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The Mystery of Moral Perception

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Abstract

Accounts of non-naturalist moral perception have been advertised as an empiricist-friendly epistemological alternative to moral rationalism. I argue that these accounts of moral perception conceal a core commitment of rationalism—to substantive a priori justification—and embody its most objectionable feature—namely, "mysteriousness." Thus, accounts of non-naturalist moral perception do not amount to an interesting alternative to moral rationalism.

Keywords

Audi – intuitionism – moral perception – moral realism – non-naturalism

I Introduction

We make many moral judgments spontaneously and naturally use perceptual terms to describe them. If you were to encounter a group of hoodlums torturing a cat, you would be able to just "see" that the action was wrong. In the last decade, some moral realists have defended a kind of moral epistemology that takes this perceptual language literally. They argue that we literally perceive moral facts.[1]

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1 See Robert Audi, *Moral Perception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Robert Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 86 (2013).

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It may seem surprising that these accounts of moral perception have been hospitable to non-naturalism.[2] A species of moral realism, non-naturalism claims that moral facts are not part of the fabric of the natural world. They have normative powers that natural facts lack—such as giving categorical reasons—and lack powers that most natural facts have—for example, they are causally impotent.[3] Because of this commitment to a *sui generis* realm of moral facts, non-naturalism is often criticized on the grounds that it requires an objectionably unscientific or mysterious epistemology.[4]

Traditionally, non-naturalists have sought refuge from these allegations in the rationalist epistemological tradition. They have tried to show that a general epistemological rationalism—roughly, the thesis that we have substantive a priori knowledge—can be extended, without any problem, into even a non-natural moral domain.[5] The moral epistemology that results is a version of moral rationalism.[6]

Andrew Cullison, 'Moral Perception,' *European Journal of Philosophy* 2 (2010); Terence Cuneo, 'Reidian Moral Perception,' *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33 (2002), 229–258; Justin McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,' *Ratio* 23 (2010), 159–175, and 'A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,' *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010), pp. 305–320; Sarah McGrath, 'Moral Knowledge by Perception,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (2004), pp. 209–28; and Jennifer Wright, 'The Role of Moral Perception in Mature Agency,' in J. Winewski (ed.), *Moral Perception* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 1–24.

2 For example, Cuneo, 'Reidian Moral Perception,' pp. 256–257; Audi, *Moral Perception*, pp. 44, 55; and McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection', pp. 300–306, each suggests that his account of moral perception can accommodate non-naturalist moral metaphysics.

3 Thus, I assume that non-natural moral properties are causally impotent. I do not here endorse the claim that causal impotence is a sufficient condition for being non-natural.

4 A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* 2nd edn (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), p. 106; J.L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 38–42; and Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), pp. 18–25, emphasize the mysteriousness of non-naturalist moral epistemology. Sharon Street, 'A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value,' *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006), 109–166, at p. 112, and Matthew Bedke, 'Intuitive Non-Naturalism Meets Cosmic Coincidence,' *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 90 (2009), 188–209, at p. 190, rely on allegedly scientifically established premises in their epistemological critiques of moral realism and non-naturalism. While Street supposes that a particular account of the evolution of our normative judgments is true, Bedke includes, in his Master Argument, the premise that the physical is causally closed—which, he asserts, "is supported daily by advances in causal explanations of the various sciences."

5 Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 122–127.

6 In contemporary metaethics, the term "moral rationalism" usually refers to various theses regarding practical moral reasons. Henceforth, however, I use "moral rationalism" to refer exclusively to the thesis that there is substantive *a priori* (moral) knowledge.

This strategy for developing a non-naturalist moral epistemology is promising to the extent that the underlying rationalism is plausible. But rationalism is controversial.[7] Many philosophers believe that rationalism—in its general as well as particular applications—is objectionably unscientific or mysterious, too. If rationalism is implausible, then we cannot vindicate any moral epistemology by showing it to be a straightforward extension of rationalism into the moral domain.

Against this background, accounts of moral perception have been advertised as an empiricist-friendly alternative to moral rationalism.[8] They promise to introduce moral realism—even non-naturalism—back into the empiricist mainstream. Perception has a pristine reputation in empiricist and rationalist circles. Indeed, it is the paradigm of a scientifically credible cognitive process. If non-naturalist moral epistemology can wear the reputable cloak of perception, then it can be absolved of the longstanding mysteriousness charge and break free from its questionable association with an epistemological tradition that flaunts substantive a priori knowledge.

In this essay, I argue that accounts of non-naturalist moral perception have failed to live up to their promise to provide an interesting alternative to moral rationalism. Necessarily, these accounts conceal a core commitment of rationalism and embody its most objectionable feature. In particular, accounts of non-naturalist moral perception conceal a commitment to substantive a priori justification and make moral perception "mysterious" in the sense that they provide no explanation of its reliability.

I proceed as follows. In Part II, I clarify the disagreement between rationalists and empiricists. I parse the dispute into separate disagreements about justification and knowledge. Following Benacerraf and Field, I develop the charge that substantive a priori knowledge—and by extension, rationalism—is objectionably "mysterious." In Part III, I distinguish three accounts of moral perception and argue that each smuggles in a priori justification. In Part IV, I argue that non-naturalist moral perception is on par with substantive a priori knowledge with respect to mysteriousness.

7 For an authoritative defense of rationalism, see Laurence Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998). For a collection of contemporary essays defending empiricism, see Michael Shaffer and Michael L. Veber, *What Place for the A* Priori? (Chicago: Open Court, 2011).

8 See, for example, McBrayer, 'A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,' p. 306, and Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 1. Cp. Audi, *Moral Perception*, pp. 2–3.

II Rationalism and Empiricism

I understand the difference between rationalism and (moderate[9]) empiricism as a disagreement about the scope of a priori knowledge. According to empiricists, all a priori knowledge is, in some sense, trivial. In contrast, rationalists claim that much a priori knowledge is substantive. While I will rely on our loose sense of the distinction between trivial and substantive propositions, I will need to examine more closely the distinction between a posteriori and a priori justification.

