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**RECONSIDERING MORAL PERCEPTION: THE DIALECTICAL  
EMERGENCE OF MORAL PERCEPTUAL CONTENTS DURING  
EXPERIENCE VIA COGNITIVE PENETRATION AND OPPRESSIVE  
SOCIALIZATION'S SUPPRESSION OF OUR ABILITY TO 'SEE'  
MORAL REASONS FOR HUMANIZATION AND LIBERATION**

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RECONSIDERING MORAL PERCEPTION: THE DIALECTICAL EMERGENCE OF  
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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

James William Lincoln

Lexington, Kentucky

Co- Directors: Dr. Clare Batty, Associate Professor of Philosophy

And Dr. Arnold Farr, Professor of Philosophy

Lexington, Kentucky

2020

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### RECONSIDERING MORAL PERCEPTION: THE DIALECTICAL EMERGENCE OF MORAL PERCEPTUAL CONTENTS DURING EXPERIENCE VIA COGNITIVE PENETRATION AND OPPRESSIVE SOCIALIZATION'S SUPPRESSION OF OUR ABILITY TO 'SEE' MORAL REASONS FOR HUMANIZATION AND LIBERATION

Moral perceptions occur when a subject makes an immediate discernment about the moral features of an occurrent experience. This project taxonomizes theories of moral perception into the following two camps: experientialism and judgementalism. I defend a version of experientialism, Moral Perceptual Orientation, by arguing that we, in addition to making moral judgments, have genuine perceptions with moral content during occurrent experience. I then go on to advance a framework for understanding how these perceptions are curated by our background beliefs by developing a view of dialectical consciousness. I do this by synthesizing Herbert Marcuse's perspective on the epistemic subject with the Phenomenological division of Feminist Affect theory using Buddhist (Mahāyāna) moral psychology to account for the formation of those background beliefs, habits of thought, and affects which shape our moral perceptions. Lastly, I argue that oppressive modes of socialization can curate our moral perceptions by reproducing moral ignorance. This, in turn, perpetuates a form of moral blindness to moral reasons during occurrent experience, something which is a defining feature of our epistemic lives wherever domination and brutalization are valued, personally or structurally, over liberation and humanization.

KEYWORDS: Moral Perception, Ethics, Cognitive Penetration, Consciousness, Oppression, Social Justice.

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James William Lincoln  
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07/28/2020  
Date

RECONSIDERING MORAL PERCEPTION: THE DIALECTICAL EMERGENCE OF  
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Date

## DEDICATION

To my children (Page, Simone, and our incoming arrival) for recalibrating my heart so that I might come to see the world rightly: with compassion, care, peace, and purpose. To my life's love, Katelyn, for starting those lessons. Your intelligence and ambitiousness remind me of how to live my best life. To my grandparents, Pops and Mama, for teaching me the value of thorough thinking and always reinforcing that I do not have to be the best to be worthy. To my grandparents, Ronald and Irene, for demonstrating that forgiveness, family, love, and hard work are essential pillars in life. To my "brothers", Todd, John, Matt, Josh, and Kyle, for their patience and persistent friendship even when I've spent so much time away from them, in these relationships I learned to value and nature of fellowship. To my parents, Holly and Wayne, for ensuring that my limitations never defined my academic potential. To Dr. Hope K. Fits, my undergraduate honors mentor, for giving me the chance to prove to myself that I could pursue an academic career in philosophy. To Dr. Morris A. Grubbs, whose investment in my future should set the standard for graduate student mentorship on a national level. To Dr. Eric Thomas Weber, for serving as my role model for professional philosophy and community-responsible scholarship. To Dr. Shelly Johnson, for proving that one does not need to compromise a desire for compassion, hope, social liberation, or kindness to work in academia, even in the shadow of an advanced neo-liberal capitalist society. To Kaylynnne Glover, for her friendship, wisdom, passion, and impatience with my propensity for self-isolation. And to Fred Rodgers, whose philosophy and life's work recently reentered my world years after I put my childhood away, for reminding me throughout these past couple of years that many of the essential things in life often go unseen, invisible, to the eye but not the heart. Even after his parting from this world, he is still the best neighbor.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While I performed the research and writing required to complete this dissertation, it feels like the role I actually played in its development was to put a swath of philosophical traditions, my life's experiences, and current literature on the topic into conversation to make sense of the thing known as 'moral perception'. Once this was accomplished, the dialogue wrote itself. As a result, this dissertation has been influenced by a variety of sources and people that should be acknowledged.

Academically speaking, my formal training in philosophical inquiry began under the apprenticeship of Dr. Hope K. Fits, whose work continues to connect the European and Asian Philosophical traditions. While completing my honors thesis with her, I had the privilege of learning philosophical practice in an environment defined by an interdisciplinary cohort of scholars in Comparative Philosophy, Geography, History, and Political Science. I owe my comparative philosophical training to my time with her at Eastern Connecticut State University. This was further complimented by my mathematics studies, for that was my major at the time, under the guidance of Dr. Christian Yankov and my work in student development theory and community leadership, in my role as student affairs paraprofessional, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Saxton. It is not surprising, I think, that I would then go on to pursue masters level study of Immanuel Kant's German Idealism and the Logical Foundations of Mathematics at Boston University under Dr. Manfred Kuehn and Dr. Judson C. Webb while simultaneously completing masters level studies in management, concentrating in project management and organizational structures in Higher Education, at Lasell University under Dr. Nancy Waldron while I worked at Lasell as a Student Affairs Professional. These institutions, people, and experiences have

a marked influence on the methodologies with which I have chosen to engage with this topic. Such things are easily felt in this project's transdisciplinary methodology and its efforts to approach moral perception as an object of study in a holistic fashion.

With this background in mind, one can more easily make sense of the motivations for this project while considering the kind of academic influences I sought during my time at The University of Kentucky. In philosophy, the influence of my co-chairs, Dr. Arnold Farr and Dr. Clare Batty, is defined by a holistic synthesis of non-ideal ethical inquiry and perceptual studies. Dr. Farr was also a key figure during my completion of a graduate certificate in Social Theory and his work on Herbert Marcuse is a corner stone of this project. In a complimentary fashion, Dr. Batty introduced me to work in disjunctivism, cognitive penetration, and evaluative perception. Additionally, having taken every class and seminar she has to offer, one cannot fail to see the influence of Dr. Anita Superson in this work as well and her work in feminist philosophy and theory is seen in part four of this project. Additionally, it is easy to see the influence of Dr. Karen Tice, Dr. Christina Alcalde, and Dr. Charlie Zhang from UK's Gender and Women's Studies Program on my work, for it is with them that I completed my graduate certificate in Gender and Women's Studies. It is also worth noting that this project has been greatly influenced by my pedagogical development and the completion of a graduate certificate in College Teaching and Learning under Dr. Morris Grubbs and Dr. Jeffery Bieber. Lastly, my professional work with the Society of Philosophers in America as a research assistant for philosophy of community under the mentorship of Dr. Eric Weber continued to provide me with experiences which validated my methodology as both philosophically robust and as a public good.



In terms of non-academic influences, I encountered ‘moral perception’, as an object of study, around the same time that I became a parent. For this reason, my children deserve a great deal of acknowledgement for their involuntary contributions to this project. They continue to be catalyst for changing how I ‘see’ value the world. Additionally, they have, among other things, consistently challenged a “western” philosophical tendency to assume that the fully-grown subject is an appropriate starting point for understanding the human condition by teaching me the value of growth and change over time. Simultaneously, my partner, Katelyn, is to be credited for enhancing the practical side of my interest in social justice and ethics by being an inspiring example of what it means to reject perceptions of oneself that devalue or dehumanize us, I am grateful for her presence in my life on a daily basis.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a large part, my desire to understand moral perception is motivated by the presence of injustice, social inequality, and violence in our society. I am constantly disturbed and unsettled by our world's addiction to brutalization and domination and its seeming aversion to systems and behaviors which humanize people and liberate life, human or otherwise. Happenings in my own lifetime (e.g., 9/11, the Iraq War, the #Metoo movement, Protests of the Keystone Pipeline, genocides in Myanmar, the continued brutalization of the black body and community, the vilification of the immigrant, the devastation of our planet, bullying in schools, the graduate student mental health crisis, ...) serve as constant reminders that the human condition is plagued by senseless suffering and surreptitious social pathologies that mutate in order to persist from generation to generation. We are, all of us, haunted by a history of domination and brutalization which often derails the moral arc of the universe's progress towards justice. What is more, this history curates the present day's controlling social apparatus and inscribes itself upon our individual sensibilities. In the non-ideal conditions of this life, the question of liberation, of understanding how it can be achieved within a humanizing society, reveals itself as also containing the problem of oppression, of understanding how structures and sentiments supporting domination and brutalization preserve themselves over time; this, as I see it, is *the problem* of our time.

As we grapple with this issue, people often attempt to understand the problem of oppression using phrases like 'our history makes us see something as wrong' or 'see it as good' in our attempt to offer an explanation for human behaviors, judgments, or

apprehensions in morally pertinent situations within the backdrop of socialized history. For example, consider the 2019 interview of *Know My Name* author Chanel Miller by *The Daily Show's* Trevor Noah. During a discussion of Miller's memoir, which recounts her sexual assault and subsequent experiences with the U.S. Justice System, Noah makes the following observation:

“What's interesting is what you write about [your rescuers] and you say that [this experience] made you realize [that], in all of these stories, it's not just the person that is doing the bad thing and the person that the bad thing is being done to, but there are those who *see* it and identify it as wrong and they do something about it.”

Noah's use of perceptual language is an attempt to capture an important aspect of the moral landscape surrounding Miller's assault. Specifically, he highlights the relationship between a person's capacity to 'see a bad thing', 'identify it as wrong', and subsequently 'do something about it' in virtue of the fact that it was *seen as a wrong*. What, then, might we say about Miller's assailant? Did he 'fail to see Miller's personhood (or dignity)', 'fail to identify the moral demandingness of Miller's personhood' or 'identify her as something to be dominated', and did he subsequently 'do something' as a result of those observations, as reasons for acting? Moreover, what role did her assailant's life, judgments, and socialized privilege play in his apprehension of the situation?

While explanations of this kind call our attention to some important dynamics during morally pertinent encounters, the perceptual language is unhelpful because of its metaphorical-literal ambiguity. Granted, we *should want* to understand how an individual can observe someone being sexually assaulted, or brutalized on an account of one's race ... among other things, and 'see' such acts as profoundly immoral and unjust. We *should want* to understand how others could 'see' these acts as permissible or, worse, justified.

What is more, we *should want* to understand how a historicized socialization process influences one's discernment of the moral features of these acts and the moral status of persons facing them. However, we *should also want* to understand the extent to which a subject's discernments during moral perception are facilitated by judgment rather than literal perceptions because the latter are more forceful in terms of defining our beliefs about the world than the former.

To illustrate, consider that it is incredibly difficult to be skeptical of the claim "that chair is in the room" when one can perceptually observe the presence of 'that chair' in the room (... I mean, its right there!). As Jennifer Church might put it, the justification for the idea 'that chair is in the room' is built into the phenomenological character of the experience's contents (i.e., literally seeing the chair in the room) and, thereby, holds a place of privilege in one's apprehension of their experience. In the same vein, if one literally perceives moral properties during occurrent experience then one's justification for a moral claim would also be built into the phenomenological character of that experience's content, its moral content would be perceptual in kind.

The true danger of the metaphorical-literal ambiguity in our everyday perceptual language, and in the literature on moral perception, is that it covers up an important question in our quest to solve the problem of oppression: are our literal perceptions of the world potentially reinforcing, bolstering, our immediate moral viewpoints by building the justification for those viewpoints into the phenomenal character of an experience's contents? Put otherwise, are we literally seeing the world's moral dimensions in accordance with our preexisting, yet socialized and personally developed, beliefs about the world? As



I see it, unpacking this ambiguity would fill a gap in our understanding of the problem of oppression. If oppression's persistence over time includes a literal perceptual component inasmuch as a subject's everyday experiences include literal perceptual moral content, then *the resistance* to and *great refusal* of an oppressive society must include a perceptual intervention, one which radically transforms our experience of the world. As a result, the question of liberation is, for me, one which requires a deep investigation into the nature of moral perception.

With this in mind, the *initial* aim of this dissertation was to investigate a series of three questions: (1) **(the veridicality question)** what does it mean to have accurate or inaccurate moral perceptions?, (2) **(the normativity question)** what should my moral perceptions of the world be like?, and (3) **(the epistemological question)** what mechanisms facilitate discernment formations during moral perception and what consequences follow from these mechanisms? However, the scope of this project in its current form focuses squarely, and only, on (3) for both methodological and practical reasons.

While exploring the literature regarding moral perception, broadly construed, it became apparent that one cannot offer a satisfactory answer to (1) without first addressing question (2) by tackling normative ethical issues. That is, an ethical-rubric from which to measure the accuracy of a subject's moral perceptions is required, first, before one can make veridicality assessments of any given moral perception, whether it be a judgement or a literal perception. However, the questions associated with (2) proved practically

unsatisfying, and, in some cases, it felt irresponsible to pursue normative ethics in a world plagued by non-ideal conditions and oppression.

What is more, the philosophical and methodological challenges associated with pursuing objective ethics amongst the historicized shaping of our moral understandings regarding freedom, life, and so on are well documented and, at this time, beyond my practical goals as an ethical and social philosopher in service to a Marcusean style revolution in values. It felt, during the earlier stages of the project, far more responsible to assume a general set of ethical values based on a desire to curate conditions and ways of relating to each other which support the amelioration of life, in the Marcusean sense, and resist oppression's presence in the world. As an exercise in genuineness, then, this project starts from the assumption that life is worth living, worth affirming, and trusts the testimonies and standpoints of oppressed peoples inasmuch as they identify society's, as well as my own, moral shortcomings. Given the prevalence of identity-based injustice in the world and capitalism's militaristic influence on the state apparatus, attending to question (2) felt like a luxury I could not afford myself and still does, especially when police literally have their knees on people's throats. Thereby, a continually refined social justice ethics has been assumed as the normative backdrop of this project resulting in its shift away from questions (1) and (2) in favor of an attempt to unpack (3), the epistemological questions underlying moral perception. In this sense, 'objectivity' regarding moral values is defined as a process, one which follows the moral arc of the universe towards justice.

To be clear, **moral perceptions** occur when a subject makes an immediate discernment about the moral features of an occurrent experience. Notably, ‘perception’ in this usage is not a success term as it might be used by philosophers of perception, nor does it represent a full commitment to a perceptual way of approaching the issue. Instead, as an object of study, the phrase ‘moral perception’ is used to sketch the borders of a yet undefined field of philosophical inquiry, what I refer to as **moral perceptual studies**. This field, broadly construed, is concerned with (i) the epistemological status of moral perception as either a form of judgment or a literal perception, (ii) the perceptual or judgmental mechanisms articulating one’s moral perceptions, (iii) the development of one’s background epistemic resources which curate the moral contents of one’s moral perceptions, (iv) the normative standards from which to judge that one’s moral perceptions are adequate to living an ethical life, (v) the concept of veridicality as applied in moral perceptual contexts, and (vi) the ethical consequences that follow, socially and individually, from views on (i)-(v). Again, the scope of this project is to focus on issues (i) - (iii), reserving (iv) - (vi) for future work.

In the first part of this project, I provide a taxonomy for categorizing theories of moral perception into one of two types: experientialism or judgmentalism. I, then, challenge judgmentalist views, which hold that moral perceptions are merely moral judgments, by using phenomenal contrast methodology to argue that moral properties are admissible contents of our perceptual experience. Notably, if moral properties are admissible contents of experience, then moral perceptions have an experiential component in virtue of this content’s capacity to yield perceptual moral knowledge about one’s occurrent experience. As a result, I conclude that one’s discernments about an occurrent

experience's moral features are not merely a function of one's judgment and give reasons to believe that we have literal perceptual experiences of moral properties.

In the second part, I argue for my own view on moral perception, Moral Perceptual Orientation (MPO). MPO asserts that how and if moral features are perceived during occurrent experience is dependent on the collection of one's background beliefs, ways of thinking, and affective sensitivities, what I refer to as our background epistemic resources. MPO gives an account of how it is that one encounters moral properties in perceptual experience and relies on the notion that moral experiences are cognitively penetrable, that our background non-perceptual mental states can have top-down influences on the contents of our perceptual experience. Under this view, one's background epistemic resources provide the orientation by which one comes to experience the world's moral features and, as a result, MPO provides a framework for understanding the mechanisms underlying moral perceptions as a synthesis of non-perceptual and perceptual mental states.

In the third part, I further develop the notion of 'background epistemic resources' by investigating the mechanisms by which life's experience curates its content and structures. To do this, I synthesize the work of Herbert Marcuse with the Phenomenological branch of Feminist Affect theory using Buddhist (Mahāyāna) moral psychology to construct a transdisciplinary way to understand the individual subject as engaging the world by means of a dialectical form of consciousness. In doing this, I develop a view on dialectical consciousness which provides a framework for conceptualizing socialization's ability to shape a subject's access to the moral features of occurrent experience by highlighting the way life's experience has a pervasive influence on a subject's background

epistemic resources. As a result, I argue that, given the role of dialectical consciousness in our lives, moral perceptions of occurrent experience are compulsory and outside one's immediate, willful, control. I then conclude by suggesting that a directed moral cultivation of one's perception is still possible by means of transformative experiences which can be sought by the individual or curated by progressive social forces. These experiences are ones which have the ability to alter our background epistemic resources and, thereby, reshape the way we see the world.

The final part of the project develops a concept called 'moral blindness' by investigating socialization's capacity to perpetuate forms of moral ignorance. Ignorance amounts to the presence of persistent epistemic selectivities in one's apprehension of a situation or topic and it is perpetuated by oppressive modes of socialization. I argue that oppressive socialization shapes a subject's background epistemic resources (a.k.a., one's epistemic toolkit) resulting in literal selectivities in one's moral perceptions, thereby resulting in a kind of pathological blindness to moral reasons for socially just action. Not only does this moral blindness threaten a subject's autonomy, in the relational sense, I argue that one has a moral obligation to seek out transformative experiences which emphasize humanization and liberation over brutalization and domination. I then conclude by suggesting that a fundamental reorientation of ourselves to the world, away from a culture of domination, becomes imperative if we are to access reasons for executing our obligations to others, especially where social justice and liberation are concerned.

I would like to close by noting that those interested in the phenomenon of moral perception in one way or another (e.g., Audi, Blum, Väyrynen, Cowan, Faraci, Goldie,

McGrath, Willett, Ahmed, and others) often pursue their investigations in accordance with their respective academic communities and traditions. Among other reasons, I believe the practice of staying within a theoretical neighborhood harms our understanding of moral perception. It prevents us from appreciating the phenomenon through a variety of theoretical lenses and, as a result, in the lives of people who feel the daily weight of these perceptions on their ability to have lives defined by dignity and freedom. Moral perceptions play an essential role in our lives as we make ethically pertinent decisions. Being limited to one theoretical tradition, thereby, prevents us from seeing how literature on moral perception, broadly construed, can impact moral life and social justice efforts.

With this in mind, I approach moral perceptual studies as a transdisciplinary field of research and this project puts a diverse set of philosophical traditions and non-philosophical perspectives into conversation using an interdisciplinary methodology. I believe that this approach benefits from an intellectually inclusive and careful analysis of moral perception by utilizing a methodological framework which enables theoretical inputs and conceptual scoping across a variety of fields. As a result, what follows is designed to set up a systematic way of addressing the phenomenon of moral perception by, ultimately, laying the epistemological foundations for moral perceptual studies.

## CHAPTER 1. RECONSIDERING MORAL PERCEPTION

### 1.1 Introduction

In a general sense, to have a moral perception is to encounter the world (i.e., its objects, people, spaces, and situations) and recognize which, if any, moral qualities are present during one's occurrent experience, accurately or otherwise. Such events are a pervasive part of our lives and include, but are not limited to, moments where such insights facilitate our comprehension of another's moral status or the moral qualities of some action.<sup>1</sup> The moral agent regularly faces a variety of situations that require them to recognize the ethical dimensions of an occurrent moment in order to make morally salient choices. As many moral theorists point out, the ability to accurately recognize moral qualities during such situations is a precondition for reliably responding in accordance with the demands of morality, whatever those turn out to be.<sup>2</sup> As a result, moral perception plays an essential part in curating the epistemological content we use to navigate our moral lives.

For example, should someone (*S*) come upon a person (*K*) kicking an infant (*I*), we hope that *S* has the ethical wherewithal to take *I* as possessing a moral status, a kind of human dignity, incommensurate with *S*'s assault.<sup>3</sup> Among other things, we also hope that *S* would take *K*'s actions to be immoral. Structurally speaking, the observer *S* encounters situation  $\alpha$  (*K* kicking *I*) and takes  $\alpha$  to possess these moral features. In the given scenario, *S*'s response to this situation should be facilitated by their moral perceptions of *I*'s dignity and the immorality of *K*'s assault. This is because *S*'s ethical choices are contingent, at

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<sup>1</sup> This is especially paramount during situations where social justice issues are of central concern.

<sup>2</sup> See Blum (1994), Murdoch, I. (1970), Fricker (2007), and Little (1997 & 1995). Additionally, Aristotle, MacIntyre, others in the virtue ethics or neo-virtue ethical traditions, and those concerned with moral psychology or epistemology consistently make such claims.

<sup>3</sup> This case can be likened to McGrath's (2018) case where a child is struck by an adult in a grocery store.

least epistemologically, on the moral qualities they take to be present during their observation of  $\alpha$ . Assuming that  $S$  is acting rationally, unless they take  $\alpha$  to possess a set of moral features ( $m$ ), we would not expect  $S$  to reliably respond to  $\alpha$  in ways demanded by  $m$  because  $S$ 's epistemic resources would not include  $m$ .<sup>4</sup> However, the nature of what it means for “ $S$  takes  $\alpha$  to possess  $m$ ” is unclear.

When asked to clarify our use of take-language to describe these situations we often resort to things like ‘ $S$  saw  $K$ 's actions as wrong’ or ‘ $S$  sees infants as possessing human dignity’ thereby trading ambiguities in take-language for other opacities in our use of perceptual-language. Human history contains a swath of examples where vagueness plagues our talk of moral discernments when we come face-to-face with morally germane events, especially those associated with instances of oppression. ‘Seeing historically marginalized and oppressed populations as lacking moral status’ (i.e., lacking a sense of human dignity) or ‘seeing instances of child-labor as a permissible practice’ are just a few illustrations of how we talk about moral perception in an opaque fashion when we are confronted with these situations.

This confusion is fueled by what we can refer to as a metaphorical-literal ambiguity in our understanding of moral perception because the use of perceptual-language, or take-language, can be understood in two ways. First, it could refer to a metaphorical allusion to a judgement formation about the presence of a moral property or, second, it can express the literal perceptual representation of a moral property. This ambiguity is found in everyday language and is a recurrent problem in the literature that investigates the

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<sup>4</sup>Provisionally, to act rationally in this sense is, minimally, to respond to the reason's one has available in such a way that is commensurate to the demands of rationality (i.e., to follow a rational course of action, perhaps in a syllogistic fashion).



epistemological features of moral discernments about occurrent experience.<sup>5</sup> The question on the table then, regarding the nature of moral perception, is this: are moral perceptions a kind of judgment or are they literal perceptions of a situation's moral features?<sup>6</sup> The metaphorical-literal ambiguity covers up this **judgement-perception question**.

Moving forward, I will use "moral perception" to refer to the general practice of taking a situation to possess some set of moral features or properties. Put formally, a subject *S* has a **moral perception** when (i) *S* encounters some situation  $\alpha$  and (ii) *S* recognizes, either accurately or inaccurately, some set of moral features (*m*) taken, at least by *S*, to be present in  $\alpha$ . Under this working definition, if one fails to discern some feature of a situation that it apparently possesses, I will call this a **moral perceptual miss**. If one discerns that a situation possesses a moral feature that it does not, I will refer to this as a **moral perceptual misfire**. Lastly, if one takes a situation to possess moral features that it actually possesses, I will speak of this as a **moral perceptual hit**.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Blum (1997), Fricker (2007), Little (1995 & 1997), Murdoch (1970), Sturgeon (1986), McGrath (2018), and Willett (2014) are examples of scholarship that does not resolve this metaphorical-literal ambiguity. Many fall into this ambiguity because they do not address the orthodox view that perceptual knowledge "X is F" entails having a perceptual experience that represents X as F. McGrath (2018) explicitly aims to avoid the ambiguity but ultimately seems to fall into it by specifically rejecting the orthodox view without clarifying an alternative. It is very difficult to accept the claim that *perceptual* knowledge of X as F can occur in the absence of an experience representing X as F without losing a precise sense of what it means to perceptive something or its properties. McGrath (2018) suggests that we shouldn't give up on, say, perceiving moral properties because, like looking at a lemon, we can still "take up the immediate, non-inferential belief that there is a lemon on the table" if we do not have perceptual representations of lemons but only its shape, color, texture, and other sensory contents. She writes, "If circumstances are favorable... then your belief that there is a lemon on the table might be safe enough to qualify as knowledge. Moreover, the knowledge in question, is perceptual knowledge." (McGrath (2018), p. 178-179). However, coming to have an non-inferential immediate belief, even in the absence of any beliefs about the color and shape of the thing experienced, because a perception of the thing's sensory contents "triggers your immediate belief" sounds more like a cognitive association (see Väyrynen (2018)) or intuition (see Audi (2013)) that perceptual content of X is F rather than a genuine perception. McGrath wishes to avoid the question of what the admissible contents of visual experience are, but this issue is unavoidable without sacrificing theoretical clarity for ambiguities about the nature of perceptual experience. Audi (2013) use of "intuition" carries similar difficulties.

<sup>6</sup> Since "evaluative perception" emerged in philosophy of perception, of which moral perception is a category, this issue has the potential to redefine how we approach moral perception and its consequences. See Bergqvist, A., & Cowan, R. (2018) for a general introduction to evaluative perception.

<sup>7</sup> Granted, whether we call a moral perception a miss, misfire, or hit, evaluations of our perceptions will need to be indexed according to some situation, some metaethical view regarding moral realism or antirealism, and in the context of some ethical theory which outlines the demands of morality. In the meantime, we can theorize about the epistemic nature of moral perception without addressing the evaluation because of reasons discussed in footnote 7.

It is worth noting that this definition of moral perception does not use “perception” as a success term when discussing genuine perception or, alternatively, as a metaphorical reference to an accurate judgement.<sup>8</sup> Instead, moral perceptions, in this neutral sense, describes those occasions where *S* literally perceives situation  $\alpha$  as possessing moral features *m*, even if it does not, or occasions where *S* genuinely judges  $\alpha$  as possessing *m*, even if it does not.<sup>9</sup> Plainly put, moral perceptions refer to what one undergoes as a perceptual experience or what judgement one makes whereas any assessment as to the veridicality or accuracy of those states is an evaluation of a subject’s moral perception.<sup>10</sup> The nature of what one discerns during a moral perception and the adequacy of that discernment to represent the ethical dimensions of the occurrent experience are distinct issues. One focus of this paper is how we should approach the former.

Additionally, theories of moral perception are used to elucidate the epistemological processes which underpin our encounters with morally pertinent occurrent experiences. They often explore some combination of the following three questions: (1) what is the epistemic nature of moral perception? (2) why does an agent take a situation to have moral properties of set  $m_1$  rather than of set  $m_2$ ?, and (3) what role do perceptions play in moral

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<sup>8</sup> This distinction, as Wright (2007) points out, between perception as a success term versus a description of the individuals experiences is referred to as the factive v. aspect distinction.

<sup>9</sup> This strategy allows us to explore epistemological approaches to moral perception from a wide range of literature which explores the topic in an implicit (Fricker (2007), Little (2001, 1997, & 1995), & Willett (2014 & 1995) and explicit fashion (Audi (2018 & 2013), Väyrynen (2018), Cowan (2015), Faraci (2015), Church (2013), Goldie (2007), Wright (2007), & Blum (1994)) investigations of the subject. Such literature investigates the moral epistemological facets of our immediate moral discernments which occur during our encounters with the world. As such, authors of such work may be considered moral perceptual theorists. It is worth noting that Aristotle and others in the virtue-theory tradition or neo-virtue theory tradition are often doing this work as well. They would be included in this category as well, as implied by Rabinoff’s (2018) *Perception in Aristotle’s Ethics*.

<sup>10</sup> Evaluations of this kind evolve into robust discussions about the nature of veridicality, judgement justifications, and so on. In some cases, especially for moral anti-realists, we come close to some version of error theory because there are no moral properties for our moral perceptions to correspond. Given the scope of the current paper, I have chosen to table the evaluation discussion about moral perception in favor of focusing on the epistemological nature of moral perceptions because insights into the latter seem to be a prerequisite for an adequate investigation into the former.

agency and autonomy? The other focus of this paper is to provide theoretical clarity for question (1) and to address it in kind.

Given its potential influence on moral reasoning, it is vital that we approach moral perception with a high degree of clarity. To do so is to take steps towards understanding the nature of its role in our existence as moral epistemic agents. This paper attempts to disentangle the way we talk about moral perceptions by fleshing out some observations made by Blum (1994) regarding moral decision making and, using this, provide a meaningful taxonomy for categorizing theories of moral perception into **moral perceptual experientialism (MPE)** or **judgmentalism (MPJ)**. I, then, explore the phenomenal character of morally pertinent experiences using phenomenal contrast methodology. From this, I argue that moral properties are admissible contents of our perceptual experience and that discerning an occurrent situation's moral features is not merely a function of our moral judgments. Ultimately, what follows gives reason to believe that we have genuine perceptual experiences of moral properties during our everyday encounters with morally germane situations.

## 1.2 Talking about Moral Perception: Acquisition & Recognition

It is prudent, first, to define a framework for discussing moral perception that precisely clarifies the aforementioned metaphorical-literal ambiguity. Blum (1994) provides the basis for such a framework. His 'situation-to-action-on-principle process' is a useful apparatus for discussing occasions where agents encounter morally germane situations and perform morally applicable actions.<sup>11</sup> In Blum's schema, agents undergo a

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<sup>11</sup> Blum 1994, p. 57-61

four-staged process when confronted by a morally pertinent situation.<sup>12</sup> In short, agents apprehend a situation, decide whether to engage with it, make a moral judgment as to the appropriate action, and, then, choose how to achieve that end.<sup>13</sup> His discussion of the latter stages is more pertinent for an investigation of moral deliberations informed by moral perceptions rather than the epistemic nature of such discernments. That is, the latter stages use moral perceptions to inform ethical actions rather than take steps to define the epistemic source of these discernments. As a result, they go beyond the scope of my current objectives. Thus, I will forgo a detailed account of Blum's latter stages in favor of focusing on his breakdown of the first stage as it is relevant to the judgement-perception question.

In his description of the apprehension-stage, Blum writes, "The first step is the accurate recognition of a situation's features. Here the situation itself is initially (as the person/agent comes upon it) inchoate -- not even a distinct "situation" -- and the person then takes it to be a situation of a certain character, that is, possessed of certain features."<sup>14</sup> While the use of "takes" or "distinct situation" in this description is unclear, the idea expressed here is that *S* approaches situation  $\alpha$  and epistemically acquires its descriptive features, or contents. This first step does the individuating of an experience's contents and is "thus providing a setting in which moral judgment carries out its task."<sup>15</sup> In our introductory case, for example, *S* acquires a perceptual experience of *K* kicking infant *I* and becomes aware of *I*'s suffering at the hands of *K*, among other things. Given this, I shall refer to this first step as the **acquisition step** in reference to a subject's acquisition of

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<sup>12</sup> Blum 1994, p. 57 – Blum discusses the existence of "seven steps that take a person from a given situation to an action based on moral principle". For the sake of brevity, I have organized these into four stages: agents perceive a situation [steps 1 & 2], decide whether to engage with it [steps 3 & 4, what he calls agency engagement], make a moral judgment as to the appropriate action [step 5 & 6], and, then, choose how to achieve that end [step 7].

<sup>13</sup> Blum 1994, p. 57-61

<sup>14</sup> Blum 1994, p. 58

<sup>15</sup> Blum 1994, p. 42

perceptual content which render a situation's features as part of a subject's perceptual experience.

Following this, Blum writes, "the second step is to recognize the features of an already characterized situation as morally significant"; 'moral significance' meaning the possession of a morally evaluative dimension and relevant to one's ethical deliberations.<sup>16</sup> In the case of *K* kicking *I*, that we perceive *I*'s suffering and that we take it to be morally significant are distinct steps which occur, for Blum, in step one and two respectively. I will refer to this second step as the **recognition step** in reference to a subject's recognition that a situation's features possess a morally evaluative dimension. Blum summarizes, "step one and two together yields the idea of a person coming upon a situation and perceiving its morally salient features... together [they] can usefully be thought of as moral perception, the second by itself might as naturally be thought of as an exercise in judgment."<sup>17</sup>

To note, Blum says little about whether we should take step one to be a literal act of perception or whether it amounts to an act of judgment. He does, however, define step two as an act of moral judgment<sup>18</sup> and portrays step one as a process of applying one's moral understanding (i.e., moral imagination and knowledge) and moral sensitivities (i.e., psychological capacities) to an occurrent experience.<sup>19</sup> He suggests that such things make an agent aware of the morally relevant features of one's experience. This implies that Blum is a supporter of judgmentalism, later referred to as MPJ, even though he holds that moral perception is distinct from moral judgments. That is, he seems to take moral perception to

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<sup>16</sup> Blum 1994, p. 58

<sup>17</sup> Blum 1994, p. 58

<sup>18</sup> Blum 1994, p. 41 "... principle-based traditions have generally failed to note the specific moral character of either of the following aspects of moral judgment of particular situations: (1) knowing what counts as best exemplifying, and knowing how to apply, rules or principles and (2) before this, recognizing given features of a situation as morally significant."

<sup>19</sup> Blum 1994, p. 42 "Such perception involves a different kind of, or aspect of, moral sensibility or understanding [than that of moral judgement]."

be a function of our capacity to form general judgments about the contents of experience (as automatically facilitated by our understandings or psychological habits). He does not take them to be a feature of our moral judgments which he defines as the process whereby we form judgements about moral significance, which moral principles apply to the situation, and applying them.<sup>20</sup> It seems, even given his silence on the issue, that Blum takes moral perception and moral judgment to be distinct processes within our broader cognitive capacity to form judgments, as I use the term. This is important to note because I will return to Blum's form of MPJ in a later section, after discussing judgments and perceptions in more detail.

For now, building on Blum's distinctions between what I have labeled **acquisition** and **recognition**, we can describe an agent's moral perceptions as the result of a two-step process.<sup>21</sup> First, the moral agent encounters a situation facilitating the **acquisition** of perceptual content. Second, said situation, rendered by the acquired content, is then **recognized** as possessing properties with moral significance or, alternatively, moral properties. This **acquisition-recognition** framework allows us to carefully approach theories of moral perception by directing us to a fundamental question: what is the relationship between **acquisition** and **recognition** during occasions of moral perception? Can recognition happen during acquisition, and thereby give us literal perceptions of moral properties, or is recognition always about and separate from acquired contents of experience, and thereby a kind of judgment? Stated otherwise, are moral properties admissible contents of our perceptual experience?

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<sup>20</sup> Blum 1994, p. 42 & 51

<sup>21</sup> Could there be a third step? Recognition occurs as a judgment or an influence on acquired content. It is a matter of the relationship between two steps and, because of this, the inclusion of a third synthesis step seems unnecessary.

### 1.3 Theories of Moral Perception: Judgmentalism and Experientialism

With the right questions on the table, we can use the **acquisition-recognition** framework to define two kinds of positions on moral perception, one which turns on whether moral properties are judged or whether they can be literally perceived during moral perceptions. First, **Judgementalist views (Moral Perceptual Judgementalism)** hold that an experience's moral features are recognized after the acquisition step by means of a judgment formation about a situation's acquired non-moral perceptual contents. Under judgmentalism, moral perceptions are judgments based on perceptual content.<sup>22</sup> Put formally,

**Moral Perceptual Judgementalism (MPJ):**<sup>23</sup> *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*MPJ-I:* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ;

*MPJ-II:* *S* possesses **background beliefs** (moral or non-moral) **or affective dispositions** relevant to situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*MPJ-III:* *S* utilizes a **judgement formation mechanism** (i.e., inference, intuition, a non-inferential cognitive association, a heuristic, or an affective disposition) to judge  $\alpha$  using the contents of II thereby allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties by means of judgements about acquired perceptual content.

The distinguishing feature of a judgementalist view of moral perception is it holding that moral properties are recognized by means of a judgement formation mechanism.

Alternatively, **Experiential Views (Moral Perceptual Experientialism)** hold that an experience's moral features are **recognized** during the **acquisition** step (i.e., that moral properties, and thereby a situation's moral significance, are admissible contents of experience). Under experiential views, moral perceptions are perceptual inasmuch as the

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<sup>22</sup> We could call moral perceptions, under this view, moral perceptual beliefs (i.e. formed moral beliefs about perceptual contents) to better parallel the relationship between perceptions and perceptual beliefs.

<sup>23</sup> Among judgementalist, I include Blum (1991 & 1994), Little (1995 & 1997), Goldie (2007), Willett (1995 & 2014), Audi (2018 & 2013), and Fricker (2007). These views will maintain a commitment to I and II, but will differ in regards to the details of III.

subject literally perceives a situation's moral features because the observer has an experience of moral perceptual content.<sup>24</sup> Put formally,

**Moral Perceptual Experientialism (MPE):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*MPE-I:* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ;

*MPE-II:* *S* possesses **background beliefs** (moral or non-moral) **or affective dispositions** relevant to situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*MPE-III:* The contents of II add to or alter the contents of I to include moral perceptual content by means of a **perception influencing mechanism** (i.e., cognitive penetration, imagination, or consciousness) thereby allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties.<sup>25</sup>

It is worth noting that there is an implausible alternative to this view which posits that moral properties are discerned by *S* during the acquisition step without the influence of *MPE-II*. Put formally, such a view would look something like the following:

**Implausible Moral Perceptual Experientialism (I-MPE):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*I-MPE-I:* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*I-MPE-II:* *S* **acquires** moral perceptual content by means of a **moral perceptual sense** allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties during a perceptual experience of  $\alpha$ .

What makes this latter view implausible is its implication that we possess a moral perceptual sense that functions in the same way as our sense of touch, sight, smell, hearing, taste, proprioception, or balance.<sup>26</sup> What I-MPE-II suggests is that a moral perceptual sense facilitates our perceptions of good, evil, dignity, cruelty, and so on in the same way that other senses create perceptual states which allow for perceptions of spatial properties, color, shape, motion and illumination. This seems ill-conceived.

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<sup>24</sup> Among experientialists, I include Jennifer Church (2013) and Sarah McGrath (2018).

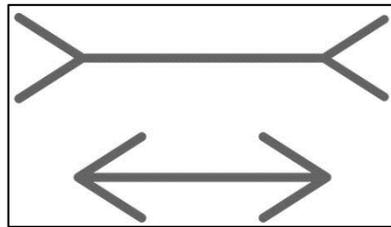
<sup>25</sup> Cowan (2015) points to cognitive penetration as a promising topic for pursuing this kind of view. Church (2013) utilizes a Kantian sense of imagination to motivate such a view. Mills (2007) seems to suggest that consciousness plays the perception influencing role in this process.

<sup>26</sup> McGrath (2004) and Faraci (2014) make this observation as well.



To clarify, this idea should not be confused with positions held by moral intuitionist, moral sentimentalists, or neighboring camps in moral epistemology or psychology. These kinds of views often hold that our moral intuitions (non-inferential and immediate cognitive apprehensions)<sup>27</sup> or sentiments (emotional or affective apprehensions)<sup>28</sup> serve as vehicles for discerning the moral features of an occurrent experience. These processes are an act of judgment in the broadest sense of the term. Provisionally put, **judgements** are distinct from **perceptions** in that occasions of the latter articulate the contents of our occurrent experience whereas the former, at least during moral perceptions, are grounded on the contents of our occurrent experience.

To motivate this distinction, the reader is asked to consider *Figure 1.1* which depicts the Muller-Lyer lines (below).<sup>29</sup> One's **perception** of the lines suggests that they



*Figure 1.1 Muller-Lyer Lines*

are of different length, the top line being longer. In contrast, one can come to make the **judgement** that the lines are of the same length after learning how this illusion is the result of conflicting depth cues which cause a kind of misfire in our perceptual system. The image appears to us, we have a perception of it, and we can make judgments about that perception. In this case, it is easy to distinguish between our judgements about the lines and our perceptions of them because our judgment (i.e., that they are the same length) has no

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<sup>27</sup> Stratton-lake (2014) "Intuitionism in Ethics". *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

<sup>28</sup> Kauppinen (2014) "Moral Sentimentalism". *SEP*

<sup>29</sup> This can be read as a parody of O'Brien's illustration of the distinction between beliefs and perceptual beliefs. O'Brien (IEP article)

influence on our perceptual field (i.e., that they appear to us as different lengths).<sup>30</sup> The judgment and the perception are distinct from one another.<sup>31</sup>

We can draw at least two ideas from this example. First, perceptions allow us to **acquire** contents of experience by utilizing our perceptual systems to apprehend a perceptual field. We look at the lines, acquire perceptual contents, and have an experience of them. In contrast, judgments, among other things, are used during occurrent experiences to draw cognitive associations between the contents of experience (e.g., contents of the perceptual field) and other propositional content by means of quick or slow cognitive processes. These processes include, among other things, intuition, inference, non-inferential rule-like mental associations, heuristics, or affective associations. In the Muller-Lyer case, our perceptual systems render, for us, a perceptual field with contents (e.g., we **acquire** perceptual contents). It is only after learning about the nature of these lines that we can judge that our perceptions are an illusion and **recognize** the erroneousness of our perception.

Similarly, during occasions of moral perception, **judgments** are non-perceptual mental states which utilize slow or fast cognitive systems to manifest moral impressions and beliefs about occurrent experience whereas **perceptions** are mental states which define the contents of our perceptual field.<sup>32</sup> This observation, alone, is not an observation about

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<sup>30</sup> Given the implication of this paper's on broadly construed evaluative perception, we might say that this judgment does have an impact on our perception of the lines. Perhaps we have the perception of something unnatural or not veridical.

<sup>31</sup> The distinction between moral perception and moral judgment or general judgments is not as clear, but that is one of the motivations for this paper. Church (2010) describes the difference between mediated states of mind and unmediated states of mind suggesting that the latter are clearly perceptual because they are experientially immediate to the observer and provides a kind of justificatory immediacy in that "perceptual knowledge is immediate knowledge in the sense that it does not depend on any other knowledge for its justification." (Church (2010), p. 640)

<sup>32</sup> Church (2010 & 2013) seems to draw out this distinction by describing the experientially immediate nature of perception as the kind of thing that happens when one sees a chair or table (its in our face) and (epistemically) justificatory immediate as a source of belief about the contents of the world (knowing that there is a chair there requires nothing more than the sight of it). Immediate, in these contexts, seems to point to the idea that there is no other mental state needed to have a perception and take its content as indicative of

the judgment-perception question, nor does it necessarily preclude the possibility that non-perceptual mental states influence or alter one's perceptual states, as supporters of cognitive penetration hold. Instead, as it is used here, this distinction between perception and judgement merely motivates the idea that perceptions ground judgments about occurrent experience, or perceptual beliefs, not the other way around. As a result of this observation, views such as ethical intuitionism or sentimentalism amount to versions of judgmentalism. Such views utilize a judgment formation mechanism, like intuitions and sentiments, to motivate our apprehension of moral properties within our occurrent experience via perceptual belief but are silent on the issue of whether these judgments about perceptual experience alter or add to our perceptual contents.

Given I-MPE's and MPE's perception influencing claim, even if we briefly allow that moral properties are admissible contents of our experience, it would be dubious to think that such content could be acquired in an unmediated way (e.g., without aid of our beliefs, affects, or associations) which leads to some influence of non-perceptual states on our perceptual field. To motivate this idea in a nonmoral case, consider a shoelace. There is, at the end of your shoelace, a hard-plastic tip used to thread the lace through a sneaker. It is easy to have a perception of this thing comprised of whatever color-contents or shape-contents we **acquire** when we look upon the shoelace tip. We cannot, however, rightly assume that we, as observers, have a literal perceptual experience of this shoelace tip as what it is named, an aglet, until we learn about the concept "aglet". This follows because, otherwise, we would be expected to have a kind of perceptual-revelation experience giving

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the content of the world. If there was, then such things would need to be mediated by other states. She is, however, unclear on these matters in many places.

us knowledge of what an aglet is and, arguably, this kind of thing does not happen. If a literal perception of kind property “aglet” is possible, it cannot occur without the aid of our background epistemic resources to serve as mediator. That is, *F* cannot perceive the shoelace tip as an aglet without background beliefs about the concept of an aglet.<sup>33</sup>

In the case of moral perception, if moral properties become part of our perceptual experiences then our background beliefs or affective states will need to inform some kind of perception influencing mechanism as suggested by MPE (or, if they are not part of perceptual experience, a judgment influencing mechanism as suggested by MPJ). Faraci (2015) refers to this idea as **Mediation**: If perceptions of X, a moral property, are grounded (i.e., “perceptions of X track an experience *as of Y* even in the absence of Y”) in experiences *as of Y*, then “perceptions of X produce knowledge only if they are mediated by background knowledge of relations between X and Y.”<sup>34</sup> He continues,

“**Mediation** is highly intuitive: Suppose A’s perception of X is grounded in an experience *as of Y*. But suppose A also has no reason to think there’s any relation between X and Y. In that case, there seems to be no way A’s experience *as of Y* could produce *knowledge* [or an experience] about X.”<sup>35</sup>

To further motivate *mediation*, the reader is asked to consider *Figure-1.2* (below). Imagine that *A* attends a pool party to meet a new group of people. Neither person in *Figure-1.2* is



*Figure 1.2 Pushed in the Pool*

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<sup>33</sup> It might be suggested that sensory properties are also kind properties. That literally seeing a stop sign as an octagon, such that the octagon property is taken to be a part of one’s occurrent experience, is no different than one’s sensory experience of a shape extended in space with eight sides. Siegel (2011) draws out this distinction as a difference between content and rich content, where the former is more sensory basic and the latter is more conceptually informed. I make the same distinction here by starting from a conceptual perspective which follows her assumption that sensory contents are distinct from conceptual contents. In this way, seeing the stop sign as an extended shape in space is distinct from seeing it as an octagon, at least in the phenomenological sense.

<sup>34</sup> Faraci (2015) p. 2063

<sup>35</sup> Faraci (2015) p. 2063

known to *A* and, thereby, *A* has no background knowledge about them or the context that prompted one person to push another into the pool. Assuming *A* has no background beliefs or affects pertaining to people being pushed into pools, the contents of *A*'s perception (perhaps even our own occurrent perception of the photo during our first read of this paper) would be generally mundane (i.e., without morally significant content).

Now, suppose that *A* comes to learn that the man in the photo cannot swim, that the pusher knows this, and, also, that they possess the belief or affective disposition to hold that putting people in life threatening situations is morally wrong, perhaps because it does someone a harm or violates their human dignity. Assuming MPE or I-MPE is correct, *A*'s perception (and perhaps our own perception) of the situation would now be altered to include moral contents. This background content is required to perceive this situation as possessing an immoral quality. I-MPE is implausible because it takes moral perceptions to be unmediated when cases like these reveal to us that any literal moral perception, just as in the case of forming moral judgments, must be **mediated** by our background mental contents or structures (i.e., beliefs, affective dispositions, non-inferential cognitive associations, and so on) if moral contents are to become contents of perceptual experience in the first place.<sup>36</sup> We are hard pressed to think that people have unmediated moral perceptual-revelations during morally pertinent situations like those depicted in *Figure-1.2*. Even if moral knowledge of particular situations could be a form of perceptual knowledge, we would still need background moral knowledge about the contents of

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<sup>36</sup> Issues of high-level and low-level contents of experience are seemingly relevant to this discussion. Rather than invest my time here trying to settle a debate about what counts as a high-level or low-level property (something I would not be able to settle here), I have minimally drawn a boundary line between sensory-content and conceptual-content knowing that sensory-content is arguably low-level content and conceptual-content is arguably high-level. That said, all that I am defending here is that conceptual-content, in virtue of its conceptual grounding, could not become part of perceptual experience, if it can at all, without some kind of mediation by our background beliefs and affects. I have taken no firm stand on what counts as high- or low-level contents. Siegel (2011) make a similar move when distinguishing K-properties from low-level properties.

morality (i.e., cognitive or affective associations pertaining to moral principles, laws, or virtues) with which to discern the moral features of the particular event in reference to an abstract moral conception of the good.<sup>37</sup>

That said, the distinction between MPJ and MPE turns on whether moral properties are admissible contents of our experience. Adopting MPJ means that one commits to some variation on the claim that the phenomenological character of such content is reducible to a kind of judgment, as defined earlier. That is, MPJ is reductivist about our phenomenological responses during morally pertinent experiences.<sup>38</sup> Väyrynen (2018), for example, takes the phenomenal character of our moral perceptions as indicative of “an implicit habituated transition in thought from a perceptual input to a moral representation, owing to the way that the relevant emotional and affective dispositions have been shaped by some relevant background moral beliefs which connect non-moral inputs with moral classifications.”<sup>39</sup> In contrast, adopting MPE means that one holds that the phenomenological character of our experiences are distinctly perceptual and, thereby, not fully reducible to some form of judgment. As a result, an answer to the **judgment-perception question** (i.e., “Are moral perceptions a kind of judgment or are they literal perceptions of a situation’s moral features?) depends on how the phenomenological character of moral perception should be understood.

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<sup>37</sup> This is Faraci’s (2015) insightful claim about the limitation of moral perception as a source of moral knowledge. If moral knowledge is in any way a form of perceptual knowledge it must be about moral particulars and not universals otherwise we would be forced to admit that we have perceptual encounters of universal moral principles. As I see it, this is antithetical to the nature of what it means to have moral perceptions of particulars. Blum’s (1994) *Moral Perception and Particularity* is a testament to this idea.

<sup>38</sup> In general, judgementalism is, by default, a reductivist position in virtue of the idea that it takes our judgments to be the source of our moral perceptions rather than entertain the possibility of literal moral perception. Faraci (2015)’s position is a little more complicated in that while he allows for the idea that literal moral perception are viable, there is no such thing as a purely perceptual moral epistemology in as much as moral bridge laws (i.e., moral principles that link non-moral and moral contents). For Faraci, we have literal perceptions of moral particulars but not of moral universals. As a result, he is a judgementalist about moral principles but an experientialist about moral properties.

<sup>39</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 123

## 1.4 The Phenomenology of Moral Perception

As Siegel (2011) describes it, **phenomenal contrast methodology** is “a way to test hypotheses about the contents of visual experience. Its main strategy is to find something that the target hypothesis purports to explain, and then see whether it provides the best explanation of that phenomenon.”<sup>40</sup> Schematized, the method functions by placing person *S* into the position of observing some situation  $\alpha$  and assuming that *S* is in epistemic state  $\Psi$ , one which lacks background beliefs or affective dispositions usually pertinent to  $\alpha$ .  $\Psi$  is then altered to include beliefs or affective dispositions, usually those pertinent to  $\alpha$ , causing *S* to enter epistemic state  $\Delta$ . Person *S* is then placed back into situation  $\alpha$  and the phenomenal character of *S*'s experience under  $\Psi$  (E-1) is compared to *S*'s experience under  $\Delta$  (E-2). The differences between E-1 and E-2 are classified using a target hypothesis ( $H_T$ ) and this explanation is compared to alternative explanation ( $H_A$ ) to determine the best possible explanation for those differences is.<sup>41</sup> This section employ's this strategy in order to address the **judgment-perception** question about moral perception.

The target hypothesis ( $H_T$ ) to be tested in the case of MPE is that moral properties are represented by the contents of experience. Put otherwise, MPE qua  $H_T$  holds that moral properties are **recognized** when we **acquire** perceptual contents during occurrent experience. With this in mind, the reader is asked to consider the following case while looking at *Figure 1.3*.

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<sup>40</sup> Siegel (2011) p. 87-88

<sup>41</sup> This formalization of the phenomenal contrast method is based on Siegel's (2011) defense of the Rich Content View wherein she uses the phenomenal contrast method to investigate our viewing of pine trees, the contrasting experience therein being what it is like to view a grove of trees before knowing what a pine tree is and, again, after learning about pine trees. See Siegel (2011) p. 100-101.

**V-J Day Photo Case:** Consider *Figure 1.3*. *S* knows nothing about this photo except that it depicts a scene in Times Square during V-J Day, celebrating the end of WWII. *In the absence of background information about the photo, Figure 1.3 seems morally innocuous to S (E-1)*. Later, after interviewing the man (George Mendonsa), *S* learns that he did not know the woman (Greta Zimmer Friedman). George tells *S* that “If that girl did not have a nurse's uniform on, I honestly believe that I never would have grabbed her. ... [in the war] we were transferring the wounded onto the hospital ship, and I was watching how the nurses were taking care of the wounded ... it was [her] uniform that did it.”<sup>42</sup> Greta goes on to tell you, “Well, it wasn't -- it wasn't my choice to be kissed. The guy just came over and kissed [and] grabbed.”<sup>43</sup> *With this, S knows that this is a photo of unwanted kissing, and, assuming that S possesses background beliefs that sexual assault is wrong and that unwanted kissing is sexual assault, Figure 1.3 now appears to S as representing something immoral (E-2)*.



*Figure 1.3 Alfred Eisenstaedt's "V-J Day in Times Square"*

In this case, situation  $\alpha$  amounts to observing George kiss Greta. When *S* is in state  $\Psi$ , possessing an absence of information about  $\alpha$ , the phenomenal character of their experience of the photo (E-1) is classified as what it is like to observe something morally innocuous. In contrast, when *S* is in state  $\Delta$ , possessing information about  $\alpha$  which includes the unwanted and forceful nature of the kiss and that such things are immoral, the phenomenal character of their experience of the photo (E-2) is classified as what it is like to observe something wrong.  $H_T$ , which amounts to the MPE position, takes the difference between the phenomenal character of E-1 and E-2 to be driven by a difference in perceptual content between E-1 and E-2. Specifically, that  $\Delta$  modifies *S*'s perceptual experience to include “wrong” as perceptual content in E-2 when it was not present in E-1.

It is worth making a clarificatory point about this case before weighing  $H_T$  against its alternative. *S*'s transition from state  $\Psi$  to  $\Delta$  occurs when they learn about the context of

<sup>42</sup> Interview, veterans history project, <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.42868/transcript?ID=sr0001>

<sup>43</sup> Interview, veterans history project <http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.42863/transcript?ID=sr0001>



the photo (i.e., from interviews with George and Greta). It is assumed that both  $\Psi$  and  $\Delta$  include morally relevant content such as “sexual assault is wrong” and “unwanted kissing is sexual assault”.  $\Psi$  is, therefore, similar to  $\Delta$  in that  $S$  possesses the same content about the immorality of sexual assault and can identify unwanted kissing as sexual assault in both states. However, there are many ways we could describe the content of  $S$ ’s epistemic state which could alter  $S$ ’s take on the photo in the way described. For brevities sake, I will limit my discussion about such content to the following five items.

(a): a **particular belief** that image-II represents an occasion of sexual assault.

(p): a **concluding belief or affective intuition** which holds that this photo represents something wrong.

(u): a **context belief** that Greta did not choose to be kissed and, thereby, it was unwanted.<sup>44</sup> (k): a **practical belief** that unwanted kissing is an occasion of sexual assault.

(w): a **moral belief or affective disposition** which holds that sexual assault is wrong.

As presented, the V-J Day Photo Case assumes that states  $\Psi$  and  $\Delta$  possess content (k) and (w). After learning about the context of the case,  $S$  exits  $\Psi$  and enters state  $\Delta$  because they have acquired (u). With (u), and assuming that  $S$  is rational, it is expected that  $S$  will come to understand (a) because (k) and (u) entail (a). From this,  $S$  should arrive at (p) because (a) and (w) entail (p). As a result, state  $\Psi$  contains merely (k) and (w) whereas it is assumed in this example that state  $\Delta$  contains (a), (u), (k), (w), and (p). This difference between  $\Psi$  and  $\Delta$  is, seemingly, what motivates the differences between  $S$ ’s experiences during E-1 and E-2.

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<sup>44</sup> One might suggest that other items should be included in this list. The description of the case as one where George grabbed Greta, that he did not know her, and that he forced himself upon her are just some examples. However, while there may be litigious reasons for including such a content in a court room, I have taken Greta’s claim that she did not choose to be embraced, and, thereby, that the kiss was unwanted to be sufficient reason to draw out the conclusion that this was a case of sexual assault. The other content either collaborate her story or makes the event just that much more shocking.

Additionally, we should not expect a change in the phenomenological character of *S*'s experience without (k), (w), and (u) in  $\Delta$ . Without them, there would, it seems, not be enough content in *S*'s background beliefs and affects to **mediate** the appreciation of any moral features during *S*'s experience of the photo in situation  $\alpha$ . This should not trouble us, however, because what this observation reveals is an alternative scenario we could consider when exploring the phenomenology of moral perception via contrast cases. If the former case occurs because of a change in one's relevant non-moral knowledge, the following contrast occurs due to a change in one's moral knowledge. Consider the following alternative case.

**Alternative V-J Day Photo Case:** Consider *image-II*, again. *S* is an expert about this photo. They know everything one could know about its contents, the context, and its iconic place in history. However, *S* does not believe or is not affectively disposed to hold (k) or (w) or denies that Greta did not want to be kissed (i.e., *S* does not believe (u)). *In the absence of background information (k), (w), or (u), Figure 1.3 seems morally innocuous to S (AltE-1)*. Then, over many years, *S* undergoes a radical transformation in their moral outlook and in their understanding about sexual assault. *S*, now, believes or affectively holds (k), (w), and (u). *With this, figure 1.3 now appears to S as representing something immoral (AltE-2)*.

In the V-J Day Photo Case, *S* can be said to have an **epistemically deficient** set of beliefs or affective attitudes about the photo given that they, in state  $\Psi$ , lack (a), (u), and (p). In contrast, the Alternative V-J Day Photo Case seems motivated by a **morally deficient set of beliefs or attitudes** from which to understand the salient moral features of the situation. Yet, the phenomenal difference in either contrast case would be classified in the same way by MPE's articulation of  $H_T$ : Holding (p), the concluding belief or affective disposition which takes the photo to represent something 'wrong', motivates a change in the phenomenal character of one's experience of the photo itself. MPE takes this change to occur because E-2 possesses different perceptual content than E-1. That is, (p) alters, through some perception influencing mechanism, experience's perceptual content to

include ‘wrongness’, or something close to it, as a feature of the perceptual experience, just like ‘table’ or ‘chair’. Under this view, *S*’s insensitivity to the moral features of the photo is a **moral perceptual miss** fueled by *S*’s lack of non-moral knowledge in the V-J Day Photo Case and by a lack of moral background knowledge in the Alternative V-J Day Photo Case.

### 1.5 Unpacking a MPE’s Account of the V-J Day Photo Case

H<sub>T</sub> accounts for the phenomenological difference between E-1 and E-2, and also AltE-1 and AltE-2, by claiming that there is moral perceptual content in the second experience that was not present in the first. The idea here is that a difference in content is what prompts a difference in the phenomenological character of these experiences. That is, during E2, in contrast to E1, perceptual contents represent the photo’s moral features (i.e., its wrongness, cruelty, or harm) as literal contents of the experience. To reiterate, MPE’s commitment to H<sub>T</sub> means that the view takes the **recognition** of the photos moral features to have occurred during the **acquisition** of the experiential contents of the photo. To illustrate, this is how Church (2013) approaches MPE.

Church holds that one gains perceptual knowledge of a situation’s morally significant properties in the same way that one does of everyday objects.<sup>45</sup> She writes, “moral perception is immediate *in the same way* that our perception of tables and chairs is immediate because its justification is built into its phenomenology.”<sup>46</sup> A perception, in Church’s language, occurs whenever one undergoes an experience which is both

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<sup>45</sup> I take this last point to be what Church (2013) means by seeing something as objective in the Kantian sense. That is, that the chair is seen as objective is to give it the sense that the chair is an object and independent of my beliefs of it. See Church (2013) *The Possibilities of perception* and Church (2010) “Seeing Reasons” for examples of this kind of reasoning.

<sup>46</sup> Church (2013) p. 191. Emphasis added.