As a first approximation, a belief is justified a posteriori if it is justified on the basis of experience; it is justified a priori if it is justified independently (i.e., not on the basis of experience). This way of drawing the distinction is asymmetrical, however, because it identifies the source of a posteriori justification but tells us only what the source of a priori justification is not. An adequate account of a priori justification should supplement this negative account with something positive. For now, I will specify minimally that the source of a priori justification is "pure thought."[10] According to rationalism, then, we can be justified in believing substantive propositions on the basis of pure thought.

Rationalists claim not only that many beliefs in substantive propositions are justified a priori, but also that many of these beliefs qualify as knowledge. In reply, many empiricists object that substantive a priori knowledge is objectionably "mysterious." But in what sense is such knowledge mysterious? Following Benacerraf and Field, I will unpack the mysteriousness charge in terms of inexplicability.[11] In particular, I will understand the charge as follows: substantive a priori knowledge is objectionably mysterious in the sense that (allegedly) there is no adequate explanation for the striking fact that we are as reliable as we are in forming substantive a priori beliefs.[12]

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9 I adopt the distinction between moderate empiricism and radical empiricism from Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason,* pp. 18–19. According to moderate empiricism, some beliefs are justified *a priori*—but all of these are of analytic propositions. According to radical empiricism, no beliefs are justified *a priori*. Radical empiricism may also be understood to include a commitment to the thesis that true analytic propositions are not made true by any feature of the mind-independent world. To avoid ambiguities in the analytic/synthetic distinction, I favor a distinction between the trivial and substantive.

10 For rigorous attempts to refine the *a priori/a posteriori* distinction, see Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason,* Ch. 1, and Albert Casullo, *A Priori Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), Ch. 1–2.

11 See Paul Benacerraf, 'Mathematical Truth,' *The Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973), pp. 661–679, and Hartry Field, *Realism, Mathematics, and Modality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

12 I follow Joshua Schechter, 'The Reliability Challenge and the Epistemology of Logic,' *Philosophical Perspectives* 24 (2010), pp. 437–464, in formulating the Benacerraf-Field

The spirit of the Benacerraf-Field challenge is best conveyed by contrasting substantive a priori knowledge with perceptual knowledge. For many of our perceptual beliefs, we have a detailed, scientifically credible, mechanistic explanation of their reliability. The general shape of the explanation is familiar to all of us: human beings have a complex cognitive system that converts causal stimuli into perceptual representations. For example, when you grab a tomato, the roundness of the tomato causally impacts the nerves of your hand and—following a very complicated cognitive process—is then represented in your tactile experience. This causal connection between the perceiver and the perceived explains the fact that our perceptual beliefs are reliable.[13]

With respect to the beliefs we form on the basis of pure thought, however, there is no similar causal explanation for the striking fact of their reliability. This is most obvious when we consider a causally impotent domain such as mathematics (assuming mathematical Platonism) or morality (assuming moral non-naturalism). Plausibly, we are able to know many mathematical and moral principles just by thinking about them. But no causal interaction with abstract mathematical entities or non-natural moral facts can explain the reliability of these beliefs.

The Benacerraf-Field challenge extends even further—to our *a priori* beliefs about domains that are arguably causally potent. For the reliability of these beliefs, there is also no causal explanation.[14] Consider the necessary truth that nothing can be both red and green all over at the same time. We are able to know that this is true just by thinking about it. To be sure, I causally interact with particular green and red things frequently. But these causal connections do not seem to explain the reliability of the process by which I form this kind

challenge in terms of reliability. Note that this is controversial. John Bengson, 'Grasping the Third Realm', forthcoming in T. Szabo Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Epistemology, Vol. 5,* argues that Benacerraf's challenge is to identify a relation between intuitions and abstracta that explains why the former are non-accidentally true. He contends that this explanatory challenge is "prior to" the reliability challenge (see pp. 3, 41–43).

13 Even though reliability is primarily a property of representation-forming processes (a genus term that encompasses both belief-formations and the formation of perceptual content), I will sometimes use the term to refer to the beliefs or perceptual representations formed via a reliable process.

14 Bonjour, *In Defense of Pure Reason*, p. 156, claims that the "objection can be extended to rationalist *a priori* knowledge and justification generally, and [...] has frequently generally been invoked in this broader form by others." Joshua Schechter, 'The Reliability Challenge and the Epistemology of Logic,' on pp. 441–443, discusses the scope of the objection. Justin Clarke-Doane, 'What is the Benacerref Problem?,', in F. Pataut (ed.), *New Perspectives* on *the Philosophy of Paul Benacerraf: Truth, Objects, Infinity* (forthcoming), catalogues different attempts to generalize the objection to non-mathematical domains.

of belief. In case this is not obvious, note that you could still know this proposition even if you were to learn that you are a brain in a vat—causally isolated, we may assume, from every particular green and red thing.[15] That a brain in a vat could reliably form beliefs about necessary truths suggests that causal connections with concrete particulars is not, even in normal circumstances, part of the explanation of the reliability of these a priori beliefs.[16] Generalized over all substantive *a* priori knowledge, then, the Benacerraf-Field challenge, as I will understand it, states that substantive a priori knowledge is "mysterious" in the sense that there is no causal explanation for the reliability of substantive a priori beliefs.

Whether such "mysteriousness" is objectionable will depend on whether there is some other (presumably non-causal) adequate explanation for the reliability of our substantive a priori beliefs. Most rationalists will say that there is. Empiricists will disagree. On this matter, I do not intend to take a stand. For my aim here is not to defend either rationalism or empiricism, but rather to contest the suggestion that non-naturalist moral perception is empiricist-friendly. I will argue that if there is such perception, then there is no causal explanation for its reliability. If such mysteriousness is an objectionable property of a priori beliefs, it is also an objectionable feature of the perception of moral facts (and of the corresponding perceptual beliefs).

III A Priori Justification in Moral Perception

A philosophically interesting account of moral perception must distinguish itself from the boring thesis that we perceive actions (or at least parts of

15 Bengson, 'Grasping the Third Realm', p. 14, offers the similar "case of Trip" to illustrate one kind of non-causal knowledge. In Bengson's story, Trip has a hallucination in which he seems to see some colors and shapes that he has never encountered before. On the basis of this experience, he is able to know certain propositions about the relationships of these shapes and colors (e.g., that red is more like orange than it is like blue). In fn 27, Bengson discusses envatment in response to the objection that the Case of Trip is metaphysically impossible. Since a properly stimulated brain can experience features to which it bears no causal connections, it is not impossible that Trip could hallucinate new shapes and colors.