**transparent** to the subject and **self-justificatory** about its content because she takes a perception to occur whenever one has an experience of objectivity.<sup>47</sup> She explains,

“An experience is a perceptual experience precisely when the independent reality of its object is evident from *within* that experience; perceptual experience is self-justifying because it includes experience of its own objectivity. This is also (at least part of) what it means for perception to be “transparent”: it presents its objects in such a way that one is unaware of any distinction between how an object appears and how it is in fact.”<sup>48</sup>

As described, “an experience of objectivity” is the central identifier for distinguishing between perceptions and other mental states, such as judgments.<sup>49</sup> In the case of the Muller-Lyer lines, what is both transparent and self-justificatory for the onlooker is that the lines appear to us as being of different length. We gain the perceptual belief that “these lines are of different length”, belief *l*, by sole means of the experience itself. That is, our experience of the lines is transparent to us because we are experientially unaware of any difference between how the lines appear to us from how they are, even though we need only use a ruler to learn that the lines are of different length. Moreover, belief *l* is self-justified by the experience, albeit erroneously in this case, because our occurrent experience of the lines supports our belief in *l*.<sup>50</sup> In an abbreviated sense, Church claims that to have a perception is to have an experience which (1) gives us the sense that we encounter objects with properties independent of us and (2) serves as its own justification for a belief that what is experienced is actually the case.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Church (2010) p. 645

<sup>48</sup> Church (2010) p. 644

<sup>49</sup> Church (2010) p.645

<sup>50</sup> “Justification” as an epistemic term is used, by Church, to reference that something supports a belief, not that it necessarily supports a true belief. The classic illustration of this use of the term “justify” can be found in Gettier cases. I can have a justified belief that it is noon by looking at a clock which, unbeknownst to me, is broken because I am a competent clock user. That belief is true when it happens to be noon and false when it is not, but my justification is drawn from my experience of the clock. One reason Gettier-cases are so provocative is because, among other things, they illustrate the complex nature of justification.

<sup>51</sup> It is worth noting that Church also argues for an accuracy condition in order to distinguish perceptions from things like blind convictions (Church, 2013, Ch. 1 & 2). While this is an important component to her views within *The Possibilities of Perception*, I have forgone exploring this aspect of her project as I have abandoned the use of perception as a success term. This does not, however, hinder our discussion about her version of MPE beyond the need to incorporate an evaluative component to my schematization of her view in a future project. I do not do that here because, again, it would not only require us to investigate veridicality conditions but also defend some moral theory with which to judge the veridicality of one’s experience. While important to the future of this project, these

On the matter of how we come to have perceptions, she goes on to state that the imagination plays an essential part of how we come to have experiences that are both transparent and self-justificatory. She writes, "... we *actively* imagine alternative perspectives whenever we experience something as an objective state of affairs" and, thereby, experience something as knowable in a plurality of ways by virtue of our occurrent perceptual experience and our imagined experience of its alternatives.<sup>52</sup> It "is our ability to use our imaginations to synthesize a multiplicity of different perspectives and possibilities (past and future, actual and merely possible) that enables us to perceive an object or a sequence of events as objectively valid."<sup>53</sup>

Technical terminology aside, the imagination, she seems to claim, utilizes our background understanding regarding how the world operates (i.e., our beliefs about space, perspective, causations, and so on) and, in the case of moral perception, our understanding of the contents of morality to produce background mental states which articulate a plurality of alternatives to how things appear to us in an occurrent experience. Using trees as an example, she writes,

"we perceive an object such as a tree insofar as we simultaneously imagine how it would appear from other points of view. For it is the imagined convergence of different perspectives around a single state of affairs that gives us the experience of its spatiality and its objectivity... When it comes to perceiving someone as an agent—as the locus of multiply intertwined mental states, I want to make a similar suggestion: to perceive that someone is a person we must imagine that person in a variety of situations—some of which are actual and many of which are merely possible, and we must discover what is invariant across those imagined actions."<sup>54</sup>

On moral matters, she continues,

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things, again, are beyond the scope of this paper which is simply to defend the view that moral properties can be contents of our experience.

<sup>52</sup> Church (2010), p. 649

<sup>53</sup> Church (2013) p. 222

<sup>54</sup> Church (2013) p. 199-200

“... [imagining] is also guided by [an agent’s] implicit knowledge of what *should* happen.... It is not enough to direct one’s imagining with a loving attitude or a desire to do right by others plus a good understanding of causal laws; one must also know a good deal about what doing right by others involves, and that is where moral laws enter... in the case of moral perception the relevant laws must include moral laws...”<sup>55</sup>

The takeaway here is that perception is a two-part process in Church’s view. First, one’s imaginative faculties **recognize** a situation’s various possibilities (both moral and non-moral) given **acquired** perceptual contents. Then, one’s **imagination** synthesizes **recognized** content with **acquired** perceptual content into an experience for the subject that is both transparent and self-justificatory, a perceptual experience. Church’s (2013) view, put formally, looks something like the following.

**Church’s MPE (C-MPE):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when they

*C-MPE-I:* **acquire** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  in occurrent experience;

*C-MPE-II:* possess **background beliefs** regarding moral and non-moral issues including the moral law and worldly operations (i.e., space, gravity, and so on) that are relevant to  $\alpha$ ;

*C-MPE-III:* **imagine** a multiplicity of possibilities regarding  $\alpha$  according to the contents of II; and

*C-MPE-IV:* use the imagination to **synthesize** the contents of I and III into a perceived state of affairs which includes moral and non-moral content. This synthesis is Church’s perception influencing mechanism and is itself facilitated by the imagination.

This view would account for the differences mentioned in the V-J Photo Cases by pointing to how the imaginative workings of *S* differ when in epistemic state  $\Psi$  versus  $\Delta$ . That is, *S* cannot imagine a situation’s moral features because one doesn’t have enough information, in C-MPE-II, to access them. In the alternative V-J Day Photo case, an imaginative failure occurs because *S* lacks the moral knowledge to imagine relevant possibilities and, thus, the imaginative synthesis during C-MPE-IV leaves the moral features of the situation unrealized in *S*’s perceptual experience. As a result, the perceptual contents of E-1 differ

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<sup>55</sup> Church (2013) p. 218-219

from those in E-2 thereby resulting in a difference between each experience's phenomenological character.

### 1.6 MPJ's Alternative Account of the V-J Day Photo Case

MPJ purports that an alternative hypothesis ( $H_A$ ) is preferable to MPE's  $H_T$ .  $H_A$  holds that the phenomenal character of moral perceptions attach to judgments, cognitively or affectively articulated, rather than to the presence of perceptual contents. The difference in phenomenological character between E-1 and E-2 (or AltE-1 and AltE-2) under  $H_A$  is accounted for as a difference in the sense one has when one figures things out. 'Figures things out', in this context, means to acquire a belief by means of a **judgment formation mechanism**. Common candidates for this mechanism include **cognitive associations** (i.e., inference, heuristics<sup>56</sup>, intuitions<sup>57</sup>, or a rule-like association between what is perceived and a moral property<sup>58</sup>) or **invoked affective states** (i.e., virtuous affects including emotions<sup>59</sup>, the *what it is like* to experience virtue's phenomenal character<sup>60</sup>, or an attunement to a situation's affect-cloud<sup>61</sup>). Some views take both cognitive associations and invoked affective states to be at play during moral perceptions. Other versions of MPJ focus on one candidate over the other. Given this, three categories of MPJ are worth mentioning. Put formally,

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<sup>56</sup> See Fricker (2007)

<sup>57</sup> See Audi (2018 & 2013)

<sup>58</sup> See Väyrynen (2018)

<sup>59</sup> See Little (1995 & 1997)

<sup>60</sup> See Goldie (2007)

<sup>61</sup> See Willett (1995 & 2014)

**Broad Moral Perceptual Judgmentalism (BMPJ):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*BMPJ-I* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ;

*BMPJ-II* *S* possesses **background beliefs** (moral or non-moral) **or affective dispositions** relevant to situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*BMPJ-III* *S* utilizes **cognitive associations** and **invoked affective states** as **judgement formation mechanisms** to judge  $\alpha$  using the contents of II thereby allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties by means of judgements about **acquired** perceptual content.

**Cognitive Moral Perceptual Judgmentalism (CMPJ):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*CMPJ-I* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ;

*CMPJ-II* *S* possesses **background beliefs** (moral or non-moral) relevant to situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*CMPJ-III* *S* utilizes **cognitive associations** as the **judgement formation mechanism** with which to judge  $\alpha$  using the contents of II thereby allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties by means of judgements about **acquired** perceptual content.

**Affective Moral Perceptual Judgmentalism (AMPJ):** *S* has a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  when

*AMPJ-I* *S* **acquires** non-moral perceptual content as of  $\alpha$  during their encounter with situation  $\alpha$ ;

*AMPJ-II* *S* possesses **affective dispositions** relevant to situation  $\alpha$ ; and

*AMPJ-III* *S* utilizes **invoked affective states** as the **judgement formation mechanism** with which to judge  $\alpha$  using the contents of II thereby allowing *S* to **recognize**  $\alpha$  as possessing moral properties by means of judgements about acquired perceptual content.

**BMPJ** is a revised version of our earlier definition of MPJ. BMPJ includes cognitive associations and invoked affective states as specified categories of how one forms judgments about the moral significance of perceived content. In the moral perceptual literature, versions of **CMPJ** and **AMPJ** emphasize one of these categories, cognitive associations and affective states respectively, in their view, usually by being silent about the role of the other. To illustrate how each of these views might account for the phenomenological difference in cases like the V-J Day Photo Case under  $H_A$ , this section lays out some prominent examples of each version of MPJ in preparation to assess which



hypothesis we should endorse, MPE's  $H_T$  or MPJ's  $H_A$ , in the next section.

In Blum's (1994) brand of BMPJ, a "failure to be in touch with part of the moral reality which confronts" the subject is indicative of their inability to automatically be aware of the occurrent situation's moral features. Blum's view marks the difference between E-1 and E-2 as a difference in one's individuation of the moral features during each of these experiences. These individuations change from E-1 and E-2 because  $S$  transitions from epistemic state  $\Psi$  to  $\Delta$  by learning new things.

As discussed during the development of an **acquisition-recognition** framework, it should be noted that Blum does state that "moral perception cannot be identified with moral judgment."<sup>62</sup> He goes on to say that in "a given situation moral perception comes on the scene prior to moral judgment; moral perception can lead to moral action outside the operation of [moral] judgment entirely; and, more generally, perception involves moral capacities not encompassed by moral judgment."<sup>63</sup> That is, moral judgment, for Blum, amounts to a moral deliberation about the significance of a situation's features and, in later stages of his schema, is used to determine the morally demanded course of action. In contrast, moral perception individuates moral features within an occurrent situation prior to the operation of deliberative moral judgment.<sup>64</sup> While he is silent on the **judgment-perception** question at most times, Blum seems to categorize one's moral judgment about the ethical significance of a situation's features as distinct from our discernments about the presence of such features, in a descriptive sense, in the first place. Both capacities, he argues, are important aspects of our moral lives.

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<sup>62</sup> Blum (1991) p. 702

<sup>63</sup> Blum (1991) p. 702

<sup>64</sup> Blum (1991) p. 711

There is, given this, reason to doubt that Blum is rightly classified as supporting BMPJ. To address this concern, I would like to suggest that Blum's project is less interested in determining whether moral perception is literally perceptual or a form of judgement than in recognizing "the range of distinct moral operations and capacities involved" during occurrent moral experiences because he claims to not rest much on his use of 'judgement' and 'perception'.<sup>65</sup> As a result, Blum's work falls into to the **literal-metaphorical ambiguity** discussed earlier because it avoids the **judgment-perception** question from the start. This does not mean, however, that we cannot explore the commitments he has made and glean which option, BMPJ or MPE, best describes his view. Moreover, given Blum's influential place in the history of moral perceptual theory it is important to take up this task.

That said, Blum's work on moral perception expands our understanding of a subject's moral epistemic operations regardless of their perceptual or judgmental nature. It challenges a historical tradition of principle-based moral theories which, he claims, have overlooked two important features of moral judgment, "(1) knowing how to apply rules or principles and (2) recognizing given features of a situation as a morally significant one".<sup>66</sup> Additionally, he argues that there is another overlooked capacity that must be considered if we are to make sense of moral agency. Stated plainly, Blum argues that (3) we must be able to individuate a situation's moral features prior to our ability to exercise (1) and (2), that is prior to our ability to render them as morally significant. It is this capacity to individuate a situation's moral features that he calls moral perception. Given this, one charitable interpretation of Blum's work holds that it expands our conception of morally

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<sup>65</sup> Blum 1991, p. 711 - "Either term can be used to refer to some of the operations I have included within the other."

<sup>66</sup> Blum (1991) p. 712

relevant judgment to include (1), (2), and (3) rather than taking a stand that (3) is a kind of perceptual capacity.

I adopt this interpretation because Blum likens moral perceptual operations to psychological capacities rather than perceptual processes.<sup>67</sup> Where moral judgements are acts of inference for Blum,<sup>68</sup> ‘judgment’, generally speaking, is a broader category which accounts for belief states which follow from our inferential and non-inferential discernments.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, non-inferential, and immediate, discernments can be facilitated by cognitive associations or affective dispositions.<sup>70</sup> Blum’s restriction of the conversation to a distinction between moral judgments, defined in technical terms, and moral perceptions, ambiguously defined, precludes him from seeing that moral perception, as a kind of non-inferential and immediate discernment, is seemingly a sibling of moral judgment in his view.

He writes, “... I am including within “perception” anything contributing to or encompassed within the agent’s take on the situation - his salience-perception - prior to his deliberating about what to do.”<sup>71</sup> Stated otherwise, Blum holds that an agent will be more or less sensitive to an occurrent experience’s features in proportion with their ability to derive non-inferential judgments from an experience’s perceptual contents because salience-perceptions, so described, take something perceived and categorize (i.e., judge it)

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<sup>67</sup> Blum (1991) p. 720

<sup>68</sup> Blum (1991), p. 707. Emphasis added. Referencing a racially charged situation: “Tim has to construe the situation in a certain way in order to see it as “the cab driver passing up the woman and her child.” And her has to *infer* the racist motive.”

<sup>69</sup> Put succinctly, non-inferential discernments result from a heuristic or automatic rule-like relation which associates x with y, thereby the agent makes judgement y whenever confronted with content x. Inferential deliberations, in contrast, carry more cognitive weight on the part of the rational faculties of the subject. Inferential deliberations can be quick, but the distinguishing feature between inferential and non-inferential judgments is that the former has a syllogistic structure whereas the latter amount to immediately adopting a belief because of some form of non-rational association.

<sup>70</sup> It is worth noting briefly that this approach to affects takes them to be forms of judgment rather than perceptions, which has been argued for by some. Given that affects respond to what is represented in perceptual experience, there is reason to believe that affects, like emotions, are not a perceptual capacity.

<sup>71</sup> Blum (1991) p. 707

as morally relevant. Under this interpretation, Blum's view seems to hold that **acquisition** collects perceptual content and **recognition** of the salient content occurs by means of a judgment formation mechanism wherein one individuates the features of a situation and exercises moral judgment to discern their moral significance. As a result, Blum's view holds that judgment formations are central to moral perception. Overall, Blum's view would account for the phenomenological differences between E-1 and E-2 in our test case as a difference in *S*'s judging that the photo represents sexual assault and its wrongness in E-2 but not E-1. Stated otherwise, Blum's approach to BMPJ would argue that there is a difference in *S*'s judgment which corresponds to an awareness of a salient property, like an act of sexual assault, and its morally evaluative dimension, like wrongness.

Alternatively, Väyrynen (2018) provides a straightforward account of BMPJ by, again, positing that cognitive associations and affective states connect non-moral perceptual content with moral classifications. Väyrynen's version of BMPJ claims that  $H_A$  has all the explanatory power of  $H_T$  without the complications associated with positing perception influencing mechanisms or distinct representational abilities on the part of the perceiver.<sup>72</sup> He writes,

“The rival explanation that I propose treats [different phenomenological responses] as reflecting an implicit habituated transition in thought from a perceptual input to a moral representation, owing to the way that the relevant emotional and affective dispositions have been shaped by some relevant background moral beliefs which connect non-moral inputs with moral classifications.”<sup>73</sup>

Väyrynen argues for this view by suggesting that the difference between experiences like E-1 and E-2 is better accounted for by views like BMPJ because the relevant change in the phenomenology attaches to an experience's cognitive phenomenology or one's

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<sup>72</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 121

<sup>73</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 123

psychologically invoked affective phenomenology rather than by perceptual content for three reasons.<sup>74</sup>

First, he argues that the phenomenological difference in contrast situations can be tracked by affective responses informed by background cognitive associations or immediate cognitive apprehensions without the need for positing a change in perceptual content<sup>75</sup>, what I refer to as his **Tracking Claim**. Second, that this difference is often experienced as a matter of degree rather than one of kind because such experiences correlate to the intensity of an affective response inasmuch as it is “psychologically immediate” and integrated with an experience’s non-evaluative inputs<sup>76</sup>, what I refer to as his **Immediacy Claim**. Lastly, he argues that his alternative account offers a simpler and more unified account of moral experience than alternatives by positing one general representational mechanism (i.e., representations via affective responses informed by cognitive mechanisms) rather than two in the case of MPE (i.e., representations via judgments and literal perceptual representations of moral content)<sup>77</sup>, what I refer to as his **Simplicity Claim**.

Overall, Väyrynen would seemingly account for the phenomenological differences between E-1 and E-2 as a difference in *S*’s cognitive phenomenology of what it is like to adopt a belief about the presence of a moral property or the affective phenomenology

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<sup>74</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p.123

<sup>75</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 119 “The transition can also be psychologically immediate and bound up with the relevant emotional or affective responses, explaining how things can ‘strike’ us as being morally a certain way. ... Alternatively the relevant transition might be more like a recognition based on taking in a pattern one isn’t able to articulate, where that patten gets recognized may be influenced by prior training or background cognitive states.”

<sup>76</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 120 – Referencing the evaluative practice of wine tasting be the expert verses the novice: “This suggests more forcefully still that their responses differ primarily in degree: in how psychologically immediate their responses tend to be and how integrated the non-evaluative inputs tend to be with the feelings of satisfaction that tasting a fine wine tends to produce.”

<sup>77</sup> Väyrynen (2018) p. 121 – “Explaining these moral properties seems to require only a general capacity to represent moral properties which is responsive to inputs from perception, imagination, supposition, and belief, and which can be psychologically immediate at least when the inputs are reliably and closely bound up with certain and emotional and affective dispositions.”

associated with an emotional response to what is understood as wrong in E-2 but not E-1. Moreover, this version of BMPJ would seemingly suggest that this account is reinforced by the apparent difference in each experience's phenomenological intensity or, put alternatively, the degree to which the cognitive or affective phenomenology is psychologically immediate to *S*.

To summarize, **BMPJ** reduces any claim that a change in the phenomenology between E-1 and E-2 in the V-J Day Photo case reduces to a difference in *S*'s cognitive or affective phenomenologies. Put otherwise, BMPJ reduces any perceptual claims about the presence of moral perceptual content to a claim about the presence of a judgment, cognitive or affectively reached, on the part of the subject *and* the phenomenology associated with those states.  $H_A$  is taken as the preferable alternative to  $H_T$  by proponents of BMPJ because it is believed to possess more theoretical virtues (i.e., is simpler and carrying equal explanatory power) than  $H_T$ , as in the case of Väyrynen, or properly accounting for the subject's moral epistemic capacities, as in the case of Blum. As a result, **acquisition** occurs prior to **recognition** in BMPJ. The same acquisition-recognition relationship is a feature of **Cognitive MPJ (CMPJ)** and **Affective MPJ (AMPJ)**.

**CMPJ** accounts for moral perception by emphasizing the role of cognitive associations (i.e., inference, heuristics<sup>78</sup>, intuitions<sup>79</sup>, or a rule-like associations between what is perceived and a moral property<sup>80</sup>) in our everyday moral discernments. In general, these views describe the immediate cognitive formation of a judgement about an occurrent experience's morally significant properties as prompting the phenomenological differences

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<sup>78</sup> See Fricker (2007)

<sup>79</sup> See Audi (2018 & 2013)

<sup>80</sup> See Väyrynen (2018)

associated with the V-J Photo Case. Whereas Blum's and Väyrynen's proposals seem to focus on 'non-inferential forms of judgment' and 'transitions in thought' in addition to discussing the role of invoked affective states, others focus on cognitive associations in terms of intuitions (Audi 2013) or heuristics (Fricker 2007). As in BMPJ, non-moral perceptual content and the identification of a situation's non-moral features occurs during the **acquisition step**. These are then associatively paired with moral content during the **recognition step** through one's capacity to make cognitive associations.

For example, Audi (2013) proposes a integration model of moral perception which ultimately holds that there is an unconscious, rule-like, pairing of non-moral *perceptual* content with moral properties by means of one's moral intuitions or, stated alternatively, a "felt sense of connection".<sup>81</sup> Under this view, the phenomenology associated with moral experiences is akin to having a "sense of injustice", a personal intuition about the connection between a moral property and non-moral contents. Clarifying, Audi (2018)<sup>82</sup> writes,

"The sense of injustice, then, a kind of impression of it, *as* based on, and as phenomenally integrated with, a suitable ordinary perception of the properties on which injustice is consequential – on which it is *grounded*, in a main use of that term – might serve as the experiential element in moral perception. ... call [this view] an *integration theory of moral*

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<sup>81</sup> Audi (2013), p. 37, 40-46

<sup>82</sup> It is worth mentioning that Audi (2013 & 2018) draws out a distinction between what he calls "perceptibility" and "perceptuality" in order to motivate these claims. Where the former seems to be a classification for one's cognitive phenomenology as a form of one's ability to articulate a kind of moral "sense", the latter refers to the level of observable properties "accessible to the five senses." (Audi 2018, 64). It seems, given this, that one could take issue with what Audi takes perception to be in that the perceptual phenomenology of an experience are, in an alternative view, like sensory properties in that they enter into one's perceptual experience by means of our apperception of the perceptual field, thereby allowing us to perceive kind properties. Both Siegel (2011) and Church (2013) hold something akin to this view. Sensory properties, like moral properties, could be seen as equally mysterious without this kind of synthesis suggesting that we should not reject the idea that moral properties can become contents of one's perceptual experience, if only through non-sensory mechanisms. However, Audi takes the non-perceptual contents route instead. Moreover, if Audi had argued strongly that affects function to draw out this "felt sense of connection", he would be classified as a BMPJ supporter. Instead, he consistently holds that a non-inferential disposition to recognize perceptually observable properties as morally significant often result in an emotional response but may not. This suggests that affective phenomenologies are more like side effects of cognitive phenomenologies for Audi rather than integral parts of the moral perceptual process. This suggests, given my scheme, that he is rightly categorized as a CMPJ supporter even though the affective phenomenology about the experience can play some part of his integration model, perhaps something like Väyrynen's claim that the intensity of an affective phenomenology. Ultimately, Audi's seems to suggest that moral perceptions are of the cognitive phenomenological character of taking something to fit, or not, (i.e., "fittingness"/"unfittingness" and "welcome rebalance") and variations on that theme account for our sense of injustice, goodness, wrongness, or justice suggests that this is the case.

*perception*. ... An important constituent in this phenomenal integration is the perceiver's felt sense of connection between, on the one hand, the impression of say, injustice or (on the positive side) beneficence and, on the other hand, the properties that ground the moral phenomena. This felt sense of connection is at least akin to what some have called the sense of fittingness."<sup>83</sup>

So described, Audi's view holds that we can have moral perceptions because we have a non-inferential inclination to classify the non-moral perceptual contents of an occurrent experience as indicative of some moral property or feature.<sup>84</sup> We sense morality by incorporating the cognitive phenomenology of our non-inferential judgment about the moral fitness, or unfitness, of a deed or person and a context within the overall phenomenology of the perceptual experience.<sup>85</sup> He goes on to characterize these cognitive associations as intuitions in the sense that they facilitate one's coming to have an immediate belief, in a way that is "significantly analogous to perception".<sup>86</sup>

As Cowan (2015) characterizes Audi's view, "Integration doesn't involve the contents of perceptual experience being altered by the moral 'experiential element', but rather, leads to the formation of an overall experience which is the amalgam of non-ethical perceptual experience and the [moral] experiential element."<sup>87</sup> As I understand it, this integration into an overall experience incorporates a judgment formation into the moral experience rather than reshaping the perceptual experience to include moral perceptual content. Audi's view is thereby not *perceptual* in nature, it predicts the aggregation of the phenomenology of making a judgment with the phenomenology of a perceptual

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<sup>83</sup> Audi (2018) p. 63

<sup>84</sup> Audi (2018) p. 63 "This sense of connection I am describing normally produces, moreover, a non-inferential disposition to attribute the moral property of the action (or other phenomenon in question) on the basis of the property or set of properties (of that action) on which the moral property is grounded."

<sup>85</sup> Audi (2018) p. 63 "Moral perception in some way embodies a phenomenal sense – which may or may not be in some way emotional – of the moral character of the act. ... In each instance of moral perception, the moral sense of wrongness, injustice or, in the positive case, of welcome rebalancing is essentially connected to perception of non-moral p[roperties on which the moral properties are grounded."

<sup>86</sup> Audi (2015) "Intuition and its place in ethics". *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*. 1. 57-77

<sup>87</sup> Cowan (2015)



experience. Audi's view thereby describes moral perception as an **acquisition** of non-moral perceptual content which gets **recognized** via our intuitions as possessing moral properties.

Alternatively, Fricker (2007) seems to articulate a version of CMPJ in *Epistemic Injustice* even though moral perception is not the primary topic of that work. That is, she seems to develop a view on moral perception while investigating the epistemological dimensions of hearers that put prejudicially driven credibility deficits on speakers facing systemic power inequities. She writes,

“There is a form of moral cognitivism in the virtue ethical tradition which advances the idea of moral perception. In this neo-Aristotelian tradition, the sensibility of the virtuous subject is conceived as ‘trained’ or socially educated, so that the subject comes to see the world in moral colour. By building an analogy with the idea of a virtuous agent’s ethical sensibility, I hope to arrive at an account of how the responsible hearer exercises rational sensitivity, without inference, so as to be critically open to the word of others. ... The main idea is that where a hearer gives a suitably critical reception to an interlocutor’s word without making any inference, she does so in virtue of the perceptual deliverances of a well-trained *testimonial sensibility*.”<sup>88</sup>

And, on the matter of virtuous moral perceptual capacities, she continues,

“I think, if one bears in mind that a virtuous moral perceptual capacity is a sensitivity to patterns of moral salience, a sensitivity to how different sorts of value configure in a new situation, action, or person. It is a sensitivity that allows the virtuous person to see the world in a certain light, where this has an intrinsic practical import, but where it would be misleading to boil the sensitivity down to nothing more than an alternative to deliberation. ... A virtuous perception gives us a moral understanding of experiences, people, situations, and events – a view of the world in moral colour, as I put it ...”<sup>89</sup>

Given this, Fricker’s *Epistemic Injustice* (2007), as partially a study of moral perception during cases of testimony, investigates the phenomenological character of occurrent experience with a specific focus on those occasions where a testimonial exchange is taking

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<sup>88</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 71

<sup>89</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 75

place and one makes discernments about a speaker's credibility.<sup>90</sup> Her general concern, using some of my language, is that there is something of a **moral perceptual miss** or **misfire** at work during occasions where identity prejudices trigger a systemic credibility deficit for a hearer about a historically marginalized or oppressed speaker. In these cases, a speaker is often prescribed a credibility deficit (i.e., not taken to be credible) because they are seen as incompetent or insincere due to their social identity. Moreover, these identities are deeply embedded in a pervasive social power structure and, as such, these kind of deficits signal, she argues, that the marginalized speaker is seen as possessing something less than what morality suggest they do, their moral status as a rational agent or knower.<sup>91</sup> The hearer, in this way, can be seen as making moral discernments about the status of agents as knowers, a morally salient assessment.<sup>92</sup> As a result, it seems that Fricker (2007) develops a perceptual model of testimony in order to account for our testimonial perceptual capacity, something she takes to be "analogous to the virtuous person's moral perceptual capacity."<sup>93</sup>

Put otherwise, she argues that agents perceive a speaker's credibility in virtue of how one establishes the person's epistemic trustworthiness, as exemplifying both competence and sincerity.<sup>94</sup> In cases where a speaker's competency or sincerity are wrongfully attacked due to an identity prejudicial credibility deficit, we should understand this as an occasion where the hearer has a moral perception of that person as possessing

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<sup>90</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 80-81, "The interpretation of the hearer's phenomenology as an unreflective yet critical alertness is mad sense of and vindicated if we accept the analogy with the moral perceptual model."

<sup>91</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 44, - "To be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wrong in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice. The form that this intrinsic injustice takes specifically in cases of testimonial injustice is that the subject is wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge."

<sup>92</sup> It is worth noting that Fricker (2007) categorizes "as a knower" as a moral feature indicative of human dignity by referencing Kantian notions of dignity and rational agents.

<sup>93</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 72

<sup>94</sup> Fricker (2007), p 45 - "Since epistemic trustworthiness requires the conjunction of competence and sincerity, a wrongful attack on either component is sufficient for being wronged in that capacity."

something less than the human dignity they are due, there is the sense that this person is “not a knower”. This might take the form of infantilizing the speaker or, among other alternatives, taking them to be insincere. Regardless, a hearer with identity prejudicial tendencies possesses, in her language, heuristics which discern that a socially marginalized speaker is less deserving of credibility in virtue of the assumption that they are less than capable of knowing or speaking sincerely about what they know.<sup>95</sup> In this way, one interpretation of *Epistemic Injustice* is that it develops, among other things, a framework for accounting for the kinds of moral perceptions one has of an important part of human dignity, our status as a knower. With this in mind, we can turn to the details of her view from the perspective that it accounts for a specific kind of moral perception because she classifies our perceptions of people qua knowers as a kind of moral discernment during occurrent experience of testimony.<sup>96</sup>

For Fricker, moral perceptions of testimony are immediate and non-inferential cognitive activities, and these activities facilitate “knower” discernments because they are saliently critical.<sup>97</sup> One’s internalized cognitive sensibilities, or heuristics, to moral patterns in an occurrent experience facilitates a hearer’s perceptual judgments and it is common for

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<sup>95</sup> Perhaps this is the case because the hearer believes that the marginalized subject is a member of a group that is believed to be intellectually inferior and knows nothing or that this group taken to always lie.

<sup>96</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 72 “According to the kind of cognitivism that grows out of the virtue tradition in ethics, the virtuous agent is marked out by his possession of a capacity for moral perceptual judgement. He is someone who, thanks to a proper moral ‘upbringing’ or (as I would prefer) a proper moral socialization, has come to see the world in moral colour. When he is confronted by an action or a situation with a certain moral character, he does not have to work out that the action is cruel or kind or charitable or selfish; he just sees it that way. Now this kind of perceptual judgement is spontaneous and unreflective; it involves no argumentation or inference on the agent’s part. The virtuous agent’s perceptual capacity is accounted for in terms of a sensitivity to morally salient features of the situation confronting him.”

<sup>97</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 80-81 “The five points of parallel explored above—that moral/testimonial judgement is non-inferential, uncodifiable, intrinsically motivating, intrinsically reason-giving, and typically has an emotional aspect—are all consistent with the spontaneous, unreflective phenomenology of testimony that has provided so much impetus for non-inferentialism. Indeed, they explain how our phenomenology as hearers can be of an entirely unreflective and spontaneous piece of cognitive activity even while it is critical activity. More specifically, these points of parallel fit the description of the phenomenology that I gave above to the effect that the hearer typically has an experience of unreflective alertness to the many prompts and cues relating to her interlocutor’s trustworthiness. Granted that our everyday on-the-spot credibility judgements are as I have depicted them—trained, socially situated perceptual judgements typically made spontaneously—then it is not surprising that the phenomenology should be unreflective and yet, as I suggested, abused if characterized as plain uncritical. The interpretation of the hearer’s phenomenology as an unreflective yet critical alertness is made sense of and vindicated if we accept the analogy with the moral perceptual model.”

an experience's cognitive activities to trigger some kind of affective response.<sup>98</sup> Yet, inasmuch as Fricker's sense of "heuristic" is a habituated habit of thought informed by background beliefs and dispositions, moral perceptual discernments in this view are a kind of judgment, as I have defined the term, because the perceptual-language is more an idiom for Fricker than a literally perceptual. Moreover, this judgement is motivated by one's cognitive associations (i.e., heuristics) and seemingly not a function of one's affective responses due to her system's reliability on heuristics.<sup>99</sup> Thus, Fricker's view on moral perception seems to amount to a version of CMPJ. Her approach to the moral perception of individuals as knowers holds that the **acquisition** of non-moral perceptual content (i.e., a subject's race, gender, sexuality, and other non-socially relevant features) is being **recognized** as morally significant in virtue of a perceiver's cognitive guiding, immediate, but non-inferential heuristics.

As representative of CMPJ, Audi (2013 & 2018) and Fricker (2007) would seem to account for the phenomenological differences between E-1 and E-2 by suggesting that they amount to a difference in the cognitive phenomenology of the subject, a phenomenology located on a judgement that an occurrence has this or that moral feature. In Audi's case, the V-J Day Photo represents sexual assault and its wrongness during E-1 but not E-2

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<sup>98</sup> Fricker (2007), p. 83. "Just as the experiences pertinent to the training of ethical virtues are internalized in the sensibility of the virtuous person, so is the body of collective and individual testimonial experience internalized by the virtuous hearer, rendering it immanent in her testimonial sensibility. It is through the broadly inductive influence of this body of experience that we may learn, reliably enough, to assume trust when and only when it is in order. Thus our perception of speakers and their assertions comes to be informed by a wealth of individual and collective experience relating to different sorts of speakers' trustworthiness regarding different sorts of subject matter in different sorts of context. As hearers, our perceptions of our interlocutors are judgements conditioned by a vast wealth of diverse testimony-related experiences, individual and collective."

<sup>99</sup> Fricker (2007) p. 36 "I have already suggested that the hearer in everyday testimonial exchange (p.36) will often make use of stereotypes as heuristics to facilitate his judgement of a speaker's credibility. Hearer and speaker are engaged in a form of social interaction, and they inevitably trade in social perceptions of each other. Anticipating the argument for a perceptual model of credibility judgement that I shall give in the next chapter, let us provisionally countenance the idea that in those everyday testimonial exchanges in which the hearer does not deliberate about how far to trust the speaker, the hearer perceives the speaker as trustworthy to this or that degree in what he is telling her. She perceives him in the light of a set of background assumptions about how far people like him are trustworthy about things like this in relation to people like her, and I have suggested that reliable stereotypes have an essential role to play here. This model of the interaction between speaker and hearer helps us to see the mechanism whereby identity prejudice can distort a hearer's credibility judgement: it distorts the hearer's perception of the speaker."

because the subject judges the fitness of the deed, unwanted kissing, with the perceived context by means of a “felt sense of connection”, or intuition. This suggests that the phenomenology of our moral experiences of the photo attaches to the cognitive phenomenology of the intuition. The difference between E-1 and E-2, for Audi, is accounted for by the presence of an intuition’s phenomenology in E-2 that was not present in E-1 because the background knowledge about the V-J Photo case was inadequate to draw out that cognitive association in E-1. For Fricker, the difference is accounted for by the presence of a perceptual judgment in E-2 that was not present in E-1 because there was insufficient background knowledge about the case to inform *S*’s heuristic capacities or cognitive habits. In both views, the presence of an invoked affective state during the experience occurs as a response to one’s judgment of the occurrent situation and, as a result, it is the cognitive phenomenology that is seemingly doing the moral perceptual work, or making the discernment, and not an affective process even though the affect ‘piggybacks’ on the experience.

In contrast, **Affective MPJ (AMPJ)** takes invoked affective states to be a key player in facilitating immediate, non-inferential, judgments about representational contents during moral perception. These judgments can be facilitated by virtuous affects (Little 1995 & 1997), the *what it is like* to experience virtue’s phenomenal character (Goldie 2007), or an attunement to a situation’s affect-cloud (Willett 1995 & 2014). In general, an invoked affective state triggered by some morally pertinent configuration of non-moral perceptual contents, as collected during the **acquisition** step, facilitates an immediate attribution of some moral feature(s) to an experience during the **recognition** step by connecting configurations of non-moral perceptual contents with moral properties. Affects, broadly

construed, include embodied and psychological feelings associated with emotions or general expressions of felt bodily states. Affects, as used here, amount to an immediate form of embodied prelinguistic judgments.<sup>100</sup> These views account for scenarios like the V-J Photo case by suggesting that *S* will come to have a different affective response to E-1 than E-2. Moreover, these affects facilitate a non-inferential, immediate, judgment about the situation's moral features for *S* and possess the phenomenal character of an invoked affective state. In AMPJ, the phenomenology of moral experience attaches to the affective phenomenology because the justification for discerning that some moral feature is present in occurrent experience is built into the affective phenomenology.

Little (1995 & 1997) and Willett (1995 & 2014) give separate versions of this kind of view. Granted, like Fricker (2007), Little and Willett do not take on moral perception as a theoretical project. Yet, Little (1995 & 1997) explores affect's relation to perceiving the moral landscape and Willett (1995 & 2014) develops a view which relies on the notion of affective attunement to make one sensitive enough to read the moral environment. Each seems to suggest that the affective character of our experiences facilitates the formation of a non-inferential, immediate, moral judgment during occurrent experience. Given that they do not suggest that there is a modification of an experience's perceptual content but hold that one can be directed to such content given an experience's affective phenomenology, both views seem rightly classified as versions of AMPJ.

For Little (1997), affects are the collection of one's various emotions, desires, or dispositions which shape the affective phenomenal character of an experience.<sup>101</sup> She

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<sup>100</sup> This claim operates under the view that affects, like emotions, are judgments rather than perceptions. Moreover, the decision to take affects to be a kind of prelinguistic judgment follows the Phenomenological Division of Feminist Affect theory, specifically those views indebted to Tomkins, but also stands against the idea that affects are forms of perception.

<sup>101</sup> Little (1995) p. 118

argues that the possession “of certain desires and emotions turns out to be a *necessary condition* of discerning moral properties, and hence must form part of even the ideal observer’s epistemic repertoire.”<sup>102</sup> In this way, her view describes invoked affective responses as the discernment mechanism for picking out the moral features of an occurrent experience because virtuous affects carry virtuous phenomenal experiences which aid the subject in understanding an experience’s moral features. She suggests that the virtuous person approaches morality itself “as part of a parcel of broad, uncodifiable, practical conception of how to live, while the non-virtuous person holds it without subsuming it.”<sup>103</sup> That is, the virtuous person ‘sees a situation more clearly’ than the non-virtuous person.

Where “seeing more clearly is often a matter of discerning a different gestalt of the individual elements one already apprehends”, she argues that the ability to recognize the moral significance of the configuration of these individual elements during moral perceptions must be facilitated by more than non-moral knowledge, as suggested by the contrast of *S* during E-1 and E-2.<sup>104</sup> That is, the phenomenological differences between AltE-1 and AltE-2 illustrate, in Little’s words, that to make certain moral discernments *S* must “have certain desires and emotions. Caring, being outraged, being moved to act - all these are part of discerning moral features clearly.”<sup>105</sup>

The difference is that *S* during AltE-1 has a different conception of how to live than *S* at AltE-2 and, as a result, they lack the ability to discern that the photo represents a wrongness-property during AltE-1. Without a properly attuned moral conception of how to live informing or regulating one’s affective response, which is motivational to some

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<sup>102</sup> Little (1995) p. 125

<sup>103</sup> Little 1997, p. 263

<sup>104</sup> Little (1995), p. 127

<sup>105</sup> Little (1995), p. 127

degree, during a moral experience, one might understand that something is a case of unwanted kissing, as in AltE-1, but fail to apprehend its moral significance, as *S* does in AltE-2. All of which is, for Little, facilitated by an affective judgment, seemingly indicating that a moral experience's phenomenology attaches to one's affective phenomenology.<sup>106</sup>

Willett (1995 & 2014), in a slightly different take on affects, suggests that one's affective attunement to the world facilitates our apprehension of its moral features. Willett and Little would agree on much, I suspect, but we should keep in mind that the former uses the notion of affect in a way that is theoretically different from the latter. Looking at parent-infant relationships, Willett writes, "Affect attunement articulates a preverbal social bond between infant and adult based on a predominantly nonconscious immersion in the rhythms and flows of ordinary life."<sup>107</sup> This approach to affects aims to provide a complex picture of the relation between affectively responsive bodies in an environment filled with affective triggers. One interpretation of this, in a moral perceptual framework, is that Willett believes affects can help us access a situation's moral features because affects can facilitate morally salient beliefs about, for example, the moral status of others. Approached as a kind of communicative exchange, Willett (1995) argues that both parent and child participate in a prelinguistic form of discourse via affective states.<sup>108</sup> For example, she notes that a parent is affectively moved by the infant's happiness and that the infant's

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<sup>106</sup> Little (1995) p.135 n5. "I have helped myself to the notion of "seeing" when I talk of apprehending moral truths. Lest that usage conjure worries stemming from its misuse by ethical intuitionists of previous centuries, let me say I am not positing any sui generis faculty of moral perception. We explain our ability to apprehend that something is cruel in the same way we explain our ability to apprehend that something is a table; not by appeal to any special sense organ, but by appeal to a much more familiar "faculty"-the capacity to apply concepts correctly. Put bluntly, we apprehend that something falls under the classification "cruel" by attending to the details at hand and making a judgment (which is not to say it is an easy skill to exercise)."

<sup>107</sup> Willett (2014) p. 82

<sup>108</sup> Willett (2014) p. 88 "During this early period, social interaction through crying, touching, rocking, and, after the first couple of months, cooing and eye-to-eye contact establishes a nuanced basis for the expression and communication of affects."



happiness, expressed via giggles and smiles, is prompted by an affective response to the presence of the parent's affection. Instead of an exchange of words, there is, seemingly, an exchange of affects.

At the center of this view is the concept of embodied 'affective attunements'. These are structured patterns of embodied dispositions that are sensitive to the affects of other individuals or groups which permeate our environment (i.e., affect clouds). Willett takes invoked affective responses to affect clouds as articulating a communicative capacity, an expressivity and receptivity, whereby "visual, aural, gestural, olfactory, phenomenal, and neurochemical transfers" intersect with social contexts to open up affective forms of discourse.<sup>109</sup> As a result, Willett's approach to affects encapsulates more than merely the kind of virtuous affective responses we might use to discern the moral significance of someone's suffering in order to judge that it is a case of cruelty and respond according to our moral conception of how to live, as in Little's view. Instead, invoked affects, regulated by our affective attunements, are ways for us to acquire information about an occurrent situation because an individual or group communicates certain affects into the environment for others to pick up on.

For example, when a parent's affective dispositions are saliently attuned to their child filled environment, they come to apprehend that the infant possesses a special moral status. Moreover, this status is an important moral feature of the parent's occurrent experience of the child. In this way, Willett's approach to affects seems akin to thinking of them as a prelinguistic form of testimony or dialogue without the kind of direct categorical

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<sup>109</sup> Willett (2014) p. 80 "affect laden photoconversions weave substantial threads of a communicative ethics across regions of the biosphere."

intentionality reserved for language.<sup>110</sup> This attunement to the affective states of others in the environment and theirs to ours makes moral perceptions of others, human or non-human in Willett's eyes, seemingly possible prior to the introduction of language. However, this does not mean that she likens affects to perceptual content or that they themselves are representations of moral content.<sup>111</sup>

To make sense of the epistemic structure of moral perception given Willett's view on affects, it is important to point out that she follows the phenomenological division of feminist affect theory and some contemporary scholarship in that field which classifies affects as *categorical* (i.e., happiness, sadness, fear, anger, shame, and so on) and as invoking a sense of *vitality* (i.e., energizing or elevating one's mood).<sup>112</sup> As a result, a moral perceptual experience with an affective phenomenology would provoke an affective state with two parts in Willett's scheme. First, one can affectively experience the intensity of the invoked affective response, its vitality. Second, one can have an affective experience that points to some moral category or property.<sup>113</sup> While not representationally intentional in themselves, invoked affects during moral perceptions, for Willett, can be felt ways of linking an experience to moral content because of their expressive contour (i.e., an intense shame, an explosive benevolence, and other pairings of visceral descriptor and categorical

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<sup>110</sup> Willett (1995) p. 91-92 "Communicative responses between infant and parent may exhibit in some sense or another identical levels of vitality affect. Still the choice of an appropriate response required an element of imaginative interpretation. As Stern Himself points out, without an act of imagination, music remains a series of sounds that express nothing. ... Attunements occur through cross-model correspondences that cannot be subsumed under a logic of identity, conceptual explanation, or [linguistic] intentionality."

<sup>111</sup> Note, it would also be unfair to read Willett as rejecting Little's use of affect or vice versa. Rather, Willett's notion of affect attunement describes a preverbal sensitivity to waves of affect triggering spaces or things, what she calls "affect clouds", in the environment. Little seems concerned with our internal affective calibration which regulates some range of our affective response to those stimuli. I take Willett's overall claim to be that one's affect attunements (i.e., a sensitivity to an environment's affect-cloud) are the means by which one comes to have an affective experience of the world. It's just that the affective experiences we have in the world are also a part of a larger affective discourse occurring in our everyday environments in a kind of prelinguistic form of call and response. Both are relatively silent about the other's work due to their differences in their philosophical traditions.

<sup>112</sup> Willett (2014) p. 90, "Through proto-conversations, creatures with adult human logos communicate a significant range of affects. Influenced by the work of Silvan S. Tomkins, Stern distinguishes affects into two types: (1) *categorical affects* ... ; (2) *vitality affects and contours*..."; Willett references both Stern's *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* and *The Forms of Vitality*.

<sup>113</sup> Willett (2014) p. 90 – "Vitality is felt profoundly, for example, when one is energized and elevated in mood. Categorical affects, on the other hand, introduce the ethical qualities of good and bad to experience."

affect). Categorical affects include, it seems, a swath of what are commonly described as the moral emotions which point to evaluative content.

When confronted with cases like the V-J Day Photo case, one's affective response to the photo is a complicated formation. It is sensitive to the affective responses of others around us as they view the photo, the affective expectations of our social world to things like unwanted kissing which have habituated (or tried to habituate) our affective attunements, but also, like Little's concern regarding virtuous character, an individual's affective attunement to the demands of morality which is more or less resilient to influences by the occurrent affective discourse.<sup>114</sup> Maybe *S*'s response at E-1 is not merely due to a lack of knowledge, but also due to their life in a world where the common response to sexual assault has been dominated by patriarchal forces which silence any felt sense of outrage.<sup>115</sup> Maybe, in E-2, *S* displays a particular resilience to the patriarchal affective discourse which once ensnared them in E-1, now allowing them to experience a kind of firm outrage to the photo.

Regardless, the phenomenological difference between E-1 and E-2 would be accounted for by Willett as a difference in *S*'s affective phenomenology. Moreover, Willett explicitly holds that affective responses do not carry the same representational content, or intentionality, as language but still retain the ability to signal to the subject, in an immediate non-inferential way, that something possesses an evaluative moral property like right, wrongness, or moral considerability.<sup>116</sup> As a result, one charitable interpretation of her

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<sup>114</sup> The last item in this list references those occasions where individuals get "swept up" in a kind of group affect.

<sup>115</sup> A motivational internalist, who adopts Willett's view, could read the difference between AltE-1 and AltE-2 in this way.

<sup>116</sup> Willett (1995) p. 91-92 "Attunements occur through cross-model correspondences that cannot be subsumed under a logic of identity, conceptual explanation, or [linguistic] intentionality." & "Categorical affects, on the other hand, introduce the ethical qualities of good and bad to experience."

view is that a moral experience's affective phenomenology facilitates non-inferential and immediate transitions in thought. It does this by functioning as an affective bridge (i.e., a judgement formation mechanism) between an experience's perceptual content and a situation's moral features. These judgments are immediate non-inferential ways of making moral discernments because affects are prelinguistic, embodied, responses to our environment which is permitted by an affective discourse. As a result, Willett adopts an AMPJ approach to moral perception because affects operate in a judgmentalist fashion by means of our affective attunement. As a result, the phenomenological difference between cases like E-1 and E-2 attaches to the affective phenomenology of an affective facilitated judgment formation. One **acquires** non-moral perceptual content (i.e., facial expressions, yelps of pain, and so on) and then **recognize** said collections as morally salient in virtue of the affective messaging communicated by to us by those situations and our affective response to those messages.

### 1.7 The Attachment Problem of Moral Phenomenology

This paper began with the development of an **acquisition-recognition** framework to pierce the **metaphorical-literal ambiguity** surrounding moral perceptual language. After considering some details of moral perceptual events under this framework, it became clear that the deeper issue facing moral perceptual theories is the need to address the **judgment-perception question**. That is, are moral discernments during occurrent perceptual experience merely the result of a judgment formation about non-moral contents (i.e., MPJ: **recognition** occurs after **acquisition**) or, rather, is there a literal perceptual component during these experiences wherein a situation's moral features are perceived as contents of perceptual experience (i.e., MPE: **recognition** occurs during **acquisition**)?

Moreover, phenomenal contrast methodology and the taxonomy of views above illustrate that an adequate classification of moral perception as either a judgment or a perception depends on how we account for the phenomenology of a moral experience. If the phenomenology of moral experience is adequately explained by a subject's cognitive or affective phenomenology, then MPJ seems preferable.

If, however, there is more to the picture and there is a reasonable account of that picture in terms of perceptual content then MPE seems preferable, especially if it appears that perceptual forms of knowledge are at play in these experiences. I will refer to this issue as **the attachment problem of moral phenomenology** which, put succinctly, points out that accounting for the phenomenology of moral perceptions is both difficult and a matter of determining whether that phenomenology attaches to (i.e., is explained by) a subject's cognitive, affective, or perceptual mental states. This section seeks to address this problem.

Assuming that judgments via cognitive associations possess a phenomenal character, it is reasonable to expect that one usually has moral perceptions accompanied by some cognitive phenomenology because we often form immediate, often non-inferential, perceptual judgments during moral perceptual experiences. Alternatively, if judgments via cognitive association do not possess a phenomenal character, it would still be equally indefensible to suggest that one never forms judgments during moral perceptual experiences for the same reason. Additionally, subjects often have moral perceptions accompanied by some affective phenomenology. Given this, it is important to keep in mind that a reasonable version of MPE cannot claim that subjects do not make cognitive associations or experience invoked affective states during moral perceptual experiences. Forming immediate perceptual judgments about a perceptual event, reacting with some

invoked affective response to that event, and experiencing whatever phenomenology accompanies that event is, seemingly, a feature of our moral lives. This observation illustrates the reason why ‘**the attachment problem of moral phenomenology**’ is rightly classified as a problem. It is a challenge to determine what the moral phenomenal character of an occurrent experience attaches to because our moral perceptual experiences are, for lack of a better term, messy by their nature.

When looking at the V-J Day Photo (or even the swimming pool example) with the relevant background beliefs or affective dispositions, *S* will inevitably be prompted by the occurrent experience to form immediate cognitive associations and undergo some invoked affective states. In fact, it seems that both processes aid *S* during their moral deliberation about how to respond to their occurrent experience. This observation is not in dispute and is a key motivator for adopting MPJ because these processes carry a lot of explanatory power as it relates to moral action and epistemology. A sound argumentative landscape for a supporter of MPE, therefore, must admit that judgments (via cognitive associations and invoked affective responses) are present during moral perceptions and that they have their role to play in moral agency. As a result, a supporter of MPE must acknowledge the value and existence of judgments during moral perception but successfully argue that MPJ (and its articulation of  $H_A$ ) presents an incomplete picture of moral perception rather than a fully incorrect one to the extent that there is some perceptual phenomenology unaccounted for by our judgment formations. To do this, I wish to return to the case of *K* kicking *I* as presented during the introduction.

Recall that *S* encounters situation  $\alpha$ , *K* kicking infant *I*, and comes to discern that *K*'s actions are wrong. I will refer to this as **moment-1 (M-1)**. Under MPJ, the phenomenal

character of *S*'s encounter with this situation would be linked to *S*'s invoked affective response to witnessing  $\alpha$  or because of a cognitive association between observing  $\alpha$  and its classification as morally wrong. MPJ holds that *S* judges that *K*'s actions are representative of something that is morally wrong. As Väyrynen (2018) might put it, the phenomenological character of *S*'s encounter with  $\alpha$  is tracked by *S*'s affective responses or a felt sense of “figuring things out” via cognitive associations [**The Tracking Claim**], it's intensity is “psychologically immediate” and integrated with an experience's non-evaluative inputs [**The Immediacy Claim**], and is a simple account with enough explanatory power to account for the experience's phenomenology [**The Simplicity Claim**].

Yet, consider what happens if *S* comes to learn that *K* is kicking a hyper-realistic facsimile of an infant and that there is no living, actual, infant present in situation  $\alpha$  because *K* is practicing for their part in the production of some big-budget horror film (i.e., **moment 2 or M-2**). It is expected, given this new information, that *S* will come to form a different judgment via their cognitive association about the “wrongness” of *K*'s action, that it is not representative of the wrongness of kicking babies because the thing kicked is not a real baby. Moreover, it is true that *S* could still take *K*'s action to be representative of something morally wrong, not as a function of their cognitive associations, but in virtue of some invoked affective state, perhaps outrage, triggered by seeing the form of an infant brutalized by *K*. So conceived, the moral phenomenology of *S*'s experience could not be accounted for by the presence of a judgment via a cognitive association because *S*'s cognitive judgment (and any accompanying cognitive phenomenology) diverges from the moral perception that the experience represents something morally wrong. But, the

affective judgment still persists and, as a result, MPJ's candidacy as the preferred explanation of this situation, for many, is preserved.

Now, perhaps *S* joins the horror movie's cast and their invoked affective response to seeing *K* kick the infant-facsimile changes over time. In fact, it changes so much that *S* no longer experiences outrage when seeing *K* kick the form of an infant (**moment 3, M-3**). The vital question, then, is this: could *S* reasonably be said to immediately and non-inferentially take *K* kicking the infant facsimile as representative of something morally wrong in the absence of (1) an invoked affective state to intuit a "morally wrong" judgment while also (2) undergoing a cognitive association which facilitates a judgment that it does not represent something wrong because the infant is not real? I would like to suggest that not only is the answer to this question "yes", but also that these kind of moments are far more common than their quirkiness first suggests, especially given that playacting and film scenarios are pervasive in our visual culture.

Consider that the case above aims to support the existence of moral perceptual content by isolating an experience, holding fixed *S*'s perceptual experience, and introducing controlled alternative epistemic states for *S* in order to conceptually test whether judgment formations completely account for *S*'s moral perception of the situation. Schematically, the argument above operates in the following way:

**P1)** *S*'s immediate and non-inferential moral belief (*b*) that situation  $\alpha$  represents the moral property "wrongness" is discerned either by means of a cognitive association, an invoked affective state, or *b* is a form of perceptual knowledge derived from perceptual contents.

**P2)** *S* during **M-1** is taken to have all the background beliefs or affective dispositions needed to acquire *b* in an immediate and non-inferential manner.

**P3)** *S* during **M-2** is taken to gather additional background beliefs with which to perform an immediate and non-inferential judgment via cognitive association that



*b* is not the case but also seems to maintain some affective dispositions intuiting that *b* is the case. [*b* is not acquired by cognitive associations].

**P4)** *S* during **M-3** is taken to have altered, over time, their affective dispositions such that they no longer intuit that *b* is the case while also performing a cognitive association that *b* is not the case, but *S* is still understood as possessing the belief that situation  $\alpha$  represents the moral property “wrongness”. [*b* is not acquired by invoked affective states or cognitive associations].

**C)** *S*'s immediate and non-inferential moral belief *b* is a form of perceptual knowledge about moral perceptual contents of “wrongness” in *S*. **[Disjunctive syllogism from P1 & P4]**

The thing that allows this argument to succeed is that the introduction of a new epistemic state for *S* during M-3, which includes content from M-2, ought to return their perceptual experience of *K* kicking an infant facsimile, one indistinguishable from a real infant, to a state of moral mundaneness but it does not.

If, at a previous moment M-0, *S* lacked all background beliefs and affective dispositions regarding the dignity of children or the harm *K* could inflict on infants, then *S* would not discern the immediate and non-inferential belief *b* when seeing *K* kick the infant during M-1. Once *S* acquires these background cognitive associations and affective dispositions, *S* is apt to acquire belief *b* in an immediate, non-inferential, way. However, if the phenomenal character of these cognitive or affective judgments are overridden by countervailing judgments or by the absence of an invoked affective response and an occurrent experience's representational character persists, such as in M-3, the cognitive and affective phenomenologies associated with these judgments no longer account for the moral experience's phenomenological character which represents something morally wrong. As a result, we have reason to believe, and acknowledge, that the presence of background cognitive associations and affective dispositions have a part to play in moral perception, but not that they provide a complete picture of moral perceptual events.

That is, they can facilitate the use of general moral principles or beliefs in our efforts to discern the contents of particular moral situations through the process of **mediation** which represents an encounter as containing moral content. However, that judgments made by these processes can be overridden by countervailing judgments *and S* can still be said to acquire a non-inferential and immediate belief *b* about the moral wrongness of viewing, even in a simulated manner, *K* kicking an infant, indicates that *b* is a good candidate for being considered a form of perceptual knowledge influenced by *S*'s background moral beliefs and affective sensibilities via some kind of perception influencing mechanism. As a result, moral perceptions appear to possess an experiential component and are not merely forms of judgment. Thus, MPE more adequately accounts for moral perceptions than MPJ; experientialism is preferable to judgmentalism.

### 1.8 Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that moral perceptions have a perceptual component. In addition to forming moral judgments during occurrent experience, moral representations seemingly appear during our experiences due to the presence of moral perceptual contents which shape, at least in part, the phenomenal character of our morally pertinent occurrent experiences. One might be concerned that this view undermines our ability to make reliable moral verdicts about particular moral situations given our tendency to see the world according to our current moral sensibilities, as articulated by our background epistemic content. I call this the **circularity problem**. One might also argue that MPE has the consequence of classifying all moral perceptions as illusory or hallucinatory. I refer to this as the **veridicality problem**. I will close by briefly discussing these issues as areas for future research.

**The Circularity Problem.** Briefly put, if correct, MPE suggests that it would be prima facie difficult to justify any moral experience because moral perceptions would always be influenced by one's beliefs or affects thereby lacking a sense of perceptual objectivity. This objection, I believe, means that our background epistemic content stands the risk of undermining the reliability of our moral judgments and moral perceptions. However, I take this kind of objection to be sensitive to only half of MPE's epistemic consequences. It could also be the case that one's background epistemic state can be epistemically beneficial in cases where expertise helps us see the world more clearly. That is, a construction safety expert is more aptly orientated to assess safety obligations towards workers during an inspection than, say, a philosopher. She perceives the world differently in regard to its moral features (via different perceptual contents) and this enhances rather than undermines her access to a situation's moral features. Given this, I take the circularity problem to be short sighted. Rather, it is motivated by a concern that people will make reliably inaccurate/accurate moral discernments based on moral perceptions in proportion with their familiarity and expertise about the encountered situation or their moral character. The objection highlights that moral deliberations based on perceptual contents requires us to invest ourselves in the development of a sound moral epistemic foundation. Consequently, it becomes the task of one's moral life to cultivate a collection of background epistemic states which allows us to reliably access, to perceive, the moral landscape, whatever that might look like. This does not mean that we need to be an ideal moral person. Rather, a consequence of MPE is that it defines an epistemically relevant moral obligation to moral living: the need to cultivate beliefs, affective sensitivities, and ways of thinking that allow one to perceive the moral world according to some wider

conception of morality. Thus, the issue presented by this problem is not that MPE is untenable, but rather that we need to do work to define proper parameters from which to discern reliable from unreliable moral perceptions. What is more, this calls for an investigation of the forces which cultivate our background epistemic resources because these mediate our moral perceptions.

**The Veridicality Problem.** It might also be suggested that experientialism commits us to the idea that our perceptual experiences of a situation's moral features are a kind of illusion or hallucination, that experientialism results in a view which holds that our moral perceptions are examples of hijacked perceptual experience. Admittedly, the veridicality problem is a deeper issue than can be explored here but I am not inclined to think that moral perceptual veridicality in experience is indefensible as a concept. Rather, if being veridical is about an existing correspondence between one's perceptions and an actual feature of the world, then perhaps the veridicality problem is more about a concern between our moral perceptions and the moral realities we face in the world. Under this interpretation, the important issue here is whether our moral perceptions align with the dictates of a defensible moral theory as it describes the conditions of the occurrent experience. The judgment that one's moral perceptions are veridical relies on a larger normative ethical project. Thus, the issue presented by this problem is, again, not that MPE is untenable but rather that being able to refer to moral perceptions as veridical requires us to index that judgment with a justifiable normative moral theory in conjunction with some form of correspondence view for moral perceptual veridicality.