16 In order for a cognitive domain to fall within the scope of the Benacerraf-Field challenge, it is not enough that there is no causal explanation for the reliability of our beliefs about that domain. The domain must also satisfy other conditions. Schechter, 'The Reliability Challenge and the Epistemology of Logic,' p. 439, proposes a plausible "objectivity" condition that encompasses a) meaningfulness (the claim that statements about that domain

actions) that in fact have moral properties—what Robert Audi calls "mere perception of a moral phenomenon."[17] We can perceive hoodlums hurting a cat. And we can perceive a nun helping a homeless person. Certainly, these actions instantiate moral properties. And, certainly, we can perceive these kinds of actions. For an account of moral perception to be of any interest for moral epistemology, though, it needs to state more than this obvious fact. It should say not only that we perceive actions that are *in fact* wrong, but also *that* these actions are wrong—or perhaps perceive *wrongness* itself.

I see three different ways of distinguishing an account of moral perception from the boring thesis. Moral perception either involves (i) an inference from what is represented in perceptual experience to a corresponding moral belief, (ii) a special representation of a moral property in perceptual experience, or (iii) a recognition of one's perceptual experience as instantiating a moral property. In short: if moral perception is non-trivial, then it is inferential, representational, or recognitional. What I will argue now is that each kind of account of moral perception presupposes a priori justification.

A *The Inferential Account*

I will begin by examining the least popular of the three accounts.[18] According to an inferential account, moral perception is partly constituted by an inference from what is immediately represented in perceptual experience

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are truth-apt), b) independence (the truths do not "depend on us"), and c) no plenitude (not every consistent set of beliefs or practices is equally correct).

17 Audi, *Moral Perception,* p. 31. See also McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,' p. 293, and McBrayer, 'A Limited Defense of Moral Perception,' p. 307.

18 No one who defends moral perception clearly endorses an inferential account. But a few philosophers endorse the account according to one not unreasonable interpretation of their views. Audi, *Moral Perception,* pp. 52–53, draws a distinction between inferences and "a belief-formation that is a direct response to a recognized pattern"—and apparently allows that moral perception can involve either kind of cognitive process. Pekka Väyryen claims that his account of moral perception is non-inferential, but allows that its "causal etiology involves unconscious inference," such as occurs in the following situation: "You turn to me at a rock concert and I hear you say 'Awesome Solo!'...only because my brain merges auditory and facial movement signals into a unified experience [...] to repair degraded sounds and resolve ambiguities" ('Some Good News and Some Bad News for Ethical Intuitionism', *Philosophical Quarterly* 58 (2008), pp. 489–511, at p. 498). Finally, Jennifer Wright distinguishes perceiving that an action is cruel and perceiving that the cruelty is reason-giving; the latter kind of perception is refined, she argues, in mature moral agents. According to one way of understanding this distinction, the perception that cruelty is reason-giving involves an inference (Wright, 'The Role of Moral Perception in Mature Agency', at p. 9).

(viz. some of the action's non-moral properties) to a conclusion that states more than what is represented (viz. that the action instantiates some moral property). For example, when you perceive that the hoodlums' action is wrong, your perception includes both (i) a representation of certain non-moral properties of the action (e.g., the hoodlums' malignant expressions, the cat's fiery tail), and (ii) an inference to the conclusion that this action is wrong. The inference is not a separate operation we perform on the deliverances of moral perception but is rather constitutive of moral perception itself.

What is an inference? Paradigmatically, an inference involves a series of mental states: antecedent beliefs in premises, an apprehension that the premises stand in some evidential connection, and the formation of a new belief in the conclusion on the basis of the premises.[19] If moral perception involves a valid inference, then one of the premises of the inference must be a bridge-principle that links the non-moral and the moral. The inferential account of moral perception, then, implies that the moral perceiver has an antecedent belief in a bridge-principle. Plausibly, inferential moral perception is a source of epistemic justification for some moral belief only when the antecedent belief in the bridge-principle is also justified. The justification conferred by inferential moral perception draws from the source of justification of this antecedent belief.

If the antecedent belief in a bridge-principle is justified, then it is justified a priori or a posteriori. And it is not justified a posteriori. For if it were, then it would be justified either via perceptual experience or via induction. But it can be justified in neither way.

The antecedent belief is not justified via perceptual experience. To see why, it helps to remember the original motivation for the inferential account. We originally posited the perceptual inference to explain how moral perception could be a source of justification for a moral belief provided that perceptual experience represents only the (boring) natural properties of actions. The inference is supposed to carry us beyond the perceptual experience to more interesting moral beliefs. If we now claim that the bridge-principle is justified via perceptual experience, then we introduce an objectionable kind of circularity into the view. We are invoking the justified belief in the bridge-principle to explain why perceptual experience is a source of epistemic justification for

19 In inferences, these mental states can occur consciously or unconsciously. To do justice to the spontaneity of our moral judgments, the proponent of inferential moral perception should say that the belief and apprehension that partly constitute "inferring" normally occur unconsciously in moral perception.

some moral belief, and we are invoking perceptual experience to explain the justification of the belief in the bridge-principle.

The claim that the antecedent moral belief is justified via an inductive generalization also introduces objectionable circularity into the inferential account. In general, the conclusion of an inductive generalization is justified only if the beliefs that constitute its inductive base are justified. For example, if we are justified in believing that "torturing babies is wrong" via an inductive generalization, then there must be a set of justified beliefs about particular cases of torturing babies. But now we have to ask how these beliefs about particular cases are justified. The proponent of the inferential account cannot say: via perceptual experience. For the inductive generalization is supposed to explain the justification of the antecedent belief in the bridge-principle which, in turn, explains why inferential moral perception is a source of epistemic justification. To then claim that perceptual experience justifies the inductive base is, again, circular.