Taken together, neither problem seems to undermine MPE. Rather, each opens the dialogue to deeper discussions about the robust avenue moral perceptual research can take when we take experientialism seriously.

## CHAPTER 2. MORAL PERCEPTUAL ORIENTATION

“What's interesting is what you write about [your rescuers] and you say that it made you realize, in all of these stories, it's not just the person that is doing the bad thing and the person that the bad thing is being done to, but there are those who *see* it and identify it as wrong and they do something about it.”

*The Daily Show's* Trevor Noah to *Know My Name* author Chanel Miller as she discusses her memoir recounting her sexual assault and subsequent experiences with the U.S. Justice System.

### 2.1 Introduction

Whether granting insight into another's moral status or the moral qualities of some action, moral perceptions regularly inform ethical decision making. Moral perceptions occur when a subject comes to form an immediate discernment about the moral features of an occurrent experience. We should, I believe, be broadly concerned about the epistemological nature of these events for many of the reasons gestured at during Miller's *Daily Show* interview. As we walk through life, there are innumerable moments where our immediate experiences are accompanied by immediate discernments about their content. Whether we encounter overt instances of racism or subtle moments of sexism, moral perceptions curate our appreciation of an occurrent situation's moral features, accurately or otherwise, and guide ethical decision making.

The field of ethics is often concerned with a person's moral status and an action's moral value. In a complimentary fashion, theories of moral perception aim to describe the process by which we, as epistemic subjects, encounter morally pertinent situations and come to recognize, or fail to recognize, the salient moral features of those moments. As illustrated by Miller's interview, this is incredibly important because *seeing* that a situation or subject possesses some moral property (i.e., individuating some set of moral features and recognizing them as morally substantive) is a prerequisite for responding in the way

that morality demands, whatever those demands turn out to be. Theories of moral perception articulate a least two things: (1) whether moral perceptions include perceptual content (i.e., where we literally *see* a situation's moral features during occurrent experience) or, instead, are merely forms of judgment on the part of the subject, and (2) give a framework for making sense of the epistemic mechanisms at work during moral perceptual events.

Given these tasks, I believe that views regarding moral perception (a.k.a., ethical perception) can be sorted into one of two categories: moral perceptual judgementalism or moral perceptual experientialism<sup>117</sup>. The former holds that instances of moral perception are best explained by the subject's propensity to form judgments about a situation's moral features, hence the '**judgementalism**' label. Under this view, a subject is said to have a moral perception of situation  $\alpha$  because they form an immediate moral judgment about acquired perceptual content by means of a cognitive (i.e., heuristics, inferences, cognitive associations, ...) or affective (i.e., moral emotional intuitions, a felt sense of connection, affective responses, ...) **judgment formation mechanism**. That is, a subject utilizes immediate, often non-inferential, judgment formations to draw out connections between perceptual content and some moral property or set of moral properties. In contrast, **experientialism** holds that we have literal perceptual experiences of moral properties during moral perceptual events. In addition to our propensity to form immediate moral judgments, this view holds that a situation's moral features are recognized as such because moral properties are infused into perceptual experience by means of a **perception influencing mechanism**. That is, the experientialist holds that "human agents can have

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<sup>117</sup> Robert Cowan refers to experientialism as perceptualism.

perceptual experiences as of the instantiation of ethical properties, at least some of which are veridical.”<sup>118</sup>

In what follows, I argue for a version of **experientialism** which I call **Moral Perceptual Orientation (MPO)**. MPO asserts, among other things, that moral properties are a part of the perceptual contents of occurrent experience and whether those features are perceived is contingent on one’s background beliefs, ways of thinking, and affective sensitivities (i.e., background epistemic content). MPO aims to give an account of how it is that one encounters moral properties in perceptual experience and relies on the notion that moral experiences are cognitively penetrable. Under this view, one’s background epistemic content provides the orientation by which one curates their experience of the world’s moral features. Consequently, MPO emphasizes that perceptual experience is an important variable in understanding how we conduct our moral lives from moment to moment because it points out that perceptual experience is not morally neutral.

I begin by introducing experientialism by drawing on moral perception’s analogous relationship to David Chalmers’s (2017) views on cognitive orientation in cases of mirror-usage. Informed by this analogy, I define the experientialism-judgmentalism debate in terms of perceptual processing-stages and follow, in section two, with a pair of arguments in favor of experientialism. The first makes a **non-modularity argument** about the mind using Tim Bayne’s (2010) unity thesis as it pertains to the relationship between human non-perceptual and perceptual processing systems. The second looks to studies on the moral pop-out effect to make an **evidence-based argument** that moral properties are

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<sup>118</sup> Cowan, R. (2015) p. 666



seemingly infused into occurrent experience. Taken together, I argue that we have good reason to adopt the experientialist position. In section three, I outline the cognitive penetration approach as described by MPO and defend it as a viable alternative to an approach proposed by Jennifer Church (2013). I argue that MPO is preferable because it maintains a more apt distinction between the perception and imagination. I then conclude by addressing an objection to Moral Perceptual Experientialism raised by Väyrynen (2018).

## 2.2 The Mirror Analogy and the Judgmentalism-Experientialism Distinction

In “The Virtual and the Real”, Chalmers (2017) describes cognitive orientation as that phenomenon whereby “background knowledge helps *orient* one to the *perceived* world, giving a global interpretation of what is *perceived*” where ‘global interpretation’ is used to express that one takes the whole phenomenal character of the experience as immediate.<sup>119</sup> To illustrate, he asks us to consider mirror-usage and suggests that it is a prototypical case of **cognitively oriented experience**, as a variety of cognitive penetrability. That is, one’s *knowledge* of the mirror’s presence, *familiarity* with mirror usage, *expectations* about mirror usage, and the experience-like *naturalness* with which one uses a mirror seemingly define mirror-experiences.<sup>120</sup> In practice, one looks into the rear-view mirror before shifting lanes and has a certain kind of experience of its mirror-objects. Chalmers observes that one’s knowledge, familiarity, expectations, and sense of naturalness engender different kinds of *perceptual* experiences for experienced mirror-users than for novice mirror-users. He writes,

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<sup>119</sup> Chalmers (2017) p. 16

<sup>120</sup> Chalmers (2017) p. 15

“Consider a car’s rear-view mirror, as used by an experienced driver. When the driver looks in the mirror and sees cars that are actually behind her, do the cars look to be in front of the driver, pointing toward her? Or do they appear to be behind the driver, following behind her vehicle? My own intuition, and those of most people I have asked about this case, is clear. When I look in my rear-view mirror, the cars I see look to be behind me.”<sup>121</sup>

In contrast, a novice mirror-user, perhaps a first-time user, would seemingly take the rear-view mirror to be a kind of window into a world of oncoming traffic.<sup>122</sup> He continues,

“Now, someone who thinks that rear-view mirrors are illusory will say that we judge that the cars are behind us, while nevertheless the cars look to be in front of us. Or perhaps they might allow that cars look to be behind us, but only in a sense where “look” is tied to judgment and other aspects of cognition—while at the level of visual perception, visual experience represents the cars as being in front of us. Once again, however, I think this gets the phenomenology of visual experience wrong.”<sup>123</sup>

Chalmers’s observation here is that each user would, *prima facie*, have a fundamentally different kind of experience of the cars in the mirror and, thereby, we get the phenomenology wrong when we classify these differences as merely ‘differences in judgment’. He argues that classifying these kind of contrast cases as representing merely a difference in judgment wrongly equates the perceptual phenomenal character of what it is like to unknowingly look into a rear-view mirror, see a car in motion, and take it to be careening towards you *with* knowingly looking into a rear-view mirror and seeing the same car. As a result, the mirror case draws our attention to experiences where our awareness, familiarity, expectations, and an experience’s felt sense of naturalness coalesce into a global interpretation, an experience with a unified perceptual phenomenal sense. It highlights what one means when one claims that our background epistemic resources influence the contents of perceptual experience. Contrast cases, like Chalmers’s mirror-

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<sup>121</sup> Chalmers (2017) p. 17-18

<sup>122</sup> It is worth noting that Chalmers’s (2017) goes on to argue that virtual reality objects are analogous to mirror-objects in these kinds of cases. He argues that “virtual reality need not be a second-class reality. It may be a second-level reality, in that it is contained within physical reality and realized by processes in the physical world, but this need not make it less real or less valuable.” (Chalmers, p. 35)

<sup>123</sup> Chalmers (2017) p. 17

case or Susanna Siegel's (2011) pine tree case, open the field for a variety of discussions regarding the contents of perceptual experience.

As a morally pertinent example, consider the following testimony from Sara Ahmed's (2017) *Living a Feminist Life*:

"I was out jogging, just near my home. A man whirled passed on a bike and put his hand up the back of my shorts. He did not stop; he just carried on cycling as if nothing happened, as if he had not done anything. I stopped, shaking. ... I kept on going. I began jogging again, but it was different: I was different. I was much more nervous. Every time someone came up behind me, I was ready, tense, waiting. I felt differently in my body, which *was a different way of encountering the world*. Experiences like this: they seem to accumulate over time, gathering like things in a bag, but the bag is your body, so that you feel like you are carrying more and more weight."<sup>124</sup>

It is worth noting that Ahmed's observations in this passage aim to motivate the idea that 'how we encounter the world' is as much a practice of our affective processes as mental processes. For Ahmed, an instance of sexual assault was enough to radically change her expectations about jogging resulting in the alteration of her immediate discernments of her occurrent experience via her affective response to the world. A change in her background epistemic resources seemingly results in a different global interpretation of her occurrent experience in an analogous way to the mirror-novice v. mirror-expert case. As she self-reports, she experiences the world differently than she used to.

In parallel, what can we say about bystanders to Ahmed's situation? In this case, there was indeed a person doing the bad thing and a person the bad thing had been done to, but what of those that observed this situation? How are we to make sense of their **moral perceptions**? It seems to me that the mirror-case is analogous to moral perceptual events because the relevant features driving Chalmers's observations are seemingly relevant

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<sup>124</sup> Ahmed (2017), p. 23, emphasis added.

during perceptions of morally pertinent events like Ahmed's assault. In Chalmers's scenario, relevant considerations included:

- 1) whether the observer *knows* there is a mirror in front of them,
- 2) the observer's *familiarity* with mirrors,
- 3) the observer's *expectations* regarding the situation, and
- 4) the observer's felt sense of experience-like *naturalness* during mirror usage.

Taken together, Chalmers argues for two things: that these features define one's cognitive orientation and that this orientation curates the phenomenal character of one's mirror-experience. That is, (1) - (4) curates one's global interpretation of what is observed.

Analogously, the following questions are epistemologically relevant to outside observers of Ahmed's situation:

- 1') Does the observer *know* they are confronted with a case of sexual assault?
- 2') Does the observer have a sense of *familiarity* with cases of sexual assault? What is the character of that familiarity?
- 3') What are the observer's *expectations*, morally or otherwise, regarding social interactions and sexual assault?
- 4') Does the experience contain a felt sense of *experience-like naturalness* for the observer?

Without the relevant background epistemic resources, like prudent responses to (1')-(4'), the observer would seemingly fail to have a global interpretation of the perceptual event (i.e., Ahmed's sexual assault) as an event representative of something deeply reprehensible and immoral. In other words, the moral features of the occurrent experience go undiscerned when one occupies an epistemically inadequate position as it pertains to sexual assault events inasmuch as one's **background epistemic resources** amount to the set of beliefs, affective sensitivities, and ways of thinking. Given this, I take moral perceptions to be stellar candidates for being understood as **cognitively orientated perceptual events**. The phenomenal character of the experience, or global interpretation, of the experience one has while observing morally pertinent situations like sexual assault,

bullying, slavery, exploitation, brutalization, dehumanization, and so on are seemingly different for those with differing background epistemic resources that are more or less capable of orienting one to the immorality of these kinds of events.

Yet, the analogous relationship between mirror-experiences and moral perceptual experiences is not a ‘knock-down argument’ for moral perceptual **experientialism** in the form of cognitive orientation as a variety of cognitive penetration, as a form of experientialism.<sup>125</sup> Instead, the mirror-analogy is rhetorically useful for opening us up to the possibility that we literally experience moral properties in the same way that we experience properties like ‘oncoming traffic’. There is still much work to be done to directly support the claim that one’s background epistemic resources influence perceptual experience during perceptual processing in morally pertinent situations. However, I would like to suggest that the value of the mirror-case analogy is that it sharpens our understanding of the central question at hand: **(The Moral Perceptual Question)** Are moral perceptions occasions where our background epistemic resources influence perceptual processes (**experientialism**) or, rather, are they merely guiding one’s belief response to the contents of perceptual experience (**judgmentalism**)? That said, a framework for distinguishing between ‘influences on perceptual processing’ and ‘influences on one’s response to perceptual experience’ is required to provide much needed details to the experientialism-judgmentalism distinction and debate. Jenkins and Siegel (2015) provide just this kind of framework by offering a way to “distinguish between stages

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<sup>125</sup> Chalmers (2017) makes similar observations in his own attempts to use the mirror-case to argue for the non-illusory status of virtual reality objects.

at which perceptual experience or judgment can be influenced” by one’s background epistemic resources.<sup>126</sup>

As summarized in *Table 2.1*, views defined under **moral perceptual experientialism (MPE)** hold that perceptual experience can be influenced by background epistemic resources during perceptual processing during early vision or during the process of rendering the contents of perceptual experience. In contrast, views defined under **moral perceptual judgmentalism (MPJ)** hold that background epistemic resources influence “what you introspectively judge the contents of your perceptual experience to be” or the “non-introspective conclusions you draw from perceptual experience”.<sup>127</sup> In other words, views categorized as moral perceptual experientialism hold that non-perceptual cognitive states have top-down effects on perceptual states and therefore influence perceptual experience.<sup>128</sup> Alternatively, MPJ views reject the presence of top-down influences or overlook them by virtue of their silence on the subject.<sup>129</sup>

It is clear that one’s background epistemic resources play an important role in moral perception and the mirror-case’s analogous relationship to moral perceptual events demonstrates the need to clarify the nature of that role. As a result of the details provided by *Table 2.1*, two important questions can be used as substitutes for the **moral perceptual question** and are to be addressed moving forward: (**The Modularity Question**) Can our non-perceptual cognitive systems interact with our perceptual cognitive systems in an

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<sup>126</sup> Jenkins & Siegel (2015), p. 534

<sup>127</sup> Jenkins & Siegel (2015) p. 534

<sup>128</sup> Top-down influences impact cases where “information that is plausibly external to your perceptual system is relied upon in order to generate a perceptual experience with a content that is different from what it would have been, absent that influence.” (Jenkins & Siegel, p.534)

<sup>129</sup> Rejecting top-down influence means that one believes “influence occurs exclusively in the response to the experience, rather than in the production of the experience.” (Jenkins & Siegel, p.535)

experience influencing way? And, (**The Process Question**) if influence is possible, at what perceptual processing stage does one’s background epistemic resources seemingly influence perceptual experience in morally pertinent cases? I address these in the next section.

*Table 2.1 Framework for distinguishing between potential stages of influence on our discernments during moral perception.*<sup>130</sup>

Processing Stage	Aspect Influenced	Non-Moral Examples	Moral Examples	View
<b>Perceptual Stage</b>				
(1) Early Vision	shape, location, motion, color, intensity of feature-based attention	Perceiving a grey-banana image as yellow-tinted. <sup>131</sup>	Intensified feature-based attention of printed moral terms like <i>courage</i> in contrast to non-moral terms like <i>run</i> . <sup>132</sup>	MPE
(2) Unconscious or pre-conscious perceptual states	Non-transparent perceptual contents	Unconsciously perceiving a rope as a snake due to fear of snakes, causing you to flinch but not know why. <sup>133</sup>	Unconsciously perceiving an act of sexual harassment towards a jogger as immoral & feeling outrage but not knowing why. <sup>134</sup>	
(3) The contents of perceptual experience	Transparent contents of perceptual experience	Consciously perceiving a rope as a snake due to a fear of snakes, causing you to flinch. You also know you fear snakes and that this is making the rope look like a snake. <sup>135</sup>	Consciously perceiving an act of sexual harassment toward a jogger as immoral, feeling outraged, & knowing that you are responding this way because you believe sexual harassment is immoral.	

<sup>130</sup> This table is based on the layout provided by Jenkins & Siegel (2015).

<sup>131</sup> Witzel et al., 2011

<sup>132</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel, 2014

<sup>133</sup> Jenkin & Siegel 2015

<sup>134</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2015a) introduce the ‘detection’ language which informs this interpretation of this example. “Detection” will be discussed in more detail later in this paper.

<sup>135</sup> Jenkin & Siegel 2015

Table 2.1 (Continued)

Processing Stage	Aspect Influenced	Non-Moral Examples	Moral Examples	View
<b>Responses to Perceptual Experience</b>				
(4) Introspective Judgments about the presences of perceptual contents	Perceptual Beliefs	Veridically perceiving some blue berries as green and tiny, and, when reflecting on the experience later, you judge them to be unripe. <sup>136</sup>	Veridically perceiving someone kicking a newborn child and, when reflecting on the experience later, you judge the act to be immoral.	MPJ
(5) Non-introspective conclusions drawn from perceptual experience	Immediate Perceptual Judgments	Veridically perceiving some blue berries as blue and big and immediately judging them to be ready to pick. <sup>137</sup>	Veridically perceiving someone kicking a newborn child and immediately judging the act to be immoral. <sup>138</sup>	

### 2.3 Responding to the Modularity Question & the Process Question

If it is the case that one’s perceptual systems operate distinctly from non-perceptual systems, then the moral perceptual experientialist position fails from the start. That is, should we have reason to believe that the **cognitive architecture of the mind** is such that there is never an occasion for non-perceptual background epistemic resources to interact with or influence perceptual states, then we would need to accept that we are just not wired in ways that facilitate influences posited at stages (1) – (3) in *Table 1* during moral perceptual events, influences which are the foundation of **moral perceptual**

<sup>136</sup> Jenkin & Siegel 2015

<sup>137</sup> Jenkin & Siegel 2015

<sup>138</sup> It is worth noting that these examples focus on cases where the moral value of some action is the central topic of concern. I see no reason, however, see this as a limitation. Moral perceptual events seemingly extend to discernments regarding the moral value of people, objects, social structures, and relations.



**experientialism.** **Modularity Arguments** defend some version of this perspective, referring to our information processing systems as mental ‘modules’. Among other things, they argue that many of the mind’s cognitive mechanisms function on restricted flows of ‘information’ into those systems for processing, that they are encapsulated.<sup>139</sup> If perceptual systems receive basic inputs from perceptual organs and cannot access information from non-perceptual systems then the system is considered **encapsulated**. Encapsulation is the litmus test for modularity and is, as a result, indicative of the impenetrability of perceptual systems by non-perceptual states such as our background epistemic resources in cases of moral perception.<sup>140</sup>

Granted, there are some persuasive reasons to believe that our perceptual systems are encapsulated. One case supporting the encapsulation of our visual systems from our background epistemic resources includes examples like Müller-Lyer lines.<sup>141</sup> Our perceptions of these lines represent them as of different length regardless of what we believe, reason, or feel about this image, even if we know they are the same length. The Müller-Lyer lines, the impossible trident, and so on give clear cases where early vision and the contents of perception seem guided by perceptual processing mechanisms beyond any influence by top-down cognitive influences from our background epistemic resources. Uses of angular lines and a consistent horizon point in art regularly give the perceiver the impression that an image, like the one below<sup>142</sup>, has depth and does this on the basis of the

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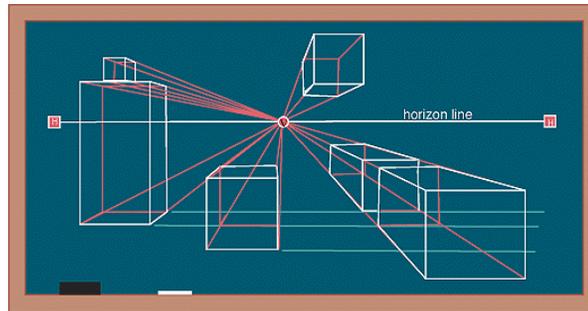
<sup>139</sup> Robbins (2017), based on Fodor (1983)’s *Modularity of Mind*, succinctly outlines a ‘modules’ under the following categories: other qualities include *inaccessible to introspection, mandatoriness, speed, superficiality, dissociability, localizability, domain specificity, and inattentness*. Should the encapsulation-test fail, these other aspects are more or less moot to the issue of top-down effects on perception.

<sup>140</sup> Robbins (2017). “Cognitive impenetrability is a matter of encapsulation relative to information stored in central memory, paradigmatically in the form of beliefs and utilities.”

<sup>141</sup> Image from Donaldson, D. and Macpherson F. (July 2017) "Müller-Lyer Illusion" *The Illusions Index*. Retrieved from <https://www.illusionsindex.org/ir/mueller-lyer>.

<sup>142</sup> Image from Jaurigue, L. (2019). *Depth Cues*. Asu.Edu. images produced for *The Chalkboard* at Arizona State University. <https://www.asu.edu/cfa/wwwcourses/art/SOACore/depthmain.htm>

ways that our visual perceptual system processes features such as shape, environment, and motion within the perceptual field. We often ‘play’ with this phenomenon in visual media.



*Figure 2.1 Horizon Lines and Depth*

Among other things, this kind of phenomenon makes three-dimensional representation on a two-dimensional plane possible during animation. However, there are also a variety of reasons to think that our **perceptual processing systems** are not encapsulated or impenetrable even though the processes governing these kinds of spatial and depth cue examples are compulsory and, in some sense, strict.

Macpherson (2015), while arguing for a version of cognitive penetration, points out that dreams and hallucination have a symmetrical relationship with perceptions. Occasions of loud noises while dreaming can change the content of a dream and partial hallucinations seem to change the content of perceptual experience. Whether it's a thunderclap leading to dreams of explosions or Lilliputian hallucinations leading to an experience of tiny people in your salad, some experiences strongly suggest that dreaming and hallucination are intertwined with perceptual processes in important ways.<sup>143</sup> In cases of dream-experiences, the subject's dream-perceptions are made possible seemingly because the perceptual processing system gets much of its information from non-perceptual states, such as background epistemic resources. In this way, Macpherson (2015) points out that human

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<sup>143</sup> Macpherson (2015) p. 348

participation in dream-experiences gives us reason to think that perceptual-systems are not encapsulated from non-perceptual systems. Similarly, hallucinatory experience, she suggests, gives us reason to think that this happens outside of dreaming. Lilliputian hallucinations are, *prima facie*, only possible if background epistemic resources, like our memory of people, can influence perceptual processing in such a way to render tiny people in one's perceptual field.

Moreover, rather than thinking that these occasions of non-encapsulation are motivated by some special set of conditions present during dreaming-experience or hallucinatory-experience, I believe there are viable reasons to think that the synthesis of non-perceptual and perceptual systems is a common feature of perceptual experience in general. At its foundation, I believe **the modularity question** asks us to consider the nature of our capacity to have experiences in the first place, to demystify the process by which each of us construct a perceptual field with phenomenal content for ourselves as consciousnesses. Do our mental processes facilitate the construction of an experience for consciousness into a single unified perceptual field with phenomenal content as the result of perceptual and non-perceptual processes interacting and synthesizing to form representational content? Or, rather, do these processes operate in a more fractured sort of way, wherein non-perceptual processes like judgment formation operate independently of and respond to perceptual experience? **The modularity question** is, therefore, asking us to consider whether perceptual experience is a **unified whole** or **pluralistic composition**. Given this, Tim Bayne's (2010) argument for the Unity Thesis can be read, I believe, as an argument for **the non-modularity** of perceptual and non-perceptual systems and states.

Bayne's position is that any subject of an experience enjoys that event as an *experience* because conscious states occur as a single total phenomenal state, a phenomenal field.<sup>144</sup> On the **Unity View**, an experience is a whole over which the contents of experience assume the status of subsumed parts. In this whole-part relation, conscious experience takes on the phenomenal character that it does for an observing subject insofar as it is the resulting unified synthesis of these parts rendered by perceptual and non-perceptual mental processes. Bayne argues,

“The plausibility of the unity thesis derives largely from introspection. Consider the structure of your overall conscious state. I suspect that you will be inclined to the view that all your current experiences are phenomenally unified with each other- that they occur as the components of a single phenomenal field: to put the same point in different terminology, that you enjoy a single phenomenal state that subsumes them all. Call this claim *the unity judgement*. ... the unity of consciousness that is revealed to introspection [and thus creates the *unity judgement*] is not a feature that consciousness possesses only when one attends to its structure but is a feature that it enjoys all the time -- even when one doesn't (and perhaps cannot) introspect.”<sup>145</sup>

In contrast, Bennett and Hill (2014) propose an alternative view, **Unity Pluralism**. It holds that there is not one unity-making relation that provides a total or universal phenomenal field. Instead, they suggest that “unity-making relations join fairly wide swaths of the experiences of a subject at a time... experiences joined by one or more of our unity-making relations do not *thereby* bear a part-whole relation to some larger experiential whole, though some experience may still, by some measure(s), bear part-whole relations to each other.”<sup>146</sup> That is, while watching a film results in an experience, the fact that the phenomenal sense of sitting in a chair is distinguishable from the sense of distance between you and the screen, they argue, is evidence for the separation, the distinctness, of these phenomena during experience. As a result, they claim that we should understand that the

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<sup>144</sup> Bayne, T. (2010).

<sup>145</sup> Bayne (2010), p. 75

<sup>146</sup> Bennett & Hill (2014)

unity of experience is actually achieved by a kind of unity pluralism rather than a single unifying phenomenal field.<sup>147</sup> In short, the response to Bayne (2010) being offered is that there is no such ostensibly identified aspect of experience (i.e., no unifying phenomenal field) revealed through introspection and that what is found are relations between parts of experience with no unifying whole and, thereby, distinct modes of perception articulate themselves independently of non-perceptual states, among other things. They write,

“Indeed, as we’ve noted, for the unity pluralist, *no* significant unity-making relation by itself unites all of the experiences of a subject at a time. Of course, various experiences of a subject at a time will typically be linked by one or more unity-pluralist unity-making relations - thickly, tightly, not much as all, and what have you. That is all there is to the unity of experience, or so we suggest.”<sup>148</sup>

Both the Unity and Unity Pluralism views seek to detail the structures of experience in terms of cognitive relations. On this issue, I believe we should endorse Bayne’s argument in favor of Bennett and Hill for two reasons. First, while Bennett and Hill endorse the possible existence of unity-pluralist principles which serve the psychological functioning of the subject, they problematically reject the existence of an overarching singular experience. In their view, when I am in a theatre, the relation between me and my chair is separate from my relation to the film screen and, as such, they would claim that my experience is fractured in some way. Yet, this is not how we experience film watching. It is not experienced as a sitting in a chair conjoined with sitting in front of a film screen, rather my experience is a singular case of watching a film sitting down. There is a kind of phenomenal smoothness to the experience, a unified phenomenological sense. My first

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<sup>147</sup> Bennett & Hill (2014), p. 237-239

<sup>148</sup> Bennett & Hill (2014), p. 240

objection then is that the unity-pluralist approach gets the phenomenology of experience wrong and, as a result, overlooks the singular phenomenal unity of a perceptual experience.

Second, and more importantly, the very claim that there is a *subject* making sense of the parts of an experience presupposes a single perspective by which those events can be ‘made sense of together’ (i.e., synthesized) in the first place. Bayne, rather than Bennett and Hill, seems receptive to this kind of observation perhaps because the former is sensitive to an important distinction that the latter authors are not. As Susan Hurley (1994) describes it:

“We can distinguish three kinds of unity. The first, *unity of type* or *conceptual unity*, is the kind of unity involved when various objects all share some one attribute. ... The second kind of unity, *unity of objects*, is the kind of unity involved when various attributes all attach to the same object. The third kind of unity, the *unity of consciousness* at a time, is the kind of unity involved when various contents of consciousness at a time, including both experiential events and propositional attitudes, are all associated with one center of consciousness...”<sup>149</sup>

With this distinction in mind, Bennett and Hill seem intent on claiming that type and object unity (and perhaps others) exist as a relation between parts of experience. But, as Gullick (2014) observes, “a conscious mental state [or experience] can exist if and only if it is contained within a set of representations whose contents are integrated or unified in a way that implies the existence of a single self or subject.”<sup>150</sup> Put otherwise, “consciousness *per se* requires at least some significant measure of representational unity or integration.”<sup>151</sup> Gullick (2014) and Bayne (2010) rightfully point out that consciousness integrates the parts of an experience, perceptual and non-perceptual, into an occurrent experience for the subject in the first place. Consciousness’s observation of perceptual experience reveals a

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<sup>149</sup> Hurley (1994), p. 55

<sup>150</sup> Van Gullick (2014), p. 391

<sup>151</sup> Van Gullick (2014), p. 391

phenomenal field (akin to Chalmers's global interpretation) rendered through the influence of non-perceptual processes on perceptual states. What these observations amount to is the idea that knowledge and expectations can influence perceptual experience and its contents in important ways.

That said, we should not expect moral encounters to escape the unifying or integrating impact of consciousness on perceptual experience. Where we take one's background epistemic resources to collect one's moral beliefs, ways of thinking, and affective sensibilities (including any senses of familiarity or moral expectations), the unified nature of experience will seemingly synthesize the non-perceptual and perceptual states during one's coming to have an experience. Echoing Chalmers's observations about global interpretations, we should seemingly expect that our background epistemic content will shape moral perceptual experiences by virtue of our cognitive capacity to synthesize perceptual states and non-perceptual states into a phenomenal field of occurrent experience for the subject. Through the influence of non-perceptual on perceptual systems, non-modularity is supported by the notion that our systems are more integrated than we commonly appreciate.

Moreover, there is growing evidence that there are top-down influences on perceptual experience. As Christopher Berger (2018) observes, "The sensory information we imagine is often treated by the brain in the same way as information streaming into us from the outside world ... Our [research] shows that what we imagine in our 'mind's eye' can lead to changes in perception across our sensory systems, changing how we perceive real information from the world around us in the future."<sup>152</sup> Additionally, in non-moral

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<sup>152</sup> Berger (2018)

considerations, Macpherson (2012 & 2015) cites the Perky effect to argue for the possibility of cognitive penetration during perceptual experience. Describing a Perky effect study, she writes:

“Subjects are placed facing a white wall and asked to visually imagine a certain object; unbeknown to them, an image that is above conscious visible thresholds for normal subjects is shown onto the wall. In these conditions, subjects subsequently report that they had visual imagery but they deny that they saw anything. However, what they report imagining is influenced by the image that is shone onto the wall... While the image projected on the screen affected what was reported, indicating that perceptual processing must have played a part in generating the experience, what was imagined affected what was reported too. Subjects often reported elements to their experience in addition to those present in the image that was projected onto the screen.”<sup>153</sup>

For example, some participants in the study reported that they experienced a book with writing when only an outline of a book was subtly projected onto the wall and others reported that they saw a leaf with veins running through it when only a leaf outline was projected. On other occasions where subjects were asked to imagine a city skyline and a tomato was projected on the wall, people reported having imagined the skyline at sunset.

<sup>154</sup> I propose that moral experiences are included in this category of cognitively penetrable experiences.

Like the Perky effect, the prevalence of the moral pop-out effect (M-POP) demonstrates that experiences of moral content are likely constructed by means of non-perceptual influences on perceptual processes. M-POP is the tendency for subjects to have an enhanced perceptual experience of certain features in the perceptual environment.<sup>155</sup> Studies show that pop-out enhancements consistently correspond to the perceiver's moral beliefs or dispositions and seemingly manifest both as a matter of awareness shifting and

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<sup>153</sup> Macpherson (2015) p. 348

<sup>154</sup> Macpherson (2015) p. 348

<sup>155</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2014), p. 132



as an emphasizing of something's phenomenal impression. Gantman's and Van Bavel's (2014) study into the relationship between *perceptual* faculties and morally relevant stimuli concluded that "moral concerns shape our basic awareness of perceptually ambiguous stimuli."<sup>156</sup> Where "perceptually ambiguous stimuli" includes a description of the phenomenal character of perceptual experience, M-POP events shape experience suggesting that perceptions mirror pre-existing moral beliefs as a consequence. Gantman and Van Bavel (2015) go on to describe occasions of increased intensity and detection of moral content in situations where subjects were asked to identify moral terms. In their words, "the visual system is preferentially sensitive to moral content. Specifically, people correctly detect moral words (e.g., kill, moral, should) with greater frequency than nonmoral words (e.g., die, useful, could) – a phenomenon termed the 'moral pop-out effect'.<sup>157</sup>

Granted, Gantman and Van Bavel seem more interested in the awareness directing nature of moral cognition on perceptual experience than on the cognitive penetrability of moral experiences. However, their work is persuasive evidence for adopting the experimentalist position. Their research suggests that the non-perceptual contents of one's background epistemic resources influence perceptual contents during occurrent experience in two ways, (i) by facilitating the **detection of moral-features** and (ii) by regulating the **intensity of a moral-feature-based attribution** during occurrent experience. As it pertains to (i), when researching our perceptual experience of moral language, they observe that "... moral words more readily reached perceptual awareness compared with non-moral words" and that priming observers to think that justice had been satisfied lowered the

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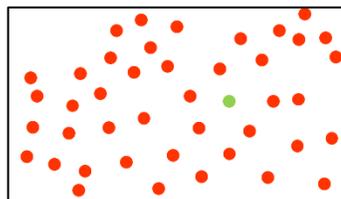
<sup>156</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2014), p. 29

<sup>157</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2015a), p. 631-633

perceptual detection threshold for injustice seemingly because they believed no injustice was present thereby negating one's detection of morally relevant content during occurrent experience.<sup>158</sup> They write,

“When justice motives are activated (but not satiated), moral pop-out occurs on the very first trial. Taken together, we suggest that moral content affects word detection in a way that is sensitive to moral motives only when stimuli are perceptually ambiguous.”<sup>159</sup>

What this passage suggests is that the ability to **detect** moral features in occurrent experience and to recognize them as containing moral significance tracks the observer's non-perceptual cognitive states. Again, the manifestation (i.e., coming to detect) of a feature in one's experience, in this case a feature with moral content, corresponds to the subject's background epistemic resources (i.e., non-perceptual states). In this way, M-POP is a special case of the larger Pop-out Effect phenomenon (POP). During POP events, when imbedded within some set of homogeneous objects, one object's difference causes it to 'stand out', as if to elevate its presence.<sup>160</sup> For example, consider the *Figure 2.2* which



*Figure 2.2 Color Pop-out Effect*

contains a green dot placed in a field of red dots. Notably, this phenomenon is used by advertisers to communicate with consumers. Gantman and Van Bavel's work provides evidence to think of morally substantive features in occurrent experience as analogous to sensory experiences of colour, orientation, size, motion, and stereoscopic depth.

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<sup>158</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2015b), 76-77.

<sup>159</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2016), p. 1728-1739.

<sup>160</sup> For more on POP, see Treisman, A.M. (1985). "Preattentive processing in vision." *Comput Vis Graph Image Proc.* 1985;31:156-177.; Wolfe, J.M. (1994). "Guided Search 2.0 A revised model of visual search." *Psychon Bull Rev* 1(2):202-38.; & Hsieh, P. J., Colas, J. T., & Kanwisher, N. (2011). "Pop-out without awareness: unseen feature singletons capture attention only when top-down attention is available." *Psychological science*, 22(9), 1220-1226.

As it pertains to (ii), M-POP events in perceptual experience seemingly create a “vicious cycle” between beliefs and perceptions because the intensity of a moral feature in one’s perceptual experience is often used to motivate or justify some moral judgment. Gantman and Van Bavel (2014) write, “the enhanced perceptual awareness of moral stimuli may help shed some light on sightings of religious and moral iconography in everyday objects ...”.<sup>161</sup> Their study predicts that the character of morally pertinent experience provides the intensification of a moral-feature’s attribution as if the feature gains a sense of enhanced prominence in the perceptual experience and, thereby, acquires some kind of forceful presence (i.e., like the green circle in a field of red circles). Given that these features and their intensity in the phenomenal field correlate with an observer’s background beliefs and affective sensitivities, one will predictably take the world to possess the moral features that one expects it too. These experiences carry epistemic justification on the basis of the prominence of the moral features in that occurrent moment for the subject, features which ‘pop’ as if they possessed a kind of prominence in the perceptual field through the **intensity of a moral-feature-based attribution.**

Views pertaining to socially informed modes of perception seemingly reinforce evidence for the existence of the moral pop-out effect.<sup>162</sup> For example, Charles W. Mills’s work on **white ignorance**. Mill’s argues that forces of **white ignorance** manifest a lived social reality which shapes the way we encounter value in the world, specifically how these realities come to hide a significant portion of that world from our observations. He argues

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<sup>161</sup> Gantman & Van Bavel (2014), p. 29

<sup>162</sup> Adams and Kveraga (2015) report that socially relevant information pertaining to race and gender seemingly influence the detection of things like expressed emotions and fear responses in those people we observe during occurrent experience. Specifically, they suggest that top-down influences on shared social associations and identity categories influences our perceptions of others in social relevant situations. It is worth noting that Jenkin and Siegel also observe that Francesco Marchi reject’s Adams & Kveraga’s (2015) study as conclusive and turns to studies by Carroll and Russell (1996) and Levin and Banaji (2006) pertaining to race and emotional expressions to support Adams and Kveraga (2015) proposed top-down model of social perception.

that white ignorance is an epistemic process which systematically distorts an agent's experiences. It does so to the extent that **white ignorance** articulates "... a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made."<sup>163</sup> Moreover, he argues that those infected by white ignorance<sup>164</sup> come to live in a "racial fantasyland" wherein ignorance is the "cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement."<sup>165</sup> These agents, thereby, come to believe that meritocracy is the prevailing law of the land even though there exists overwhelming evidence to suggest that certain classes of the population are systematically oppressed on the basis of race because their experiences reinforce that judgement.<sup>166</sup>

As Mills observes, these beliefs and attitudes warp perceptions of oppression or exploitation in ways that make such events seem 'just' by blinding the subject from, as Gantman and Van Bavel might put it, detecting or perceiving belief-countervailing contents within the experience.<sup>167</sup> The observer's invested perceptual interest shapes their encounter with the world. The very preservation of this worldview is seemingly predicated on the idea that one's beliefs and affective attitudes about the world impact one's experience of the world. Mills points to numerous cases where white privilege overrides the needs of the marginalized as evidence of this phenomenon. In my estimation, these are cases where two subjects can have the same perceptual contents but take the situation to have different moral features in virtue of it having a different global interpretation for each

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<sup>163</sup> Mills (1997), p. 18

<sup>164</sup> Mills himself claims that this infection isn't limited to the white population and I expect that he would say the same about forms of Male Ignorance and Heteronormative Ignorance.

<sup>165</sup> Mills (1997), p. 18-19

<sup>166</sup> This is seemingly also the case where class, gender, and sexuality in cases of where capitalistic economic elitism or heteronormativity are the prevailing ideologies.

<sup>167</sup> Alcoff (2007), p. 48

observer given that such social perceptions track moral categories like ‘just’, ‘unjust’, ‘right’, ‘wrong’, ‘fair’, ‘unfair, and ‘morally considerable’ or ‘morally non-considerable’.

Given these observations, I believe we are justified in adopting moral perceptual experientialism for two reasons. First, in response to the **modularity question**, our cognitive architecture is seemingly more integrated than encapsulated thereby providing pathways through which top-down non-perceptual states (i.e., our background epistemic resources) can influence our perceptual experiences during perceptual processing in salient ways during stages (1)-(3) as described in *Table 1*. Second, in response to the **modularity question** and the **process question**, the moral pop-out effect demonstrates that these influences seemingly manifest through the **detection** of a morally substantive feature during the occurrent experience as an instance of an influence on stages (2) & (3) thereby shaping perceptual contents and through the **intensity of a moral-feature-based attribute** such that the detected feature pops-out during one’s global interpretation of their perceptual experience, as an influence on stage (1) of perceptual processing. Put informally, I believe we should move forward by adopting the understanding that our ability to encounter moral features during occurrent experience and to have them impress themselves upon us with some intensity is not merely a process governed by our judgments about perceptual experience. Rather, moral perceptions are an integral part of the process by which we have perceptual experiences in the first place because we seem to have literal perceptual experiences of moral properties during occurrent experience due to the unifying nature of conscious experience and as evidenced by phenomena like M-POP. This is what it means to adopt **moral perceptual experientialism (MPE)**.

## 2.4 Moral Perceptual Orientation: A framework for MPE

As a form of MPE, **Moral Perceptual Orientation (MPO)** purports that one possesses a collection of background epistemic resources of morally relevant beliefs, ways of thinking, and affective dispositions which can influence immediate perceptual experience. MPO is informed by two ideas: that perception is cognitively penetrable, as suggested by M-POP, and that experiences are constructed by a unifying perception-cognition mechanism, as suggested by the given interpretation of Bayne's Unity Thesis as a kind of non-modularity argument.

In terms of the former idea, cognitive penetrability holds that cognitive states can have top-down effects on perceptual content acquired during perceptual experience.<sup>168</sup> To paraphrase Sillins's (2016) articulation of its main thesis:

**Cognitive Penetrability Thesis (CPT):** if two agents share the same occurrent experience, differ in regard to their perceptual content, and differ in regard to their background epistemic resources, then the best explanation is that perceptual experience is cognitively penetrable.<sup>169</sup>

That is, perception is cognitively penetrable in terms of its perceptual content just in case two people are the same with respect to their sensory inputs and the orientation of their perceptual gaze but differ with respect to their perceptual experience. Given this, the following moral corollary of CPT can be formulated:

**Moral Cognitive Penetrability Thesis (MCPT):** if two agents share the same occurrent experience, take the situation to have different moral features, and differ in regard to their background epistemic resources, then the best explanation is that moral perceptual experience is cognitively penetrable.

That is, if two agents share an occurrent experience (i.e., share the same immediate moral encounter), differ in regard to their observation of its moral features, and differ in regards

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<sup>168</sup> Silins (2016) provides one of the clearest account of the cognitive penetration position and its epistemic consequences.

<sup>169</sup> Sillins (2016), p. 27

to their epistemic toolkits, then the suggestion is that moral perceptual experience is best explained by the cognitive penetrability of perception, by MPE. Put this way, the previous two sections can be read as clarifying the details and arguing in support of MCPT and concluding that, as a thesis, it is sound given phenomena like M-POP. In this way, to adopt MPE is to affirm MCPT and, therefore, MPO affirms MCPT.

As it pertains to the latter idea, MPO's approach to cognitive penetration is modeled on Macpherson's (2012) two-step mechanism<sup>170</sup> as a framework for understanding the cognitive penetrability phenomenon.<sup>171</sup> The first step in this mechanism "involves our cognitive states causing some non-perceptual state with phenomenal character to come into existence or to alter the phenomenal character of some existing non-perceptual state that has phenomenal character."<sup>172</sup> The second "involves the phenomenal character of these non-perceptual states interacting with and affecting the phenomenal character and content of perceptual experiences."<sup>173</sup> As discussed earlier, she argues that this two-step mechanism is observable in very common instances of imagining, hallucinations and daydreaming suggesting that cognitive penetrability is a consequence of the integrated nature of our cognitive faculties.<sup>174</sup> She writes,

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<sup>170</sup> In modeling MPO on this two-step mechanism, I am endorsing what Macpherson (2015) calls Cognitive Penetration Lite in addition to the presumption that moral properties are importantly different than non-moral perceptual contents; moral features are not perceivable in the same way as non-moral features. As a result, MPO follows Macpherson's arguments for Cognitive Penetration Lite, but commits to the idea that the perception of moral content *q* will not occur without a corresponding moral belief or affective sensitivity. Additionally, it is not unlikely to expect that moral content *q* can be multiply realized by a swath of varying epistemic toolkits. Moral content in perceptual experience is multiply realizable.

<sup>171</sup> Macpherson (2015), p. 331-358

<sup>172</sup> Macpherson (2012), p. 50-51

<sup>173</sup> Macpherson (2012), p. 50-51

<sup>174</sup> Macpherson (2012), p. 50. Macpherson also stated as much during a guest lecture at the University of Kentucky on September 28, 2017. As evidence, she points to the incorporation of perceptual elements into dreaming, and intertwined status of perceptual and hallucinatory or illusory events.

“... the processes that typically do create perceptual imagery, dreams, or hallucinations interact with the perceptual processes to yield one state with phenomenal character. The phenomenal character of the state is determined by the contribution of both processes: imagery, dreaming or hallucination, on the one hand, and perception of the other.”<sup>175</sup>

In this way, Macpherson observes that the integrated nature of our cognitive faculties plays a formative role in our experiences. As such, MCPT gains initial support as a species of CPT under Macpherson’s argument for the integrated nature of our cognitive faculties in a way similarly argued for by Bayne’s unity thesis.

Using the ‘two-step mechanism’ as a guide, MPO is constructed around the idea that experiences are rendered by a **unifying perception-cognition mechanism** which serves as a **perception influencing mechanism**.<sup>176</sup> Put formally, MPO can be stated as follows:

**Moral Perceptual Orientation (MPO)**<sup>177</sup>: X has a moral perception of situation y when

- I. One acquires non-moral perceptual content as of y during a morally pertinent occurrent experience;
- II. One possesses background epistemic resources relevant to the content as of y;
- III. One comes to possess a morally pertinent non-perceptual cognitive state (i.e., a belief or an affect) or comes to alter the moral character of some existing non-perceptual state given I and II;
- IV. The non-perceptual state from III interacts with and influences the phenomenal character and content of our perceptual experiences by means of consciousness’s perception-cognition interface which unifies and constructs an experience with moral contents for the observer (i.e., a perception influencing mechanism which creates a unified experience<sup>178</sup>). This influence takes one of two forms: (i) the **detection of a moral attribute** in the contents of occurrent experience or (ii) **the increased intensity of that moral-feature-based attribute**.

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<sup>175</sup> Macpherson (2015) p. 348

<sup>176</sup> It is worth noting that this idea is neither novel nor without precedent. Kant’s manifold of apperception and the intelligibility of experience under the intuitions (i.e., space and time) in combination with the categories of the understanding assents to the idea that consciousness could fit such a unifying role. I do not wish to defend or endorse Kant’s views on human cognition. However, the wherewithal to acknowledge that an experience is constructed by means of an unifying mechanism is an invaluable insight into how we come to have experiences in the first place.

<sup>177</sup> In modeling MPO on this two-step mechanism, I am endorsing what Macpherson (2015) calls Cognitive Penetration Lite which holds that content q can be multiply realized in *perceptual* experience.

<sup>178</sup> In Kantian terms, the best conceptual cousin to the unified experience is the manifold of apperception which represents a synthetic unity of the manifold by means of our intuitions (i.e., time and space) and the categories. The genealogical difference here, however, is that a unified experience need not be beholden to the Kant’s categories of the understanding so described in the *Prolegomena* or the *Critique of Pure Reason*.



As its name suggests, MPO takes one's background epistemic resources to provide the *orientation* by which one comes to experience a global interpretation of the world, an interpretation with moral content.

It is worth noting that an alternative approach to moral perceptual experientialism has been offered by Jennifer Church's (2013) *The Possibilities of Perception*.<sup>179</sup> Church's brand of moral experientialism is a product of her **Extended Perception Thesis**. Put succinctly, it states that the imagination plays an essential role in our ability to have perceptual experiences inasmuch as it serves as both **content producer** and **experience synthesizer**. As Church understands the perceptual process, the imagination plays an essential part of how we come to have experiences in the first place. She argues that, "... we *actively* imagine alternative perspectives whenever we experience something as an objective state of affairs" and, thereby, occurrent experiences are rendered as perceptual experience in tandem with our imagined experience of alternatives to our immediate perceptual experience.<sup>180</sup> Additionally, Church holds that it "is our ability to use our imaginations to **synthesize** a multiplicity of different perspectives and possibilities (past and future, actual and merely possible) that enables us to perceive an object or a sequence of events as objectively valid."<sup>181</sup> To illustrate, consider the following examples offered by Church:

"we perceive an object such as a tree insofar as we simultaneously imagine how it would appear from other points of view. For it is the imagined convergence of different perspectives around a single state of affairs that gives us the experience of its spatiality and its objectivity... When it comes to perceiving someone as an agent—as the locus of multiply intertwined mental states, I want to make a similar suggestion: to perceive that someone is a person we must imagine that person in a variety of situations—some of which are actual

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<sup>179</sup> Macpherson (2017) seems to flirt with a similar view regarding the role of imagination as Church.

<sup>180</sup> Church (2010), p. 649

<sup>181</sup> Church (2013) p. 222, emphasis added.

and many of which are merely possible, and we must discover what is invariant across those imagined actions.”<sup>182</sup>

She goes on to similarly describe our imagining of moral objects or properties in the following way:

“... [imagining] is also guided by [an agent’s] implicit knowledge of what *should* happen.... It is not enough to direct one’s imagining with a loving attitude or a desire to do right by others plus a good understanding of causal laws; one must also know a good deal about what doing right by others involves, and that is where moral laws enter... in the case of moral perception the relevant laws must include moral laws...”<sup>183</sup>

This alternative and those like it, henceforth referred to in a general way as **imaginative moral perceptual experientialism (IMPE)**, take the **imagination** to serve as a **perception influencing mechanism**. That is, the imagination serves as the **synthesizer** of perceptual and non-perceptual cognitive states thereby rendering a perceptual experience for the subject. In addition to its role as a **contributor** to our background epistemic resources, the imagination is rendering perceptual experience in a way that makes moral properties a feature of perceptual experience. Put formally, these views look something like the following:

**Imaginative Moral Perceptual Experientialism (IMPE):** X has a moral perception of situation y when

- I. One acquires non-moral perceptual content as of y during a morally pertinent occurrent experience;
- II. One possesses background epistemic resources relevant to the content as of y;
- III. One comes to possess a morally pertinent non-perceptual cognitive state (i.e., a belief or an affect) or comes to alter the moral character of some existing non-perceptual state given I and II through the use of one’s **imaginative faculties**;
- IV. The non-perceptual state from III interacts with and influences the phenomenal character and content of our perceptual experiences by means of **imagination’s role** as a perception influencing mechanism which creates a unified experience through an act of synthesis.

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<sup>182</sup> Church (2013) p. 199-200

<sup>183</sup> Church (2013) p. 218-219

MPO does not rely on imagination to have the perception influencing role that IMPE seems to do. As a kind of view, IMPE's reliance on the imagination as an experience generating faculty problematically blurs the distinction between perception and imagination. That is, the imagination, when understood as a creative faculty, is undoubtedly a source of cognitive content. Yet, IMPE is also suggesting that imaginings and perceptual experience share in an experience-like quality, a global interpretation a la Chalmers or a phenomenal unity a la Bayne, and from this suggesting that it is the imagination that is doing the work to construct an experience for the subject. Granted, daydreams and mental imaginings, perhaps even dreaming itself, do seem to possess something akin to perceptual experience, at least in the sense that we can be said to experience a dream, a daydream, and imaginative imagery. However, rather than taking this to indicate that the imagination serves a synthesizing role in rendering experience, I think it should indicate to us that each of the aforementioned experience-like events is rendered by some other experience unifying mechanism. I propose the unifying function that consciousness serves fits this role better than the imagination.

I take this to be the case for two reasons. First, thinking that the imagination serves a synthesizing role in our coming to have an experience given that imagining has an experience-like quality seems ill-reasoned. By way of analogy, it would be fallacious to conclude that the Earth is the orbit-defining determinant in a collection of planets because we observe that Earth, Mars, and Venus have predictable orbits. It would be strange to say that the Earth is the thing motivating clear orbital paths. Similarly, it would be fallacious to believe that patient A is the cause of the flu because we observe that patient A, B, and C display symptoms of the same affliction. At best, this reasoning seems like a kind of red

herring inasmuch as it draws our attention away from the relationship between planets and gravity or, as in the second case, people and viruses. With this in mind, it seems like a step in a wrong direction to observe that dreams, imaginings, and perceptual experiences share a similar experience-like quality and endorse the claim that the imagination is the experience-synthesizing mechanism fueling our capacity to undergo experience-like events. Instead, we are better off observing that dreams, imaginings, and perceptual experiences share something in common and start from there.

Second, consciousness's unifying role, as Bayne describes it, is seemingly well suited to account for the experience-like (i.e., 'the phenomenal unity' or "global interpretation") nature of events like dreams, imaginings, and perceptual experience. As Bayne (2007) discusses related issues, the role of 'consciousness' during dreaming conceivably serves a different function for the subject than it does during waking forms of consciousness. That is, REM dreaming's experience-like quality manifests cognitive states "in which the contents of consciousness derive from internal stimulation rather than environmental input, reasoning and decision-making is impaired, and one enjoys unusual (at least, relative to normal waking consciousness) conscious states."<sup>184</sup> Defending this functional approach to understanding consciousness, Bayne (2007) writes,

"The functional role of a particular conscious state is, at least in part, dependent on the background state of consciousness in which it occurs. In normal wakefulness the contents of consciousness are available to the mechanisms associated with rationality and memory-consolidation in a way in which they are not available in dreaming, inebriation, hypnosis or delirium."<sup>185</sup>

The takeaway here is that the function of consciousness, given this approach, is to provide a unified phenomenal field upon which we, as subjects, are said to have experiences, in

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<sup>184</sup> Bayne (2007)

<sup>185</sup> Bayne (2007)

waking moments or otherwise. This is precisely the role MPO takes consciousness to have during moral perceptions. As a result, when coupled with an appreciation of the role that our background epistemic resources have during cognitive penetration of our experience (at least in morally pertinent scenarios), I believe we have strong reasons to view MPO as preferable to IMPE.

## 2.5 Conclusion

MPO, and experientialism in general, is not without its opponents. Most cutting among them, perhaps, is Pekka Väyrynen. Väyrynen (2018) raises several doubts regarding views like MPO. Generalized, his concerns center on the belief that inputs from perception, imagination, supposition, and belief are immediate and often bound up with certain emotional and affective dispositions; the result of a sense of inference which captures broad transitions in thought akin to intuitions, affective connections, heuristics, associations, and so on.<sup>186</sup> Generally put, those in a similar camp as Väyrynen challenges experientialist models, like MPO, in two ways.

First, they offer **the reduction response** which claims that moral perceptions during occurrent experience can easily be explained by judgementalist views rather than by experientialists views because the former posit that ‘transitions in thought’ more simply account for the recognition of moral features during occurrent experience. That is, a rule-like cognitive relation between perceptual experience and moral judgments can automatically guide one to form moral discernments about occurrent experience. Väyrynen’s claim is, then, that judgmentalism avoids the need to posit a perception

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<sup>186</sup> In many ways, the kind of view Väyrynen seems to lean towards views like those in Audi (2013).

influencing cognitive mechanism, a defining feature of experientialist views. Ultimately, the reduction response takes moral perceptions to be reducible to moral judgements because working with transitions in thought is believed to be simpler and more likely than introducing a perception influencing mechanism.

Second, they offer **the empty promise response**, which claims that experientialist views “add no explanatory power” above that of judgementalist views. We might observe that subjects engaged in moral encounters cannot help having the moral impression of them that they do. However, both automatic moral judgements (thought transitioning forms of judgmentalism) and moral perceptual experiences (experientialism) posit a lack of volition on the part of the epistemic agent regarding how one judges a situation or experiences it respectively. That is, if experientialism is correct, we cannot help having the moral perceptual experiences we do during immediate moral experience and, if judgementalism is correct, we cannot help making the moral judgements that we do during immediate moral experience. The empty promise response takes judgementalism to be as, if not more, helpful when understanding the epistemology of and our obligations during moral encounters than experientialism without the complications that come with utilizing a perception influencing cognitive mechanism.

I want to respond to these concerns by first acknowledging that some broader sense of inference does seem to be at play in our epistemic lives; cognitive associations are common. Transitions in thought by means of a rule-like relation or a felt sense of connection are indeed part of our everyday lives as epistemic agents. **Miranda Fricker’s** (2007) use of heuristics in *Epistemic Injustice* or **Robert Audi’s** (2013) use of an affective or emotional cognitive connection in *Moral Perception* rightly illustrate how a broader

sense of inference can be employed to describe judgment formations during moral encounters. Fricker uses heuristics to illustrate how automatic recognitions of moral content about the testimony of marginalized populations amounts to a non-inferential moral judgement formation about their credibility.<sup>187</sup> Likewise, Audi uses a felt sense of connection, ‘intuitions’, between non-moral contents and moral properties to explain how we recognize a situation’s moral features.

However, the real force of **the reduction response** is best illustrated if we turn to Väyrynen’s (2018) central counter-case, the possibility of cognitive penetrability during proton-identification.

**Proton-identification case:** “When Marie, a trained physicist, sees a trail of vapor bubbles in the cloud chamber, she doesn’t need to figure anything out, she can just *see* that a proton is going by.”<sup>188</sup>

Väyrynen argues that this *proton*-identification case gives strong reasons to believe the judgmentalist model, where one’s training and heuristic mechanisms facilitate judgment formations, is more appealing because it undermines the possibility of cognitive penetration in a more general sense.<sup>189</sup> That is, what might we expect Marie to be actually experiencing when she sees the vapor bubbles? She may report that she is seeing a proton, but the idea that Marie comes to literally *see* the proton is problematic. Granted, Marie, by all accounts of perceptual sharpness, cannot come to see a literal proton because it is an unobservable. Yet, I do not take this to be Väyrynen’s (2018) point. By trying to describe

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<sup>187</sup> Fricker calls this a perceptual-model of heuristics judgment formations because the process is non-inferential, a transition in thought.

<sup>188</sup> Väyrynen, p. 117

<sup>189</sup> Väyrynen p. 118

the epistemological mechanisms at play, the case asks us to endorse one of two possibilities, either:

- 1) That Marie has an occurrent experience with a phenomenal character informed by the presence of proton-representing perceptual content which grants her perceptual knowledge of the proton's presence, or
- 2) That Marie has an occurrent experience with a phenomenal character informed by a puff of vapor which she is used to make an automatic cognitive association which concludes that a proton is present. In this case, Marie only comes to have non-perceptual knowledge of the presence of the proton.

I believe Väyrynen's (2018) choice to endorse (2) rather than (1) is driven by a belief that knowledge of **p**, the presence of the proton, can either be a form of non-perceptual knowledge or perceptual knowledge, but not both, in this case. Where representational perceptual content of proton-ness is distinct from vapor-puff representational content, Väyrynen's endorsement (2) seems motivated by the idea that nothing in the unified phenomenal field of the subject (i.e., their perceptual field), can properly be said to have proton-representing perceptual content, content which yields perceptual knowledge of the proton. Instead, one is better off endorsing the claim that a perceptual judgment about the vapor-puff is what permits Marie to have non-perceptual knowledge of the proton's presence.

However, if we grant that proton-experiences are cognitively penetrable, Marie's knowledge of **p**, in cases where her training and expertise is robust in these kinds of experiments, could be said to be secured through a two-step cognitive penetrability process. First, logically, an immediate cognitive association occurs between the vapor-puff and the idea of the presence of a proton in Marie's non-transparent background epistemic processes. Then, this non-perceptual knowledge would go on to influence Marie's perceptual experience through the immediate perceptual **detection** of a proton-



representative property in the vapor which POPs and an **intensification** of the vapor's proton-feature attributive space in the perceptual field. Marie's automatic, non-transparent, and non-perceptual understanding of **p** *manifests* perceptual experiences which yield perceptual knowledge of **p**. Yes, Marie's training and background epistemic information makes her an excellent discriminator of a proton's presence. Yet, **CPT**'s claim is not that such cognitive associations never happen, but rather that those associations play an important part in rendering some cognitive states, like beliefs and cognitive associations, into contents of perceptual experience for experts whose experience have a phenomenal unity with a felt sense of naturalness. In this way, the example as it is often presented sets up a kind of false dichotomy and, in doing so, talks past the central issue of perception influencing mechanisms operating in tandem with judgment formation mechanisms. Väyrynen (2018), as reductionist, favors (2) because it is simpler rather than address the possibility that our cognitive and perceptual systems are complicated to the extent that (1) is influenced and informed by (2). In taking this approach, the **reductivist response** seems to sidestep the **modularity question** and the **process question**. In this case, simplicity is not necessarily a theoretical virtue.