Perhaps the inductive base enjoys a non-perceptual source of justification. But what could this source possibly be? Whatever it is, it is either a source of a priori justification or a posteriori justification. If it is a source of a priori justification, then we have introduced a priori justification into the inferential account of perception—which is just to concede that this kind of moral perception conceals a core commitment of rationalism. And there is no plausible non-perceptual source of a posteriori justification for the particular beliefs that compose the inductive base. Besides perception and induction, sources of a posteriori justification include introspection and kinesthesia. Clearly, these sources do not play a starring role in moral perception. Since it would be circular to claim that the inductive base is justified via perceptual experience, and there is no plausible non-perceptual source of a posteriori justification, the antecedent belief in the bridge-principle is not justified a posteriori via an inductive generalization.

Let us consider one other kind of inductive argument that is so different from inductive generalization that it is sometimes considered its own category: inference to the best explanation (i.e., abduction). If we are justified in believing moral principles via an inference to the best explanation, then there is some explanandum that the moral principles supposedly explain. Either the explanandum includes moral observations or it is purely non-moral. Suppose that the explanandum includes moral observations, for example, the observations that many different cases of torture are wrong. This explanandum obviously presupposes particular moral beliefs. The inference to some explanans is justified only if these particular beliefs are justified as well. Because the inference to the best explanation requires antecedent justified moral beliefs, the inferential account

of moral perception that incorporates this abductive inference is circular in the same way as the kind that involves an inductive generalization.

Perhaps there is something that moral principles best explain that does not imply any moral facts: some purely non-moral explanandum. This possibility, however, is unavailable to the non-naturalist. While many naturalists claim that various moral facts explain different facts of the natural world—famously, Nicholas Sturgeon claims that Hitler's depravity explains some of the events of the Holocaust—non-naturalism is usually understood (and is assumed here) to exclude this possibility.[20]

Moreover, even if it were true that moral properties did explain various non-moral features of the world, this fact (or belief in this fact) is not plausibly a source of epistemic justification for all of our spontaneous moral judgments about particular cases. When a normal person just "sees" that the hoodlums are doing wrong, it is unlikely that his epistemic justification for the perceptual belief is derived from any inference to the best explanation of certain non-moral facts. Normal people should not be credited (or charged, as it were) with making such an inference.

Like inductive generalizations, inferences to the best explanation fail to provide an adequate a posteriori account of the justification of the antecedent beliefs that are essential to moral perception on this view. Since neither perceptual experience nor the most promising inductive sources can explain this justification, it is unlikely that such justification is derived from any posteriori source. If the antecedent belief is justified at all, then it is justified a priori. Therefore, if moral perception involves an inference, it implies a priori justification of an antecedent belief in a bridge principle. Thus, the inferential account conceals a core commitment of rationalism: to the a priori justification of substantive bridge-principles that specify links between the moral and the non-moral.

B *Representational Accounts*

Most defenders of moral perception, however, have denied that moral perception involves any inference at all. Proponents of non-inferential accounts of moral perception, then, must find a different way to distinguish their account from the boring thesis that we perceive actions that are in fact wrong. One way they have tried to do so is by building into their account a strong phenomenological constraint.

20 Nicholas Sturgeon, 'Moral Explanations,' in David Copp and David Zimmerman (eds.), *Morality, Reason, and Truth* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Allanheld, 1985), pp. 49–78.

According to a representational account of moral perception, when we perceive instantiations of moral properties, the phenomenology of our perceptual experience represents, not only some of the base properties that ground the moral property, but also the moral property itself. According to this account, perceptual experience represents not only actions that are in fact wrong but additionally wrongness itself.

Robert Audi and Robert Cowan have each developed representational accounts of moral perception.[21] The striking similarities between their accounts—which, I will argue, are constraints on any remotely plausible representational account—raise the worry that these accounts do not supply a source of justification that is clearly a posteriori.

Let us note some of these similarities. In each of their accounts, perceptual experience has two phenomenological layers; the top layer is less "robust" (Cowan's term) than the base layer, and is phenomenally dependent on it.[22] For Audi, the base layer is the "perceptual" and the upper layer is the "perceptible;" for Cowan, the base layer is a "phenomenal presence," which underlies an upper layer that involves "phenomenal presence as absence."[23] In each account, properties of color and shape serve as paradigms of the base layer. In contrast, the representation of a moral property happens in the more rarified upper layer.[24]

According to Audi, the representation of a moral property is "phenomenally integrated with" the "cartographic" representation of some of its perceptual base properties. Cowan claims that representations of moral properties are "added to" a "spatial framework" that is established by phenomenally present properties.[25] While Audi does not clearly identify any non-moral examples of the perceptible, one gathers that he would be amenable to the examples Cowan uses to illustrate phenomenological presence as absence. For an example, Cowan mentions the way that you can have an experience "as of the backside of a tomato"—even when all that is phenomenologically present is the side facing you.[26] In Audi's more abstract discussion of the phenomenological upper layer, he suggests that the perceptible representation of the moral property is "intellective" and, when the property of "injustice" is represented, involves a "felt *unfittingness* between the deed and the context."[27]

21 Audi, *Moral Perception*. Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism.'

22 Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 7 (italics omitted).

23 Audi, *Moral Perception*, p. 35. Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 6 (italics omitted).

24 Audi, *Moral Perception*, p. 35. Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' pp. 6–7.

25 Audi, *Moral Perception*, pp. 38–39. Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 10 (italics omitted).

26 Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 7.

27 Audi, *Moral Perception*, pp. 33, 43.

Unlike Audi, Cowan claims that the representation of the moral property in perceptual experience is the result of "cognitive penetration."[28] Cognitive penetration occurs when one of a person's extra-perceptual mental states affects perceptual content. For an example of cognitive penetration by a moral belief, we can imagine a person who believes *that torture is wrong* so firmly that, when he sees an actual case of it, the background belief causes a representation of wrongness to appear in his visual field.

I agree with Cowan's suggestion that, if the representation of the moral property in perceptual experience is the effect of cognitive penetration, then the justification conferred by this experience must be derived from the penetrating mental state.[29] For example, if a perceptual representation of wrongness is the effect of the background belief *that torture is wrong*, then the justification of the associated perceptual belief *this action is wrong* must be derived from the justification of the background belief.

An argument parallel to the one I developed in the previous section establishes that this kind of penetrating background belief, like the antecedent belief in inferential moral perception, must have a source of a priori justification. If this penetrating background belief is justified a posteriori, then it is justified via perceptual experience or induction. It is circular to claim that it is justified via perceptual experience, because the penetrating background belief is supposed to explain why perceptual experience is a source of justification for some moral belief. You can fill in the rest of the parallel argument.

Beliefs are mental states that transmit justification. Elaborating on the above example, we can picture the justification passing from its a priori source, to the background belief *that torture is wrong,* to the representation of the moral property in perceptual experience, and finally to the justified perceptual belief *that this action is wrong*. In the next section, I will consider cognitive penetration by moral memory, which implies a similar transmission of a priori justification. For now, though, we need to consider accounts of moral perception via cognitive penetration from mental states that do not transmit justification from a more basic source.

If the penetrating mental state does not transmit justification from a deeper source, then that mental state must be the (basic) source of justification for the perceptual moral belief. If the penetrating mental state is a source of justification, then either it is a source of a posteriori justification or a priori justification. But it cannot be a source of a posteriori justification, for reasons that have

28 Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism,' p. 13.

29 See Cowan's discussion of "epistemic dependency" ('Perceptual Intuitionism', at pp. 4, 24–29).

already been suggested. Sources of a posteriori justification include perceptual experiences, introspective states, and kinesthetic states. Again, these last two states should not be assigned a starring role in accounts of moral perception. And it would be bankrupt to appeal to the penetrating effects of perceptual experience to explain why perceptual experience is a source of justification. Whether the penetrating mental state is a transmitter or a source of justification, then, the representational account that incorporates a commitment to cognitive penetration implies a source of a priori justification.

Cognitive penetration, however, is a distinguishing feature of Cowan's account. Audi's account does not include this commitment. Nevertheless, it must smuggle in a priori justification. But there is a subtle difference in the nature of the a priori involvement. If the representation of the moral property is the result of cognitive penetration, then moral perception *has* a source of a priori justification. But if it is not the result of cognitive penetration, then it *is* a source of a priori justification—or, at best, is a source of justification that is not clearly a posteriori. The representation of the moral property has this confused epistemological identity because it fits the profile of an priori intuition as well as it does the profile of an "upper layer" a posteriori experience.

To explain what I mean, I will need to problematize my symmetrical characterization of the distinction between a posteriori and a posteriori justification. To recall: a justified belief is a posteriori if it is justified on the basis of experience and a priori if it is justified on the basis of pure thought. This demarcation of the two concepts is inadequate for the fairly obvious reason that "pure thought" is experiential in some broad sense of the term. And some of these experiences arguably play a justifying (as opposed to a merely enabling) role in a priori justification. For example, when you contemplate the proposition 2+2=4—and you form a justified belief on the basis of pure thought—you have an intuition that this proposition is true. This intuition is an experience in the sense that it is a conscious state. And it is a justifier. To uphold the distinction between beliefs that are justified on the basis of experience and beliefs that are justified on the basis of pure thought in light of the awareness that pure thought is experiential in some broad sense of the term, we will need to draw a more fundamental distinction among kinds of justifying experiences: those that are sources of a posteriori justification (henceforth, a posteriori experiences) and those that are sources of a priori justification (henceforth, a priori experiences). And this is hard to do.

When we consider only paradigm cases, the distinction between a posteriori and a priori experiences seems obvious and the request for a principle to justify the distinction might seem pedantic: in so many ways, seeing a red tomato is unlike intuiting that 2+2=4. But paradigm cases of perceptual experience,

which stand in such striking contrast to a priori intuition, are examples of the perceptual (Audi) or the phenomenally present (Cowan), i.e., the phenomenal base layer. While the phenomenal base layer of perception is strikingly different from a priori intuition, the upper layer is not. On purely phenomenological grounds, it is difficult to distinguish the rarefied representation of phenomenal presence as absence from the subtle phenomenological flavors of an a priori intuition.

To avoid this confusion, a proponent of moral perception might attempt to relocate the representation of the moral property in the phenomenal base layer. But the account, so amended, is implausible. It is no coincidence that both Audi and Cowan locate the representation of the moral property in the upper layer. For it is obvious that the representation of the moral property in perceptual experience—if in fact it is represented at all—is utterly unlike the phenomenology that represents properties of space and color. If the phenomenology were similar, we would not be able to seriously question whether moral properties are represented in perceptual experience at all. (Nobody denies that we are "appeared to redly.") This characteristic of Audi's and Cowan's account, which raises the suspicion that the representation of the moral property is an a priori intuition, is an essential feature of any plausible representational account.

If the thin phenomenology of the representation of the moral property raises the suspicion that it is an a priori intuition, its phenomenological dependence on the representation of base properties further arouses this suspicion. As W.D. Ross has noted, the order of discovery of a necessarily true general principle often involves a prior apprehension of the application of that principle in some contingent event.[30] For example, suppose that you were to observe an actual Gettier case: you see Jones form the justified true belief that it is 9 a.m. on the testimony of a broken clock that Jones has every reason to believe works. You would just be able to "see" that Jones does not know that it is 9 a.m. Obviously, your sensory experience justifies your beliefs about many of the contingent facts of this case. But rationalists will say—plausibly—that there is an a priori source to your justified belief that Jones does not have knowledge.[31] When we apprehend necessary truths in particular cases, perceptual experience and a priori intuition are mixed together. Apparently, the a priori intuition exhibits the same kind of phenomenological dependence on the perceptual

30 W.D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), p. 33.

31 Timothy Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), questions the significance of the a priori/a posteriori distinction and goes on to reject the standard view that the justification of our beliefs about Gettier cases is a priori (see pp. 189–190).

properties that, according to Audi and Cowan, the perceptual representation of the moral property has on the representation of its base properties.

Again, we find that this shared feature of Audi's and Cowan's account is a constraint on any remotely plausible representational account. It is obvious that the representation of the moral property (if it is represented at all) must exhibit a kind of phenomenological dependence on base properties. After all, we do not experience the representation of wrongness floating free from all other phenomenology—supervening, perhaps, in the corner of the basement next to a lost sock. An account of moral perception is plausible only if it claims that the phenomenological representation of the moral property is both subtler than, and dependent on, the phenomenological representation of some its base properties. But it is just these features of the perceptual experience that make it resemble a priori intuition. In order for an account of moral perception to succeed as an alternative to moral rationalism, its defenders need to do more to show that moral perception is significantly different from a priori intuition.