Similarly, Väyrynen (2018) also offers a parallel case with an ethical twist. It is set up in the following way:

**Cat-abuse:** "If you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that it is wrong."<sup>190</sup>

Again, Väyrynen would have us choose between two kinds of explanations in this case: (1') that one gain's knowledge of the action's wrongness by means of perceptual

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<sup>190</sup> Väyrynen utilizes this Harman (1977)'s case to facilitate a contrast scenario regarding moral perception.

knowledge or (2') that one comes to have the immediate belief that the situation is wrong through non-perceptual knowledge facilitated by some form of cognitive association. Again, moral properties in this case, like proton-ness in the previous case, are seemingly communicated to the subject because our **detection** and **intensification** of a property in the experiences seemingly attaches to the experience because background cognitive associations occur. By stopping at these associations, however, we are not actually interrogating moral perceptual experiences and phenomena like M-POP because the **reduction response** seemingly gets the object of study wrong or does not afford our cognitive systems the complexity they possess.

Second, and as a result of the observations above, the **empty promise response** misses the force that immediate experience has on our epistemic lives in experientialist approaches to moral perception. Under a judgementalist position, we are restricted to the claim that errors in one's moral perceptions are errors in judgment. Yet, if MPO is correct, then moral discernments about our immediate experiences can be influenced at the experiential level rather than just the judgmental level. This has consequences for our moral epistemological activity. That is, MPO predicts that moral perceptions will occur in such a way that moral properties exhibit the same phenomenal qualities that non-moral objects and properties exhibit. Properties like "goodness" would function like color or shape in an experience of looking at a brown chair. In this way, moral perceptions under experientialist views harbor a kind of objective-sense which is materially distinct from the kind of justificatory sense one obtains from automatic judgments via various forms of cognitive association. Put analogously, it is very difficult to convince someone to be skeptical that there is a chair in front of them. As one acquires perceptual knowledge of the chair before

them, the individual takes their justification for belief **c**, “that there is a chair in front of me”, to be built into and supported by their experience of the chair. Similarly, convincing someone that there is a ‘wrong’ in front of them when they are having an experience that there is something ‘good’ or ‘permissible’ in front of them would be equally, if not more, difficult.

As Church (2010) puts this kind of observation, perceptual knowledge is a more **secure**, although not more reliable, source of knowledge than non-perceptual forms of knowledge. She writes, “Knowledge that is inferential rather than perceptual will be less secure insofar as it depends on a series of steps that may be forgotten [or disrupted] by the time the calculation is reached.”<sup>191</sup> I may have reasons for making a judgment, but I might forget or lose transparent access to those reasons. In contrast, moral perceptual knowledge gained by a subject during occurrent experience is mediated by one’s deeply held and worldview guiding background epistemic resources under MPO. Church’s observation is that moral perceptual knowledge, from an experientialist perspective, would be less susceptible to doubt because the justification for holding some moral belief **m**, as by moral perceptual knowledge, gains the same kind of epistemic status as **c** for the observer. This, of course, can have both positive and negative impacts on our moral life, but this observation is in direct contradiction to the **empty promise response** and has a lot of explanatory power, especially in terms of Mills’s view on things like **white ignorance**.

Church (2010) also observes that perceptual knowledge can be a valuable resource for developing and acquiring new knowledge. That is, once Marie has gained the ability to acquire **p** in the form of perceptual knowledge, she is granted the advantage of devoting

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<sup>191</sup> Church (2010), p. 665

one's cognitive workload towards acquiring and calculating new knowledge or, alternatively, using the ability to picture the location of a proton in rough visual space to inform other parts of the experience.<sup>192</sup> In as much as personal moral progress is concerned, the capacity to inform one's life by means of moral perceptual knowledge gained through acts of moral perception, as understood by MPO, would seemingly be an advantage to moral progress. Similar observations are made by a swath of scholars influenced by neo-virtue theory like Fricker's (2007) call for 'virtuous seeing' in *Epistemic Injustice* or Margaret Olivia Little's (1995) description of the 'virtuous knower' in "Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology".

Moreover, Church (2010) suggests that perceptual knowledge is more efficiently motivating in human psychology, especially in cases of moral knowledge. Church writes, "perceptions usually motivate us more efficiently than beliefs that depend on inference [or judgment]. ... Insofar as increased responsiveness to the world and to others is desirable, then seeing reasons will be preferable to understanding that remains non-perceptual."<sup>193</sup> That is, if MPO, or another form of experientialism, is correct then it carries the benefit of clarifying issues related to moral motivation during occurrent experiences. Just as one is efficiently motivated to sit in a chair they observe in the world, one can be expected to be more motivated to meet the demands of the moral world should they acquire moral perceptual knowledge during moral perceptions of occurrent experience.

In summary, where the reduction response to views like MPO seems to get the object of study wrong by looking for simpler answers to make sense of our highly complex

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<sup>192</sup> Church (2010), p. 666. It is worth noting that Church's example focuses on learning new things about the melting of ice.

<sup>193</sup> Church (2010), p. 666-667

perceptual systems, the empty promise response seemingly overlooks the viable explanatory points in MPOs favor. Ultimately, by taking MPO seriously, we can begin to make sense of the role of moral perceptions by acknowledging that there are people that do wrong things, people that have wrong things done to them, and that we need to turn our attention to understanding what it means to say that there are people that see these wrong things happen. More importantly, we can begin to explore why some *see* and others *fail to see* the world's moral features, whatever those turn out to be.

## CHAPTER 3. THE UNFREEDOM OF MORAL PERCEPTION DURING OCCURRENT EXPERIENCE

“Human freedom is ... rooted in the human sensibility.”

- Herbert Marcuse, “Nature and Revolution”, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (1972).

“Even those whom you would think of as defeated are living beings figuring out how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that, at least.”

- Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (2011).

“The first stratification [of consciousness] is ālayavijñāna or store-consciousness, the repository of all vāsānas (traces of past experience). The “seeds” generated by good or bad action, are stored in the “ālaya-consciousness”. It is the realm of potentiality.”

- Bina Gupta, “The Buddhist Schools”. *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*. (2012)

### 3.1 Introduction

Dominant conceptions surrounding gender, race, class, and other group striations cover our social topography. They define guidelines that direct and discipline the social subject according to the sensibilities of the local, and sometimes global, normative social order. Sara Ahmed, a feminist affect theorist and social philosopher, consistently refines our appreciation of this by showing how social sensibilities, or norms, constitute an expected “way of living, a way of connecting with others over or around something.”<sup>194</sup> That is, life’s experiences are consistently shaped by dominant social sensibilities because of their directing and disciplining power. Moreover, as black feminist theorist like Patricia Hill Collin’s and social political theorist’s like Charles W. Mills point out, society’s

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<sup>194</sup> Ahmed (2017) p. 43

interlocking social-political systems have the power to mold a subject's epistemological standpoint.<sup>195</sup> Life's experiences, that is, also have the capacity to transcribe a society's sensibilities onto the minds and bodies of its members through a socialization process that transforms external evaluative expectations into internal background epistemic structures which mediate thought and knowing. As a result, one's background epistemological resources, and thereby one's conscious apprehension of life's experiences, are subject to the same dominant social sensibilities, even when they occupy cultural and sub-cultural spaces. Yet, what is the nature of the relationship between consciousness, a subject's life experiences, and their<sup>196</sup> background epistemic resources? What does this relationship have to tell us about one's moral perceptions of occurrent experience given its capacity to impact our immediate apprehension of the world?

Moral perceptions occur whenever one comes to have an immediate discernment about the moral features of an occurrent experience.<sup>197</sup> If someone is walking down the street, it is not unreasonable to want that person to come to have the immediate belief that their occurrent experience represents something morally wrong should they encounter, say, someone kicking an infant. Yet, it is often the case that instances of bullying, exploitation, sexual harassment, race or gender discrimination, and other forms of oppression are overlooked features of occurrent experience. That is, when confronted by such events, there

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<sup>195</sup> See Collins (2008) & Mills (2007)

<sup>196</sup> Note: 'they', 'their', and 'them' are used throughout this paper as a gender-neutral personal pronouns. English does not have a gender-neutral third-person singular personal pronoun. As a result, some version of "his or her" is traditionally used instead. However, I have chosen to adopt this convention in order to use gender inclusive language in my work. As a result, you will often see pronoun choices which reflect the following kind of change: "Someone dropped his or her book." written as "Someone dropped their book."

<sup>197</sup> The nature of this belief, whether it is perceptual or non-perceptual, is surely relevant to this question. However, the focus of this current piece is to investigate the source and plasticity of our background epistemic resources. These resources serve as a ground upon which consciousness renders a morally pertinent encounter into an experience with moral features. Moral perceptions, as an immediate discernment of a situation's moral features, can be considered perceptual or non-perceptual, judgmental, in nature, depending on what moral perceptual theory you endorse. Regardless of one's preferred moral perceptual theory, a view about the formation of our background epistemic resources is needed in order inform our understanding of how moral perceptions are mediated by our existing moral beliefs and dispositions. In this way, the framework offered here is intended to apply to any moral perceptual theory.

are swaths of people that do not come to have a moral perception of a situation's immorality or, instead, can falsely take an oppressive act to be 'right' rather than 'wrong'. Notably, cases where one's moral perceptions are insensitive to the moral status of the other are especially alarming (e.g., during acts of sex trafficking, slavery, testimonial injustice, and so on). Given this, it is important that we understand the extent to which one is free to influence their moral perceptions because such discernments play an indispensable role in navigating moral life.

With this in mind, the aim of this piece is to develop an interdisciplinary perspective on the development of the background epistemic resources available to human consciousness in order to investigate the extent to which one is free to influence their moral perceptions. In what follows, I develop a dialectical view of consciousness in order to conceptualize the relationship between life's experiences and our background epistemic resources. To do this, I synthesize the work of Herbert Marcuse with the phenomenological branch of Feminist Affect Theory using Buddhist moral psychology, specifically work from the Mahāyāna tradition. From this, I go on to argue that a subject's moral perceptions of occurrent experience are outside their immediate control because background epistemic resources and structures cultivated through dialectical consciousness curate the contents of such discernments. That is, I argue that we are not free to have moral perceptions in whichever way we wish during occurrent experience because such immediate discernments are not ours to willfully control in the moment. However, I conclude by supporting the claim that we can influence our moral perceptions by cultivating the grounds upon which our dialectical consciousness is rooted.



### 3.2 Marcuse's Epistemic Subject: Reason and Drives

Marcuse, a critical social philosopher from the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory, approaches the subject qua knower, henceforth referred to as the **epistemic subject**, with the understanding that they seek to make sense of their world, to render it intelligible as a consciousness in that world. In his view, life shapes consciousness and society curates life. That is, he recognizes that society's expectations and practices shape the epistemic subject's habits of thought through manipulation of a subject's drives and ways of thinking by means of curating life's experiences through social sensibilities. He argues that the rationality, one's way of thinking and connecting with others, within advanced capitalist industrial society is whittled down by our immersion into the happenings and sensibilities of society. As such, a subject's critical reflective capacities atrophy and result in a one-dimensional (i.e., uncritical or merely positive) form of thought and knowing. He writes,

"The means of mass transportation and communication, the commodities of lodging, food, and clothing, the irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and, through the latter, to the whole. The products [and infrastructure] indoctrinate and manipulate; they promote a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood. ... it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life – much better than before – and as a good way of life, it militates against qualitative change. Thus emerges a pattern of *one-dimensional thought and behavior* in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe. They are redefined by the rationality of the given system and of its quantitative extension."<sup>198</sup>

Alternatively put, the subject, as a result of living within an advanced capitalistic civilization, conforms to dominant sensibilities regarding value, morality, and meaning not merely because they adopt those attitudes by means of willful practice. Instead, the ways in which one connects and interfaces with others, social artifacts, and the material world

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<sup>198</sup> Marcuse (1964) p. 12

prompts the epistemic subject to internalize society's 'rationality', its way of thinking and operating. This, in turn, governs expected forms of thought and knowing in the subject. At the same time, the epistemic subject's capacity to resist this process via critical, negative, thought is undermined because the sense that the 'world as it is' *is not also* the 'world as it must be' diminishes. The subject comes to believe that 'conformity with local sensibilities' is a rational choice in that conformity is in the subject's best interest, inasmuch as they are aware, where one's life is 'bettered' by that system, sometimes at the expense of others. The result is that the epistemic subject acquiesces to the value and meaning structures governing the social world as if they were a necessity because the current social order, and its sensibilities, defines 'how things are done'. One-dimensional thinking, as a kind of operational thinking, persists because the subject is directed and disciplined, he argues, by a social system which "permeates the general consciousness" resulting in the absorption of negative thinking into positive, one-dimensional, thinking.<sup>199</sup>

For example, consider our relationship to automobiles. They have a certain amount of utility inasmuch as they are useful tools for traveling. Cars can also support meaningful relationships because they allow for visits with friends, family, and services (i.e., hospitals, grocery stores, ...) that are located outside reasonable walking distances. As a result, road systems develop over time, cityscapes build parking garages, freeways are constructed between cities, freeways are tolled, street parking is established, traffic officers are hired, parking attendants are dispatched, demand for cars rise, people are hired to increase car production, mechanics learn how to fix them, and the pedestrian is restricted to walk-ways

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<sup>199</sup> Marcuse (1964) p. 226

and sidewalks. Cars become an integral part of contemporary life. In many places within the United States, having a car has almost become a precondition for life's activities.

With this example in mind, Marcuse's observations about society and one-dimensional thinking can be illustrated in the following way. Navigating society and connecting with people through our use of cars amounts to a kind of social administration of our lives because the performance of certain expected car-based actions and ways of thinking are required to have relationships and access services (i.e., waiting in traffic, finding parking, traveling on roads, ...). A car-rationality, a way of thinking based on cars, emerges and is internalized by the subject when making decisions about their life (i.e., which jobs to apply to, school to attend, friends to hold on to, family to visit, ways to vote, ...). In turn, the reality of the world, materially and socially, becomes not only more car-friendly but car-advocating. The world systematizes the role of cars into a 'need' and we, as subjects in a world of cars, are indoctrinated to accept dominant social sensibilities about cars. Thoughts about robust public transportation systems, pedestrian friendly cities, and so on become valuable only in relationship to their car-supportive claims. Resistance to car-rationality is directed and disciplined so that the subject accepts the car's place in life. Moreover, it becomes rational for the subject to adopt the dominant social sensibility about cars because the world is organized to *help* people by car-means. Ultimately, the roadways of the car-world shape the rational pathways of our inner-world wherever one says "I can't get there because I don't have a car" when in reality one can't get there because society resists alternative ways of life that are not dependent on car-use (i.e., one with robust public transportation).

As a theoretical ground, Marcuse uses an interpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis to flush out his view of the epistemic subject and the influential role of social sensibilities. He writes, "Freud's theory reveals the biological deindividuation beneath the sociological one... The primary instincts pertain to life and death - that is to say, to organic matter as such. And they link organic matter back with unorganic matter and forward within higher mental manifestations."<sup>200</sup> The thought expressed in this passage, and throughout Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, is that the sociological forces of civilization shape the primary life and death drives into expressions which direct our general disposition to the world. Such dispositions are shaped to align with some ideological guidelines of the good life, with some set of social sensibilities. Put alternatively, social scripts, both explicit and implied, communicate expectations and provide the framework by which society disciplines deviation from normalized standards. These standards are internalized by one's drives and dictate how one is drawn to or repulsed from certain actions, objects, and peoples. Through this, one's consciousness of the world is affectively articulated and is reason shaping.

As an investigation into the social epistemological forces of civilization, Marcuse's work on the epistemic subject's drives seeks to unpack the relationship between social **sensibilities** (i.e., the rationality of the social system) and individual **sense-abilities**. Marcuse's use of 'sensibilities' often references normative expectations which define the standards of appropriate rational and drive-based frameworks for social encounter-response behaviors. However, he often uses 'sensibilities' in a second way. In contrast to **sensibilities**, '**sense-abilities**' reference a subject's rational and drive-based sensitivities

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<sup>200</sup> Marcuse (1962) p. 107

which render the moral and non-moral value landscape comprehensible to the subject. This distinction begins to form in the following passage from Marcuse's "Freedom and Freud's Theory of the Instincts":

"The organism develops through the activity of two original basic instincts: the *life* instinct [i.e. Eros] and the *death* instinct, the destructive instinct. While the former strives for the binding of living substance into ever larger and more permanent units, the death instinct desires regression to [a] condition [like that which existed] before birth, without needs and thus without pain... Thus the psychic dynamic takes the form of a constant struggle of three basic forces: Eros, the death instinct, and the outside world. Corresponding to these three forces are the three basic principles which according to Freud determine the function of the psychic apparatus: the *pleasure principle*, the *Nirvana principle*, and the *reality principle*... the pleasure principle stands for the unlimited unfolding of the life instinct [for joy and happiness], and the Nirvana principle for the regression into the painless condition before birth [i.e. of existence without struggle or suffering], and the reality principle signifies the totality of the modifications of those instincts compelled by the outside world."<sup>201</sup>

Marcuse's observation of the reality principle in this excerpt highlights his commitment to the claim that subjects modify their **sense-abilities** in accordance with normative parameters defined by the outside social world according to its **sensibilities**. The influence of dominant **sensibilities** on a subject's **sense-abilities** can appear wherever the subject strategically adapts their desires and ways of thinking in order to navigate the tension that exists between the reality principle, the pleasure principle (i.e., individual desires motivated by the life instinct), and the Nirvana principle (i.e., the pursuit of contentment motivated by the death instinct). Put otherwise, adaptation of one's **sense-abilities** to the dominant **sensibilities** occurs as a result of the directing and disciplining forces within civilization on the subject trying to fit-in for their own sake.

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<sup>201</sup> Marcuse (1970) p. 164-165

Further evidence for the important role of this distinction in his work is found in *The Essay on Liberation*. Here, he points out that what we take to be obscene or beautiful is most often curated by the social order's dominant **sensibilities**.<sup>202</sup> He argues that obscenity is used as "a moral concept in the verbal arsenal of the Establishment, which abuses the term by applying it, not to expressions of its own morality but to those of another."<sup>203</sup> That is, a subject's repulsion from the obscene and attraction toward the beautiful follow normalized standards for obscenity and beauty prescribed by society's dominant **sensibilities**. By synthesizing Marxian, Hegelian, and Freudian philosophy, Marcuse carries Freudian drive theory towards the realization that life's experiences cultivate individual consciousness and its apprehension of occurrent experience by shaping a subject's **sense-abilities**. In doing so, civilization utilizes socialization as a curating device regulating one's life experiences to direct and discipline individuals in accordance with social **sensibilities** of value and meaning, both about morality and utility.

In summary, Marcuse holds the following beliefs about the epistemic subject. First, life's experiences shape a subject's **sense-abilities** by curating their background epistemic resources (i.e., their drives and ways of thinking). Second, socialization directs and disciplines the subject's sense-abilities towards the dominant **sensibilities** by curating life's experiences. Lastly, while not directly discussed in this paper, Marcuse's focus on society's potential for liberation in the totality of his work<sup>204</sup> defines a third belief: that this process can be resisted.<sup>205</sup> That is, Marcuse's call to resist the dominating forces of society by

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<sup>202</sup> Marcuse (1969) p. 8

<sup>203</sup> Marcuse (1969) p. 8

<sup>204</sup> This is especially the case in *One-Dimensional Man* and *An Essay on Liberation*, but is also true in later works and lectures such as "Repressive Tolerance" and "Nature and Revolution".

<sup>205</sup> One such place that this is apparent is in the following passage: "'The possibility of an entirely different societal organization of life has nothing in common with the "possibility" of a man with a green hat appearing in all doorways tomorrow, but treating them with the same logic may serve the defamation of undesirable possibilities... What appears unlovely and disorderly from the logical

means of the cultivation of a new sensibility and the participation in a 'Great Refusal' to operate in an oppressive system signal his commitment to the idea that individual sense-abilities can be liberated. As a result, three observations follow from Marcuse's view of the epistemic subject.

First, our drives and ways of thinking are *semi-plastic but intransigent* because civilization/society represses, sublimates, or desublimates our sense-abilities while maintaining an underlying set of affective and thought potentialities (i.e., Eros (the life drive), Thanatos (the death drive) which aims for Nirvana, and the practice of reasoning persists). Second, human instincts and ways of thinking are *compulsory* inasmuch as having certain dispositions, or sense-abilities, to undergo expressions of Eros or Thanatos manifest as an intensification of an immediate belief attitude or affective force outside the momentary willful control of the subject. This force pulls the subject in a particular direction, towards a particular object, or toward a certain belief rather than necessitating that certain actions be taken. Third, that the subject *strategically adapts* their drives and ways of thinking to the established culture/society and in doing so internalizes its sensibilities thereby shaping the subject's sense-abilities in an *accidental* way.

Given this, Marcuse's view of the epistemic subject contains more than merely a commitment to a *rational* consciousness, a form of being plagued by pervasive one-dimensional thinking in contemporary society. Rather, it hints at a form of *affective* consciousness, of being attuned to the world through one's embodied drives for life and death, which, unfortunately, is left underdeveloped in his work on a 'new sensibility' in

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point of view, may well comprise the lovely elements of a different order, and may thus be an essential part of the material from which philosophical concepts are built." Marcuse (1964) p. 216

*The Essay on Liberation* and subsequent lectures due to his passing in 1979. Yet, Marcuse begins to develop a deeper sense of consciousness through his realization that life “is experienced as a struggle with one’s self and the environment” inasmuch as one seeks to regulate one’s affective and rational engagement with the world in an adaptive way so as to affirm the life instincts or death instincts with the ultimate goal of living.<sup>206</sup> He is committed to the idea that human drives and ways of thinking are semi-plastic, compulsory rather than purely volitional, and are accidental byproducts of a historical process that never allows the subject to perfectly fit with the environment, social or otherwise. Marcuse’s epistemic subject is defined by “man’s primary impulses and senses as foundations of his rationality and experience” and the manipulation of these foundations shapes our very encounters with the world.<sup>207</sup> Given this, I am inclined to suggest that this view of the epistemic subject intersects with Feminist Affect Theory in many important ways and, because of this, I argue for their compatibility in the next section.

### 3.3 Feminist Affect Theory and Marcuse’s Epistemic Subject

Put briefly, Feminist Affect Theory<sup>208</sup> takes **affects** to be an integral part of the body’s engagement with the world and it articulates embodiment as “webbed in its relations” to the world.<sup>209</sup> Affects are displayed in “a body’s *capacity* to affect and to be affected.”<sup>210</sup> Donovan O. Schaefer, a professor of material religion and visual culture, describes affect theory in *Religious Affects* as a field which “thematizes the way that the world prompts us to move before the interventions of language. It calls attention to

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<sup>206</sup> Marcuse (1970)

<sup>207</sup> Marcuse (1972)

<sup>208</sup> I write here primarily from the perspective of the phenomenological branch of Feminist Affect Theories.

<sup>209</sup> Gregg and Seigworth p. 2

<sup>210</sup> Gregg and Seigworth p. 2



embodied histories that precede the advent of language -- as well as moments when language is bound with other thick, embodied forces.”<sup>211</sup> By this description, Marcuse shares a project in common with affect theory because each aims to critique power within civilization by supplementing the linguistic, or rational, perspective on human consciousness rather than erase it in favor of embodied forms of knowing. Both theoretical traditions recognize that affects, or drives in Marcuse’s case, within the embodied subject are of paramount importance for understanding the epistemic subject beyond its reduction to a form of rational consciousness.<sup>212</sup> Moreover, where Marcuse lacks a fully developed view of affective subjectivity but provides a robust view of rational subjectivity, Affect theory provides a robust view of affective subjectivity while not treading deeply into rational subjectivity because it is not the central object of study for that field. As a result, if these views are compatible, we are presented with an opportunity to put these traditions into conversation in order to develop a robust conception of consciousness with the potential to fix what is often referred to as ‘Descartes’s error’<sup>213</sup> by reunifying our conceptions of the rational and embodied subject. In this section, I argue for this compatibility by outlining the developmental and conceptual parallels between these two traditions.

First, Schaefer describes affects as essentially **semi-plastic but intransigent, compulsory, and adaptively accidental**. He highlights affect theory’s fusion of Freudian drives with Darwinian evolutionary biology by describing the subject’s embodied affects as a set of sculpted dispositions which are configured into structures in accordance with

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<sup>211</sup> Schaefer p. 9

<sup>212</sup> Schaefer p. 21

<sup>213</sup> This is a phrase coined by Antonio Damasio (1994) in *Descartes Error*. It is used to reference Descartes’ mind-body distinction which, historically, has caused western philosophy to treat rationality and embodiment as separate, non-overlapping, aspects of human development and consciousness.

one's embodied experiences and cultural history (i.e., *the intransigence claim*).<sup>214</sup> Additionally, these affective structures are susceptible to reconfiguration with some sense of general consistency (i.e. *the semi-plastic claim*).<sup>215</sup> That said, it is worth recalling that Marcuse implicitly takes the same to be true of our drives which comprise, what he calls, our second nature.

Additionally, Schaefer's discussion of affects as *compulsory* and *adaptively accidental* continues to echo Marcuse's use of Freudian drive theory. Affects are felt intensities aimed at the world and its objects. We often think of animal affective responses as mechanistic in kind. However, this is a misrepresentation of affect theory. Rather, the idea is that an embodied accumulation of affected experiences and evolutions over time configures the subject to respond affectively or rationally in particular ways to certain environmental stimuli. It's about embodied compulsory affective responses, not compulsively necessary choice or action.

For example, there is an episode of the U.S. version of *The Office* where Jim, the office prankster, plays a chime on his computer while offering his coworker, Dwight, a mint. After months of creating an affective environment which linked a chime with the taste of mint, Jim plays the chime and *does not offer a mint*. The result: Dwight is confused as to why his mouth tastes bad. The explanation: "Affectivity is not optional, but compulsory" and this compulsion is a result of having adapted one's affective dispositions or instincts to the environmental stimuli in an automatic way facilitated by the subject living in that space.<sup>216</sup> Schaefer writes, "Affect theory offers an alternative model [to the

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<sup>214</sup> Schaefer p. 29

<sup>215</sup> Schaefer p. 29

<sup>216</sup> Schaefer p. 14

merely rational framework of consciousness], in which affects have their own capacity to articulate bodies to systems of power.”<sup>217</sup> Again, it is worth noting that this model echoes Marcuse’s description of our sense-abilities towards obscenities as compulsory responses to certain social stimuli which, in turn, influence our thoughts and knowings.

The study of affect also gives us the tools to think about bodies in terms of “affective economies - economies driven by a complex matrix of compulsions that do not necessarily follow predictable watercourses”<sup>218</sup>; the dynamic accumulation of affects is a strategic response to a myriad of environmental conditions and it is not reasonable to expect the embodied bundle of responses to be without contradiction. There is an accidental nature to affects during the configuration of the body whereby one cannot expect a perfect affective-fit between the environment and the subject. This mirrors Marcuse’s commitment to the reality principle inasmuch as our instincts are being strategically adapted to the world in a way that permits internal contradictions. Notably, Marcuse’s belief that contradictions in lived experience will reveal unfreedoms is also relevant to Schaefer’s point because both suggest that the subject will never be completely ordered without countervailing affective, and as Marcuse points out, rational structures. Thus, both theories predict the development of internal contradictions while pointing out that oppressive systems will also attempt to manage and defuse those contradictions.

Additionally, as Ahmed describes them, affects are *sticky*. “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.”<sup>219</sup> For example, happiness, as a form of approval and a mode of affective response, possesses an

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<sup>217</sup> Schaefer p. 92

<sup>218</sup> Schaefer p. 149-150

<sup>219</sup> Ahmed p. 29

intentional relation to the world, according to Ahmed. Affects are taken to be intentional to an object or person inasmuch as that affect-producing target points to a future possibility (i.e., to be happy or unhappy) and they are taken to be evaluative inasmuch as the promise of the ‘future possibility’ articulates a value judgement of *good* or *bad* respective to the promise for happiness or unhappiness.<sup>220</sup> She writes,

“The object becomes a feeling-cause. Once an object is a feeling-cause, it can cause feeling, so that when we feel the feeling we expect to feel we are affirmed... for a life to count as a good life, it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course.”<sup>221</sup>

I take this to mean that affects take on a *directedness* toward an object and that the object is encountered as good or bad with respect to the object's status as a feeling-cause. These are objects which carry a bundle of affective and relational promises. If we recall Marcuse’s discussion of obscenity and beauty as attaching to objects, actions, or peoples in the world, then we notice that he too takes drives to possess *directedness*. In Marcusean terms, this directedness communicates an evaluative component to a subject’s **sense-abilities** which reveal the evaluative dimensions of the thing, moral or otherwise.

Lastly, it is also worth noting that a common Freudian ground is shared by Marcuse and the phenomenological division of Affect Theory which guides these theoretical views in a way that permits compatibility. This shared basis reveals the theoretical closeness of Marcusean drives and Feminist Affects. Each holds that drive or affect structures emerge over time, as Schaefer might put it, “as the preferred method for bodies to navigate the ambiguity of information-rich environments. They prioritize effective strategies

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<sup>220</sup> Ahmed p. 29

<sup>221</sup> Ahmed p. 40

intensifying motivational forces.”<sup>222</sup> It is true that Marcuse’s construction of the epistemic subject takes theoretical cues from Hegelian and Marxian theory whereas Affect Theory takes cues from Darwinian Evolutionary Theory. However, Both Marcuse and Affect theory hold that response mechanisms will change over time to align sense-abilities/affective sensitivities with best-fit strategies for experiencing the environment according to some functional or social standard. As a result, this difference fails to support the idea that these views are incompatible in light of the aforementioned parallels between affects and drives (i.e., their semi-plastic but intransigent, compulsory, directive, and adaptively accidental nature). If anything, it suggests that each tradition developed functionally compatible views independently and in their own traditions because the systems offer different ways of talking about the same process for affect-structure development, one grounded in the philosophy of evolutionary biology and the other in Hegelian and Marxist philosophy. Thereby, I take this difference between these views to be a non-criticism to their compatible nature given the functional and theoretical symmetry between Feminist Affect Theory and Marcuse’s epistemic subject.