C *Perceiving-As*

So far, we have looked at inferential and representational accounts of moral perception. We have found that the former relies on a priori justification and that the latter invokes a kind of experience that either *has* or *is* a source of a priori justification. We will now consider one additional attempt to distinguish an account of moral perception from the boring thesis, by claiming that moral perception is a kind of perceiving-as.

In "Moral Perception and the Causal Objection," Justin McBrayer suggests that any other kind of account of moral perception is trivial:

> Relying on Dretske's (1969) distinction between seeing and seeing as, we can say that all cases of perception are either cases of perception simpliciter or perception-as. "Perception as" requires identification. For example, upon seeing the university president for the first time, I perceived simpliciter the university president but failed to perceive him as the university president. [...] If some form of moral realism is true, it is obvious that we have moral perception simpliciter. We see actions that are, in fact, morally wrong. The contentious claim is that we might also have moral perception-as, e.g. that we might be able to see that an action was wrong, etc. I shall use "moral perception" to mean perception as if some moral property or other is instantiated.[32]

32 McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,' p. 293. See Fred Dretske, *Seeing and Knowing* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 9.

In this passage, McBrayer suggests that accounts of moral perception are distinct from the boring thesis only if they are accounts of perceiving-as. If we draw the distinction between perceiving and perceiving-as so that the latter encompasses both the inferential and representational account, then McBrayer is surely right. But this way of carving up logical space is crude, for there is a kind of perceptual identification that is arguably neither inferential nor representational. I will use "perceiving-as" in this narrower sense to denote perception that involves this kind of identification.

Such "identification," I take it, is no different from the "kind of recognitional awareness" that Andrew Cullison independently claims is constitutive of moral perception.[33] Cullison compares moral perception with a chicken sexer's ability to distinguish male from female chicks, with a park ranger's ability to see that a certain tree is a maple rather than a pine, and even with his own ability to identify a friend from a distance.[34] Aside from these suggestive analogies, Cullison does not offer any account of the kind of recognitional awareness that he takes to be essential to moral perception.

To understand how McBrayer's and Cullison's accounts of moral perception (-as) fit into the conceptual framework I have established, we need to better understand the kind of "recognition" (I will drop synonymous reference to "identification") that is distinctive of perceiving-as. On one plausible account, perceptual recognition involves matching the contents of one's current perceptual experience with some stored representation. I have a belief or memory that represents, in some semi-abstract fashion, certain distinguishing characteristics of the university president or a maple tree. If moral perception is like this, then I have a similar belief or memory that represents distinguishing characteristics of right and wrong actions. When the moment of recognition happens—when I suddenly see the person as the university president or the tree as a maple or the action as wrong—what has happened is that I have matched the contents of my current perceptual experience with the relevant stored representation.

Can a recognitional account of moral perception be reduced to either of the accounts we have considered? It cannot be reduced to the inferential account, although it may be similar in one respect. A fully developed recognitional account should specify the content of the semi-abstract representation against which one's current experience is matched. According to one such specification, the stored representation of wrongness is so abstract as to be a kind of moral principle. In that case, recognitional moral perception and inferential

33 Cullison, 'Moral Perception,' p. 162.

34 Cullison, 'Moral Perception,' pp. 160–163.

moral perception are similar in that they both presuppose representations of moral principles. But this similarity is not enough to ground a reduction of moral perceiving-as to inferential moral perception, because retrieving a moral principle for matching is different from enlisting it in an inference to some conclusion.

Whether recognitional accounts ever reduce to representational accounts depends on whether the mental state retrieved in perceptual recognition can cognitively penetrate perceptual content. Susanna Siegel has argued that experts' perceptual recognition is often representational.[35] In one of her examples, she notes how your experience of seeing a pine might undergo a significant phenomenological shift if you spent your entire summer working a job where you had to identify them.[36] She contends that the best explanation of the phenomenological difference is that your perceptual experience now includes a representation of the property of being a pine. If repeated recognition begets new representations in perceptual content via this process of cognitive penetration, then recognitional perception is sometimes a species of representational perception.

Even if the two accounts can overlap in this way, though, they should remain distinct during the early stages of matchmaking. To ensure that we cover new ground, I will focus on moral perceiving-as in its novitiate stage, before perceptual recognition has had adequate opportunity to penetrate perceptual content. If perceptual matching in this early stage implies a source of a priori justification—as I argue it must—then this characteristic will be passed on to perceptual content after penetration occurs.

At this early stage, perceptual recognition relies on a background belief or memory. Suppose that it relies on a belief. For example, suppose that an instance of recognizing your perceptual experience as the president relies on a background belief about what the president looks like. In that case, the instance of perceiving-as is a source of epistemic justification of a corresponding

35 Susanna Siegel, 'Which Properties Are Represented in Perception?' in T. Szabo Gendler and J. Hawthorne (eds.), *Perceptual Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 481–503, at pp. 490–491. These kinds of "phenomenological contrast" cases play a starring role in Siegel's Master Argument for a "permissive view" of perceptual content, according to which perceptual experience represents not only simple properties of color, shape, motion, and illumination but also what Siegel calls "K properties"—a diverse class that encompasses natural kind properties along with an indeterminate number of other properties that are not "standardly taken to be represented [by visual experience]" (see p. 482).

36 Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism', at p. 14, offers this example of Siegel's as one possible "model" of an account of cognitive penetration.

perceptual belief only if the background belief is justified as well. And here we re-enter familiar territory. Either this background belief is justified a priori or a posteriori. If it is justified a posteriori, it is not justified on the basis of perceptual experience or induction, for reasons we have already seen. A parallel version of my argument to the conclusion that inferential accounts of moral perception presuppose a priori justification establishes that perceptual recognition, when it relies on a background belief, must do the same.

But suppose that moral perception-as relies not on a background belief but rather on a (non-doxastic) memory. In that case, defenders of the recognitional account still owe us an explanation of why the matching of some new non-doxastic representation to some old one is a source of epistemic justification for an associated moral belief. To account for this justification, the recognitional account of moral perception will again have to rely on one of the other accounts. Either the matching non-doxastic representations (i.e., the current perceptual experience and the memory) include a distinct perceptual representation of a moral property (e.g., of wrongness) or they do not. If they do include such a representation, then the recognitional account can appeal to the distinct representation of the moral property to explain why moral perception-as is a source of epistemic justification—but only by smuggling in the representational account.

But suppose that neither of the matching non-doxastic representations includes a distinct perceptual representation of the moral property. Then the justification of the associated perceptual belief must involve an inference from what is represented in the non-doxastic representations to a conclusion that represents more than what is represented. And once again we re-enter familiar territory. Because the recognitional account must draw from one of the other accounts to explain why perceiving-as is a source of epistemic justification, it inherits the problems of one of the other accounts. In all of its variations, it requires an element of a priori justification for the states that play an essential role in justifying moral beliefs.

IV The Mystery of Moral Perception

A *The Reliability Challenge*

So far I have been concerned with the epistemic justification of the beliefs formed on the basis of moral perception. I have argued that this justification is a priori (or at best: not clearly a posteriori). I have not discussed what might be called the "mechanism" of moral perception. As was mentioned above, we know quite a lot about the causal mechanism that governs perception.

As the Benacerraf-Field challenge emphasizes, however, we do not have a similar understanding of the cognitive mechanism with which we gain substantive a priori knowledge.

Focusing on the mechanism of moral perception, defenders of moral perception might contend that there is an important respect in which their accounts are empiricist-friendly even if the justification implied by their accounts is not clearly a posteriori. According to this perspective, these accounts are empiricist-friendly because they assimilate the formation of moral beliefs into a broader, reputable causal mechanism. This causal mechanism provides an adequate explanation for the reliability of moral perception—and thus renders it, unlike substantive a priori knowledge, unmysterious. This putative feature of moral perception should be attractive to empiricists even if, from the standpoint of justification, it has a suspiciously a priori look.

The attempt to prove that moral perception is non-mysterious may be the hidden agenda driving lively discussion of the causal constraint on perception. To my knowledge, everyone who has defended an account of moral perception accepts the causal constraint or something much like it.[37] Moreover, their attempts to show that their accounts satisfy the constraint have been highly uniform.

Defenders of moral perception note that, even if moral properties are themselves causally inert, they stand in a very close relationship—at least supervenience—with simpler natural properties that are obviously causally active. When hoodlums torture a cat, the wrongness of the action does not causally affect you. But the cat's fiery tail and the hoodlums' malign expressions obviously do. Even if we do not have a direct causal connection with any moral property, we may still enjoy an indirect causal connection with many moral properties; we are connected to the moral property via our direct causal connection with some of the natural properties that ground it. According to defenders of moral perception, this indirect causal connection satisfies the causal constraint.

Even if it does, though, it fails to uphold a causal explanation for the reliability of moral perception in any of the three kinds of accounts that we have considered. This is most obvious when we consider inferential accounts of moral perception. Suppose again that moral perception is constituted by both a perceptual representation of natural properties (the hoodlums hurting the

37 E.g., Audi, *Moral Perception*, pp. 55–56, Cuneo, 'Reidian Moral Perception,' pp. 256–257. McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,' p. 303, proposes an "emendation" on the causal constraint that would allow some other relations that ensure "non-accidentality" to satisfy the constraint.

cat) and an inference to some moral conclusion (this action is wrong). The causal connection between the perceiver and the natural properties that grounds the moral property explains the reliability of the perceiver's beliefs about these natural properties. But it does not seem to explain the reliability of the belief in the bridge-principle that the perceiver enlists in the inference to the moral conclusion. As we saw earlier, the antecedent belief in the bridge-principle cannot be justified on the basis of perceptual experience. We see now that the causal mechanism of perception does not explain the reliability of such a belief.

Since representational accounts of moral perception do not posit antecedent beliefs about bridge-principles, they might seem to avoid the charge I have made against the inferential account. Since they do not require antecedent beliefs, they should be spared the burden of having to explain the reliability of this kind of belief.

While it is true that they are spared this particular explanatory burden, they assume a parallel one. Even though representational accounts of moral perception do not presuppose that we reliably form beliefs about bridge-principles, they do presuppose that we reliably follow bridge-principles—in the way that our perceptual systems convert natural causal stimuli into phenomenological representations of normative properties. The indirectness of the causal connection between the moral perceiver and the moral property becomes relevant here. Unlike perception that involves a direct causal connection with the perceived property, perception that involves an indirect connection must rely on a bridge-principle. When you (directly) perceive the round surface of a tomato, the part of the tomato that impacts your sense organs is also represented in your perceptual experience. As noted above, there is an extremely complex mechanical process whereby our cognitive faculties convert the causal stimulus into a phenomenological representation. But in cases of direct perception, cognition operates in service of a simple mimetic goal: like a Xerox machine, it simply produces a copy of its input.

When perception is indirect, however, our cognitive machinery must adhere to a more sophisticated algorithm. If moral perception is representational, our machinery does not simply produce a copy of the natural properties that causally impact us; it also adds normative detail. For example, if you see hoodlums torturing a cat, your cognitive faculties would not merely produce a representation of the natural properties of the event that impact you—they would also integrate an original representation of wrongness into the cartography. And the formula by which the natural stimuli are transformed into representations of the non-natural moral property must, again, depend on bridge-principles that specify links between the non-moral and the moral.

Since the recognitional account must invoke one of the other two accounts to explain why moral perception-as is a source of epistemic justification, it seems unlikely that this account will be able to provide, by itself, an adequate explanation of the reliability of moral perception. To discharge this explanatory burden, it will again have to piggyback on one of the other accounts. The retrieval and matching that is distinctive of the recognitional account explains how we relate our present moral experiences to previous ones, but it cannot explain, on its own two feet, the reliability of either experience (or more exactly the belief-forming processes associated with them). If the inferential and representational accounts do not provide an adequate explanation for the reliability of moral perception, then the parasitic recognitional account does not provide an adequate explanation either.

While none of these accounts explain the way we reliably believe or follow these bridge-principles, they all imply that the cognitive success of moral perception depends crucially on them. Consider the (false) moral principle that torturing babies is morally right. If you believed this false bridge-principle, and enlisted this belief in a perceptual inference, the result would be perceptual error. You would perceive that an action is right, though it is in fact wrong. Similarly, if your perceptual faculties followed this principle when it produced representations of moral properties in response to certain natural stimuli—if, every time you were causally affected by events that constitute the torture of babies, your perceptual experience included a representation of rightness—then again the result would be perceptual error. If there is moral perception, and our cognitive lives do not involve widespread perceptual error, then most of the bridge-principles we believe or follow must be true.

The success of moral perception depends on our ability to reliably believe or follow a very complex set of bridge-principles. Since accounts of moral perception provide no explanation of this reliability, they are no improvement on the rationalist epistemological model.

B *Objections and Replies*

One objection to my suggestion that non-naturalist moral perception is mysterious appeals to companions in innocence.[38] Other presumably non-mysterious forms of perception presuppose reliable bridge-principles, too. Consider Cowans's paradigm of phenomenal presence as absence. If we can perceive the occluded backside of a tomato, then there must be some bridge-principle that specifies that the present part of the tomato—which most

38 For similar Companions in Innocence arguments, see Cuneo, 'Reidian Moral Perception,' p. 256, and McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection,' pp. 295–298.

directly makes contact with your sense organs—has a similarly round posterior. As with moral perception, more is represented in your perceptual experience than directly impacts your sense organs.

The realization that many forms of perception involve bridge-principles complicates the mysteriousness charge against rationalism. If substantive a priori knowledge is mysterious because of its reliance on bridge-principles, but perception involves similar bridge-principles, then the mysteriousness charge succeeds only if there is an explanatory disparity between the various bridge-principles. Empiricists who make the mysteriousness charge against rationalism need to say that there is an empiricist-friendly explanation for the bridge-principles that figure in (e.g.) the perception of the backside of a tomato but not for the bridge-principles that figure in moral perception. While this disparity claim does not strike me as implausible, I will not discharge the empiricist's burden by attempting to defend it here.

I will note instead that defenders of moral perception have not upheld their share of this burden—to provide some explanation of the reliability of the bridge-principles on which the success of moral perception depends. Until accounts of moral perception explain rather than presuppose the reliability of our use of these bridge-principles, they do not constitute an interesting alternative to moral rationalism. The plausibility of my thesis does not depend on my endorsement of any particular putative basis of an explanatory disparity that would render the perception of tomatoes unmysterious while upholding the charge against substantive a priori knowledge.

Another objection to my claim that moral perception is mysterious appeals to evolution to explain the reliability of our deployment of the bridge-principles. In response to evolutionary objections, moral realists have sketched evolutionary histories (many friendly to non-naturalism) that purport to vindicate our moral beliefs by uncovering evolved tendencies to believe true moral principles.[39] Suppose that one of these vindicating evolutionary stories is true (or, if it makes a difference, that we are justified in believing it). Presumably our justification for believing such a story would be a posteriori and non-mysterious. One might suspect that we can appeal to evolutionary forces to provide an empirical vindication of the bridge-principles presupposed by

39 See Erik Wielenberg, 'On the Evolutionary Debunking of Morality,' *Ethics* 120 (2010), 441–464; David Enoch, 'The Epistemological Challenge to Metanormative Realism: How Best to Understand It, and How to Cope With it', *Philosophical Studies* 148 (2010), 413–438; Knut Skarsaune, 'Darwin and Moral Realism: Survival of the Iffiest', *Philosophical Studies* 152 (2011), 229–243. For a very different kind of putative evolutionary vindication of our moral beliefs, see Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism,* p. 216.

any account of non-naturalist moral perception—thereby rendering it entirely empiricist-friendly.

One problem with this attempt to enlist evolution to vindicate the empiricist-friendly character of moral perception is that empiricists enjoy no special claim to the vindicating evolutionary history. Rationalists are equally entitled to rely on successful evolutionary theses to absolve their own accounts of any charge of mystery.

In case this is not clear, consider how a moral rationalist might appropriate such a story to vindicate moral rationalism. According to rationalists, we are justified a priori in believing many moral principles. According to one version of moral rationalism, reflecting on true principles tends to trigger a rational intuition that they are true. If charged with mysteriousness, a moral rationalist could reply that the tendency to have this rational intuition, upon consideration of the true principle, was shaped by evolutionary forces (per the details of some vindicating evolutionary history). If such an evolutionary appeal exonerates moral perception of the mysteriousness charge, then it should exonerate moral rationalism just the same. In their current state of development, vindicating evolutionary accounts of morality do not favor empiricist moral epistemology over moral rationalism. Thus, defenders of moral perception cannot fall back on evolutionary vindications to establish the empiricist-friendliness of their accounts.

V Conclusion

Accounts of moral perception have been advertised as an a posteriori epistemological alternative to moral rationalism that promises to normalize non-naturalist moral epistemology. I have argued that these accounts do not live up to the hype. If it is not boring, non-naturalist moral perception is inferential, representational, or recognitional. Inferential accounts presuppose a priori justification of bridge-principles. Representational accounts involve a kind of justifying experience that may be a source of a priori justification. And recognitional accounts are parasitic on the inferential or representational account. Thus, each of these accounts conceals a core commitment of rationalism—to substantive a priori justification—or at best does not clearly uphold the empiricist's commitment against it.

We have considered whether these accounts might provide an interesting alternative to rationalism, if not for the justification they provide, then for the way that they explain the reliability of the beliefs so justified. But the accounts do not provide this either. They presuppose rather than explain

reliable bridge-principles. Thus, they are on an explanatory par with rationalism. Since accounts of moral perception are not clearly distinct from rationalism, and are objectionable for the same reasons as rationalism, they do not constitute an exciting alternative to rationalism. Our spontaneous moral judgments are, at most, a marginal form of perception that is on par with substantive a priori cognition in the most philosophically interesting respects.[40]

40 For help on this paper, I am indebted to Russ Shafer-Landau, John Bengson, David Killoren, Alex Hyun, Jonathan Knutzen, and two anonymous referees at the *Journal of Moral Philosophy*.