In summary, Marcuse’s view of the epistemic subject and Affect theory are compatible traditions because each is grounded in the idea that a subject’s drives or affects are **semi-plastic but intransigent (i.e., flexibly variable within some range of defined possibility) , compulsory (i.e., beyond one’s immediate willful control)<sup>223</sup>, adaptively**

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<sup>222</sup> Schaefer p. 46

<sup>223</sup> It is worth noting that ‘compulsory’ could be thought of as having at least two senses. In the first sense, it might be suggested that someone is coerced to feel X-ly when saying that ‘X is compulsory’. This implicates that one’s drives or affects can be made to manifest in this or that way at any given moment by coercive means. In the second sense, it might be suggested that someone feels X-ly in a habitual sense when saying that ‘X is compulsory’. This implicates that one’s drives/affects are automatic responses outside anyone’s immediate willful control. ‘Compulsory’, as it is used here, is used in this second sense. This does not mean that we are immune to affective manipulations by others, but rather that the way in which we can be manipulated to feel X-ly at any given moment is dictated by a set of compulsory configurations within the epistemic subject which regulate their affective responses to the world. It is these responses, or configurations, which are (in the sense used here) compulsory, outside the immediate control of the subject and their community.

**accidental (i.e., imperfectly attuning to fit the environment), and possess a sense of directedness (i.e., intentionally directed towards meaningful content).** Moreover, this compatibility is grounded in a shared Freudian influence which was transformed by different theoretical traditions which nevertheless produced functionally similar views with analogous consequences. As a result, each tradition's view of the epistemic subject is positioned to complement and be complemented by the other thereby providing a holistic picture of human consciousness, and thereby the epistemic subject, in its rational and affective dimensions.

### 3.4 Synthesizing Marcuse and Affect Theory using Buddhist Philosophy

Compatibility, while useful for justifying our putting Marcuse's epistemic subject and Affect Theory in conversation, is merely one step towards articulating a view which describes the extent to which life's experiences and socialization shapes the epistemic subject and their moral perceptions. It is worth pointing out that one aspect of this compatibility is grounded in the **compulsory** nature of one's conscious apprehension of the world. This, itself, hints at the unfree nature of moral perception during occurrent experience. Yet, there is still a need to synthesize these approaches into a useful framework that provides a robust sense of the epistemic subject that is sensitive to its rational and affective dimensions. For this, I turn to the Mahāyāna school of Buddhism, which will henceforth be referenced using 'Buddhist philosophy'. I make this turn because Buddhist philosophy provides a model for understanding the mechanisms by which social sensibilities become inscribed onto individuals in a way that emphasizes the causal role of life's experiences on the affective and rational aggregates of the human subject. Buddhist philosophy develops a view of the epistemic subject which is sensitive to both Marcuse's

concern for the rational subject and Affect Theory's concern for the embodied subject because the Buddhist philosophical tradition explored here takes the human creature as an aggregate comprised of material (i.e., the body) and mental (i.e., the mind) components.<sup>224</sup> In this way, Buddhist philosophy carries the potential to guide our understanding of the epistemic subject towards this robust sense.

There are at least two concepts in Buddhist philosophy relevant to the project at hand: store consciousness and psychological seeds.<sup>225</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh's *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching* introduces the reader to these concepts in the following way:

“In each of us, there are wholesome and unwholesome roots -- or seeds -- in the depths of our consciousness... if the seed of betrayal is watered, you may betray even those you love... The source of our perception, our way of seeing, lies in our store consciousness... [what we see] depends on our mind -- our sadness, our memories, our anger. Our perceptions carry with them all the errors of subjectivity.”<sup>226</sup>

As demonstrated in this passage, Buddhist philosophy is sensitive to the idea that one's conscious *encounter* with or *view* of the world will be directed by one's subjective store consciousness.<sup>227</sup>

Bina Gupta, a comparative philosopher, expands on the relationship between consciousness and store consciousness in the following way:

“The three transformations [of consciousness] are: sensory representation, self-awareness, and the store-house (i.e., store) consciousness where experiences at the two levels deposit their traces as seeds which need to be actualized under appropriate conditions.”<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> For the sake of bridging the linguistic gap between Marcuse/Affect theory and Buddhist philosophy, I use 'material' and 'mental' to categorize the Buddhism's conception of 'being', the five aggregates. 'Materiality' references the body and includes the aggregate of matter (Mpakkhanda). 'Mental' aggregates which include sensations (Vedanakkhandhd), perceptions (Sannakkhandha), mental formations (Samkharakkhandha), and consciousness (Vinnattakkhandha). Rahula (1967) p. 20-23

<sup>225</sup> These are especially developed in Mahayana schools. Store consciousness is also typically associated with Yogacara Buddhism.

<sup>226</sup> Hanh, p. 53-55

<sup>227</sup> This echoes insights made by Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* and in *Living a Feminist Life* where she describes Consciousness as a sensuous as well as thought dependent phenomenon.

<sup>228</sup> Gupta, p.220

That is, *store consciousness* contains epistemic impressions from life's experiences which serve as the ground for a subject's affective configurations, beliefs, and habits of reason. Store consciousness serves as the source of our background epistemic resources and we use it to turn our encounters with the world into meaningful experiences. Put metaphorically, life's experiences plant seeds in store consciousness. These seeds are adaptively cultivated or repressed/neglected through our everyday experiences and choices under salient lived conditions. Living a life of anger or hate fosters aggressive encounters with the world and shapes your perceptions of it. Encountering systematic forms of oppression through violence can reveal empty parking lots at night as *dangerous*. A life where fear is a pervasive phenomenon, rather than a momentary occasion, will nurture dispositions for distrust, anger, and hate that shape one's engagement with the world. Choosing to continue to engage in destructive behavior, even after one comes to understand it as destructive, continues to reinforce one's own propensity for destruction over creation. Notably, distrust, anger, and outrage are often warranted by those facing dehumanization and brutalization in oppressive social systems. Examples of this phenomenon are abundant.

To further illustrate the importance of *seeds*, or experiential potentialities, it should be noted that Buddhists hold that *right view* (i.e., holding the *Buddhist* moral and metaphysical outlook on life) is a fundamental step in the Buddhist path, as founded on the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are, briefly put, (1) human existence is characterized by *dukkha* (i.e., suffering), (2) the immediate cause of *dukkha* and excess *dukkha* exists because of our ignorance towards the nature of things as fundamentally impermanent (i.e., suffering prompted by attachments fueled by selfish needs or desires), (3) *dukkha* can be overcome, or cease, through abating the cause of *dukkha*, and (4) the



pathway to overcoming *dukkha* is articulated by the Eightfold Noble Path<sup>229</sup>. As part of this path, *Right View* points to the philosophical weight of the first three Noble Truths and the need to adopt a view of life which recognizes a fundamental interdependence and interconnectedness of persons, the prevalence of surplus suffering or *dukkha*, and the truth of the non-self. If this view does not curate one's background epistemic resources, the Buddha's path can neither be walked nor seen. Buddhist philosophy articulates the need for the epistemic subject to, and their ability to, cultivate a store consciousness that helps the agent experience value in the world in a way that reveals an object, person, or relation as helpful or as a hindrance to a life without excess suffering (*dukkha*). This idea will be returned to in the conclusion of this piece.

Moreover, *right view* emphasizes a Buddhist's philosophical commitment to the existence of some set, or set of sets, of psychological seeds which should be cultivated under a Buddhist ethics and with contextual reference. In fact, it is the promotion of the sublime states that point to this kind of advice. The sublime states include loving-kindness or generosity of care for others, compassion or empathy, sympathetic joy for others without envy, and peacefulness. Each is seen as essential for epistemically navigating life's fortunes and misfortunes. These, it is argued, would be housed within a store consciousness capable of bringing the epistemic subject closer to seeing the world in a way that allows them to identify *dukkha* and pathways to minimize it. Yet, we need not adopt a Buddhist Ethics to use Buddhist philosophy to understand how store consciousness functions in subjectivity.

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<sup>229</sup> The eightfold path is broken into three essential categories of Buddhist practice and training: "(a) Ethical Conduct (*Silo*), (b) Mental Discipline (*Samadhi*), and (c) Wisdom (*Panna*)" (Rāhula 1967). When following the paths categorized under (c) *Panna*, one acquires wisdom through adopting the (1) right view, alternatively translated as 'right understanding', and practicing (2) right thought. The features of the eightfold path categorized under (a) *Silo* amount to the cultivation of compassion in (3) right speech, (4) right action, and (5) right livelihood. Under the (b) *Samadhi* category one finds the call for (6) right effort, (7) right mindfulness, and (8) right concentration. For both a practical and accessible investigation of these items, see Rāhula (1967).

Instead, to explain store consciousness and its relationship to subjective experience, we can turn to the teachings of Ven. Dr. Walpola Rāhula.<sup>230</sup> The aggregate of consciousness (*viññāṇaskandha*) contains three distinct aspects: (1) *citta* (store consciousness), (2) *manas* (self-consciousness), (3) *viññāṇa* (perceptual consciousness).<sup>231</sup> Rāhula writes,

“Thus we can see that *viññāṇa* represents the simple reaction or response of the sense-organs when they come in contact with external objects. This is the uppermost or superficial aspect or layer of the *viññāṇaskandha*. *Manas* represents the aspect of its mental functioning, thinking, reasoning, conceiving ideas, etc. *Citta*, which is here called *alayaviññāṇa*, represents the deepest, finest and subtlest aspect or layer of the Aggregate of Consciousness. It contains all the traces or impressions of the past actions and all good and bad future potentialities.”<sup>232</sup>

Under this model, as articulated by the Yogācāra school of Mahāyāna Buddhism, there are three main aspects of human consciousness. Perceptual Consciousness (*viññāṇa*) as articulated by sensory interaction with the world and our embodied activity. Self-Consciousness (*manas*) amounts to our self-awareness and mental activity. But, Store Consciousness (*citta* or *alayaviññāṇa*) amounts to the underlying elements, concepts, ideas, and dispositions which dialectically articulate experience and are shaped by experience through *viññāṇa* and *manas*. Buddhist philosophers following this tradition point to the idea that *alayaviññāṇa* stands as a unifying principle of consciousness by which conscious events, like seeing a bird or thinking caring thoughts about a friend, are possible and **compulsory**.

As Jay Garfield, a comparative philosopher, puts it, store consciousness “is the pre-reflective ground of experience... it is not introspectable and is not the seat of the

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<sup>230</sup> It should be pointed out that Dr. Rāhula was the first monastic Buddhist to hold a professorship in the western world.

<sup>231</sup> Rāhula (1959), p. 23

<sup>232</sup> Rāhula (2001)

subjectivity of any particular conscious episode, but rather stands as a transcendental condition on any awareness being conscious at all.”<sup>233</sup> If consciousness unifies awareness of one’s experiences into *an experience*, then such an event is compulsorily shaped by store consciousness at its very core in the Buddhist sense described here. Awareness may precede consciousness, but experience’s inscribing of store consciousness will, for the Buddhist, fundamentally shape our encounters with the world by organizing current and future conscious experiences in a compulsory way. Such is also the case, as we have seen, in both Marcuse’s view of the epistemic subject and in Affect Theory’s discussion of the affectively embodied subject.

Within this framework, it is vital to note that one’s store consciousness changes over time. It is just as impermanent as everything else in Buddhist metaphysics and fits as part of the five aggregates of our being: (1) form or embodiment, (2) sensation or affectedness, (3) perceptual awareness of external and internal happenings, (4) possessing mental states, and (5) consciousness. Under a theory of seeds, *alayavijnana* becomes the garden by which lived experience plants dispositional and cognitive seeds that grow to shape our encounter with the world. These seeds, or beliefs and affective dispositions within one’s background epistemic resources, are further cultivated during our encounter with the world. *Alayavijnana* collects one’s affective and rational experiences (i.e., those mental states that become seeds), and uses these to compulsorily unify experience into a meaningful manifold, and constantly revises that manifold’s content according to whichever seeds are nurtured or neglected. The Sautrāntika theory of seeds (*bīja*)

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<sup>233</sup> Garfield (2015) p. 130. It is important to note here, as Garfield does, that this is not some attempt by Buddhist philosophers to “sneak” a self back into the Buddha’s teachings. Rather, this is not a self in the sense that Buddhists reject, an Atman or soul-like permanent thing, but rather it is an ever changing and impermanent part of the aggregate of our being.

underlying consciousness can inform our understanding of the theory of store consciousness *by articulating the process by which lived experience influences consciousness thereby shaping our encounter with future experiences in a compulsory way.*<sup>234</sup>

As Christian Coseru, a philosopher of mind and cross-cultural philosophy, writes,

“A ‘seed’ in this case stands for two sets of phenomena: (1) latent dispositions underlying the karmic process; and (2) the capacity or power of certain causal chains to bring about a given result... The theory of seeds in the mental stream thus provides a mode of talking about causality that does not exclude the notions of latency and disposition.”<sup>235</sup>

In this passage, Coseru points to the idea that the subject engages and encounters the world, but more so to the idea that that world has a causal influence on the subject by shaping involuntary compulsions rather than whole-hog freedom-denying psychological mechanisms. Given this, he acknowledges the need for a language that avoids a fatalistic picture of human choice. Utilizing psychological seeds to identify causally created epistemological structures in store consciousness provides a picture of the non-determined epistemic subject that avoids radical atomism and gives us a language to discuss life’s influence on a subject’s perceptions of occurrent experience. The way the subject chooses to engage the world *and* the way that life’s happenings influence the subject’s encounter with the world provide a dialectically causal story regarding how the subject affectively and rationally comprehends their lived reality and, thereby, comes to have the **compulsory** moral perception that they do. Coseru continues,

“Following this process of maturation and dependence upon the repository consciousness there evolves a reflexive awareness whose object is none other than this subliminal or repository consciousness itself. This theory of cognitive emergence presumably provides a better account of the role that the residual forces of past cognitions play in ‘seeding’ the

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<sup>234</sup> Coseru, p. 40

<sup>235</sup> Coseru, p. 38 -39

repository consciousness. It is the dynamics of these residual forces which ultimately generates the intentional forms of cognitive awareness that support all other forms of cognitive activity.”<sup>236</sup>

From this, we gather that the seeds planted by life’s experiences are gained throughout our development, from infancy to our present existence, and guide store consciousness’s articulation of our ‘cognitive awareness’ of the world. That is, the seeds of our experience influence and inform our moral perceptions of the world and drive their compulsory nature.

As a result, civilization’s socialization of the subject can plant a lot of instinctual/affective or rational seeds regarding expectations of value and normalcy thereby shaping our experience of the world. I believe a Marcusean Affect theory can be developed using this Buddhist approach to causality in store consciousness for three reasons. First, there is a catalog of affective capacities currently possessed by the human being as a result of evolutionary psychology and observed by Freudian instinct theory (the *life-instinct/love/attraction* and *death-instinct/hate/aversion* as base affects) which are directed and shaped in accordance with the local environment. In Buddhist terms, the first seeds of store consciousness possess the potentiality for hate/death-instincts or love/life-instincts and are cultivated by life’s experiences. In this way, Buddhist philosophy articulates a mechanism and language with which to be precise about the process wherein sensibilities cultivate one’s background epistemic resources or sense-abilities.

Second, dynamic embodied affects or drives can be cultivated or planted in store consciousness as the life instincts and death instincts are cultivated by life’s experiences in the local environment. The pleasure and reality principles describe how we come to have more complex affective abilities such as outrage, anger, lust, altruism, and so on. These

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<sup>236</sup> Coseru, p. 44

would seemingly emerge or be repressed in accordance with socialization practices, life choices, moments of trauma or joy, *and* in those moments where one makes paradigm shifting decisions. Over time, and through natural maturation, a Buddhist theory of mind predicts that these affects will grow effectively motivating and that modes of rational thinking will emerge because of the dispositions and beliefs in one's store-consciousness.

Lastly, store consciousness serves as the epistemic ground for one's experience and judgment of the world's value landscape (i.e., it informs moral perceptions during occurrent experience). This will carry the errors of subjectivity inasmuch as one's affective dispositions, propositional beliefs, and ways of reasoning will influence one's engagement with the world. According to this Buddhist infused Marcusean Affect Theory, the epistemic subject is a triadic being whose lived experience is articulated by its store consciousness, its interaction with the world, and the constant reshaping of store consciousness's epistemic resources (i.e., its affective dispositions, beliefs, and modes of rationality) by experience. Thereby, this view results in a kind of **Dialectical Consciousness (DC)** which is best articulated by the following four observations:

- 1) the epistemic subject affectively (i.e., via one's sense-abilities) interacts with and is shaped by life's experiences,
- 2) the epistemic subject's rational habits judge and are shaped by life's experiences,
- 3) A subject's moral perceptions of the world aim to make sense of perceived value using a store consciousness comprised of these affective and rational aspects. The human being simultaneously undergoes biological and culturally influenced processes which shape its understanding of those experiences<sup>237</sup> and moral perceptions,
- 4) At any given moment, one comes to have experiences that are constructed by store consciousness thereby mediating a subject's moral perceptions in a **compulsory, not willful**, way, of the world that, at first glance, reinforce existing structures within store consciousness. Unless the subject becomes aware of some

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<sup>237</sup> Schaefer p. 49

propositional/affective contradiction or undergoes some kind of existential transformation, they will not be pushed to challenge the very foundation of their store consciousness because their moral perceptions reinforce their justification to see the world as that have seen the world. Additionally, if they do not embrace a healthy skepticism about how to resolve contradictions or existential challenges, the subject will perceive value in the world as they have perceived value in the world. They may also dismiss inconsistent experiences as unimportant rather than as a signal calling for further investigation of the social world or one's store consciousness as a foundation for their moral perceptions.

With DC in view, there are several reasons why I believe we should accept it as an adequate picture of the epistemic subject describing our compulsory moral perceptions. First, it accurately predicts that certain affective dispositions and thought patterns will emerge as a feature of socialization during child development or during adulthood. It suggests that when socialization disciplines or controls a child's engagement with the world then certain affective dispositions and ways of thinking will follow from the seeds those experiences plant when they are nurtured. For example, if we only provide boys with toys that are physically engaging at very young ages, then boyhood preferences for physical activity would predictably become part of (or an enhanced part of) a bundle of affective responses to and reasoning about the world. It thereby would seem natural when young boys do not identify with activities like reading but gravitate towards sports because of an aversion (as an expression of Thanatos) to the former and an attraction (as an expression of Eros) to the latter. These dispositions, as a result, lead to moral perceptions of sports as a "moral good" inasmuch as they are seen as a conception of how to live well, as a proper way of life for boys wherein they can 'function' according to the local sensibilities of a good life. In fact, Martin's 1998 study of preschool classrooms makes just this kind of observation. Within the study, she interrogates *hidden curriculums* and claims that they

(partially) curate embodied differences between the genders while making any correlation between preferences and physical differences appear and feel natural.<sup>238</sup>

Hidden curriculums, as a form of socialization, are unseen or implicit practices that classrooms maintain which simultaneously serve as forms of socially controlling subjects. These include practices which socialize students into privileging certain modes of expression and these curriculums demand that students practice, she concludes, “bodily control in congruence with the goals of the school as an institution.”<sup>239</sup> She writes:

“The effects of dressing-up or bodily adornment, the gendered nature of formal or relaxed behaviors, how the different restrictions on girls’ and boys’ voices limit their physicality, how teachers instruct girls’ and boys’ bodies, and the gendering of physical interactions between children ... suggest one way that bodies are gendered and physical differences are constructed is through social institutions and their practices.”<sup>240</sup>

DC also holds that if experiences of a certain kind become normalized adults will develop affective responses and habits in reasoning about the world. For example, former President Nixon’s illegalization of marijuana and his war on drugs consistently presented a vilification narrative of the black body to the U.S. population. After having experiences that associated the black body with crime, a negative affective attunement to black bodies seems to have arguably been reinforced in our public life. As a result, the dominant political discourse seems to rationalize policies which systematically disadvantage marginalized populations because those “super predator” populations needed to be controlled or punished. Many adult epistemic subjects, usually in a position of privilege and power, came to have, or have reinforced, compulsory moral perceptions of the black body as if it were representative of ‘wrongdoing’.

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<sup>238</sup> Martin, p. 494

<sup>239</sup> Martin, p. 494

<sup>240</sup> Martin, p. 497 & 510



Similarly, Vivyan Adair's "Discipline and Punished: Poor Women, Bodily Inscription, and Resistance Through Education" echoes this observation by describing the systematic depiction of "Welfare Queens" as a process which disciplines our expectations of women on welfare. As a result, political discourse often utilizes a narrative that too often unwarrantedly punishes those who need aid. She writes,

"The welfare mother -- imagined as young, never married, and black (contrary to statistical evidence)-- is positioned as dangerous and in need of punishment ... the poor welfare mother threatens not just her own children but all children. The Welfare Queen is made to signify moral aberration and economic drain; her figure becomes even more impacted once responsibility for the destruction of the "American Way of Life" is attributed to her."<sup>241</sup>

These are, in effect, observations about our moral perceptions of Welfare Queens as made possible by DC. Taken together, I take Martin's and Adair's observations (among others who make similar observations like bell hooks, Iris Marion Young, and Angela Davis) as offering evidence for the fecundity of DC to predict patterns in socialized consciousness as grounded in store consciousness and the resulting moral perceptions that follow.

The second reason to accept DC is that it accounts for the vicious loop which characterizes consciousness's role in the articulation of our moral perceptions of occurrent experience. Sara Ahmed emphasizes this observation in *Living a Feminist Life*. She writes,

"... power works as a mode of directionality, a way of orienting bodies in particular ways, so they are facing a certain way, heading toward a future that is given as fact ... A crowd is directed. Once a crowd is directed, a crowd becomes directive. We are directed by what is in front of us; what is in front of us depends on the direction we have already taken ... [consciousness] is a loop: we are directed by what is in front of us; what is in front of us depends on how we are [and have been] directed."<sup>242</sup>

In this, Ahmed makes the observation that there is a mutually evolving relationship between embodied subjectivity, lived experiences, socialization, and consciousness's

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<sup>241</sup> Adair, p. 39-40

<sup>242</sup> Ahmed 2017, p. 43 - 48

capacity to organize experience into a lived reality for the subject (i.e., to curate one's moral perceptions). Socialization *and* life's experiences, she claims, direct our orientation and encounter with the world. As a matter of course, objects in the world come to represent a bundle of promises towards some end or way of being. Focusing on happiness and sadness, Ahmed describes how social norms orientate us to approve of certain happenings and to disapprove of others, to have defined moral perceptions. She writes,

“Happiness: what we end up doing to avoid the consequence of being sad. Happiness is a way of being directed toward those things that would or should make you happy. Happiness can thus also be a form of pressure. Pressure does not always feel harsh. A pressure can begin with a light touch. A gentle encouragement...”<sup>243</sup>

Given this, part of DC's value, I claim, is that it captures this account of the epistemic subject and *acknowledges* that how we come to encounter or judge the world (and to have moral perceptions of it) is a function of how we have encountered or judged that world (and our past moral perceptions of it).

### 3.5 The Unfreedom of Moral Perception during Occurrent Experience

DC might be objected to because it could be interpreted as fatalistic, especially if we are trying to determine how it is that we can achieve emancipatory social change. That is, DC emphasizes the **compulsory** nature of our conscious apprehension of the world and, thereby, the unfree nature of our moral perceptions of occurrent experience. Yet, this strikes me as an unnecessary interpretation of DC. Instead, DC forces us to take seriously the complexities of moral agency and responsibility given that store consciousness directly impacts our moral perceptions of the world's moral features which, in turn, impacts store consciousness. DC does not predict that one cannot *ever* modify or reorient oneself to the

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<sup>243</sup> Ahmed 2017, p. 48

world, to come to have different moral perceptions that one currently does. In fact, this is a fundamental part of Buddhist philosophy and a virtue of using Buddhism to synthesize Marcuse and Affect Theory. It keeps open the possibility for liberation. Ultimately, DC's value is a function of its ability to provide a model for understanding socialization's oppressive potential while opening up a future possibility for seeing the world differently, for our liberation from domination, brutalization, and oppression. Our liberation from dukkha.

Specifically, it highlights society's power to limit our capacity to freely shape our moral perception by showing the extent to which life's experiences can influence our rational and affective parts, both of which shape the epistemic resources which prompt us to have the moral perceptions that we do. DC pushes us to re-interrogate the relationship between rationality, affective dispositions, and moral perceptions. In doing so, it forces us to take seriously the available reasons, rendered by our moral perceptions, one uses during moral decision making in our lives as moral agents.

It does this by making explicit the scope of our unfreedom. As either a consequence of our attachment to radical individualism or the influence of scientific ideology, we often think ourselves capable of easily overcoming the influence of the lived world and that our experiences are independent of our moral judgments. Sartre's belief that we are condemned to be free was itself a commitment to the belief that the subject is equipped with an ever-present capacity to transform any experience into an expression of one's freedom to choose. However, social striations across our lived world exist as epistemological gatekeepers for epistemic agents and signpost that world with morally evaluative content.

The epistemic dimensions of the U.S.'s culture of silence regarding sexual violence against women is a prime example of this phenomenon.

Although we have seen some reform to this of late, the atmosphere of silence surrounding sexual violence against women is still pervasive and especially disturbing given that such events are fundamentally antithetical to the dignity of women qua persons. A world where this is pervasive, on top of devaluing and harming women, also limits one's moral perceptions of personhood when seeing women. Similarly upsetting, many men maintain epistemically problematic dispositions towards this reality or, at worst, are presently incapable of having alternative moral perceptions of it. As bell hooks, a black feminist philosopher, puts it, socialization in patriarchy becomes a tool used to forge people into expressions of masculine or feminine subjectivity under the guiding hand of a culture of domination. As a result, women come to fear men as an origin of violence, to have moral perception of them as 'cruel' or 'violent', and, hooks claims, men also come to fear that same violent potential.<sup>244</sup> The perpetuation of the "wait until your father comes home" narrative among other things communicates the idea that masculinity is about power, domination, and fear. Hooks writes,

"Patriarchy is a political-social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females, and endowed with the right to dominate and rule over the weak and to maintain that dominance through various forms of psychological terrorism and violence."<sup>245</sup>

She points out that patriarchal masculinity "teaches men that their selfhood has meaning only in relation to the pursuit of external power; such masculinity is a subtext of the dominator [social] model"<sup>246</sup> where men achieve *manhood*, the ideal of meaning, only if

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<sup>244</sup> hooks p. 18

<sup>245</sup> hooks p. 18

<sup>246</sup> hooks, p. 116

they dominate. Hegemonic boyhood socialization, thereby, becomes defined by the expression of violence, emotional distance, and coming to see any intimate or genuine form of emotional connection with another as alien or, at worst, obscene. Granted, men and women have vastly different reasons to fear the patriarchal agent and to have the moral perceptions of the other as they do. The violence experienced by each intersectional subject will vary. Yet, it is seemingly the case that fear pervades our lives as a result of our embeddedness in a society that perpetuates an ideology of domination. We are afraid of being dominated and this fear shapes our moral perceptions in a compulsory way by defining the epistemic grounds upon which those perceptions are formed, by shaping our store consciousness.

Patriarchy, thereby, enforces an oppressive form of socialization. It systematically oppresses and harms because it makes intersubjective modes of fear an ever present reality rather than a passing moment in life.<sup>247</sup> Where women are taught to systematically fear men because of the emotional or physical violence perpetrated by patriarchy's domination of them qua women, it seems that men, myself included, appear to systematically fear other men. According to hooks, this fear results from the knowledge that failing to meet the demands of hegemonic masculinity *makes you the target of male violence*: a kind of violence that men are also aware of because they experience hegemonic masculinity's curriculum of practiced violence, bullying, and abuse. Again, this sense of fear will be realized across various social identities in both content and intensity because, for example, the black male subject, the immigrant, and white male subject have different reasons to fear a routine traffic stop. Yet, as hooks points out, we are all afraid. She writes, "this is

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<sup>247</sup> hooks p. 118

the big secret we all keep together-the fear of patriarchal maleness that binds everyone in our culture.”<sup>248</sup> Fear, in this sense, pushes us away from each other, it interrupts our connections to the other and disrupts our access to liberating moral perceptions.

Socialization has the ability to influence the epistemic subject through hidden or explicit curriculums that shape store consciousness, and thereby our moral perceptions. DC, under a Marcusean-Buddhist Affect Theory, shows how such systems are reinforced. Taken together, the nature of our immediate moral perceptions of the value landscape is marked by unfreedom: our inability to choose how we perceive the moral features of the world during occurrent experience.

To further motivate this idea that we are not as free as we wish we were, consider the following scenario. Phil loves his son (Sam) and takes his role as a father very seriously. Committed to his “manhood”, Phil expresses his masculinity through conventional activities by participating in sporting rituals, his work as a mechanic, and by teaching Sam how to fish and hunt. As Sam gets older, Phil begins to bond with Sam by rebuilding a truck together in preparation for his senior year of high school. Sam picks up on the skills quickly and soon expresses the desire to follow in Phil’s footsteps. For Phil, being with Sam is an experience filled with joy and, as Ahmed might put it, an encounter with Sam is a happy experience. Phil has moral perceptions of Sam which represent Sam’s moral value as a person, his dignity. One day, at dinner, Sam sits with his family (mom, dad, and his sister) and says that he’s not happy. Sam then comes out to his family. Phil’s beliefs about the moral status of homosexuality (i.e., that it is a moral wrong according to his religious views) results in a huge fight. Over time, Phil fails to reconcile his moral values, his life

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<sup>248</sup> hooks p. 9

with Sam, and this new information regarding Sam's sexual identity. Experiences with Sam are no longer happy for Phil and Phil's compulsory moral perceptions of Sam change into taking Sam to be representative of something 'wrong'.

There are many ways this scenario could have played out and it is not the intention of this example to provide a one-dimensional account of the coming-out process nor how one expresses any religious values. Instead, the Phil-scenario represents a contrast case indicative of how the unfreedom of our moral perceptions during occurrent experience can manifest in our lives. Phil, as a subject, is *not free to experience Sam any way he wishes at any singular moment*. Instead, his moral perceptions are compulsory and rendered meaningful for him by means of his store consciousness. Yet, the contents of store consciousness can change during transformative moments, those times which have significance or existential import for the subject thereby reshaping, nursing, or planting seeds within one's store consciousness. In Phil's case, we can easily contrast his pre-Sam-coming-out experiences with his post-Sam-coming-out experiences and, in doing so, see that Sam's coming out was a transformative moment for Phil. Phil's paternal attraction to Sam (as an mode of affectively expressing Eros) has been reshaped into a repulsion (as a mode of affectively expressing Thanatos). DC's Buddhist synthesis of Marcuse and Affect theory allows us to catalogue the shift in Phil's moral perceptions of Sam while appreciating the conditions required for that shift because both Phil's ways of thinking about Sam and the embodied affects experienced when looking at Sam point to the epistemological mechanisms underlying Phil's occurrent experience. That is, Phil's moral perceptions of Sam track shifts in Phil's knowledge about Sam in conjunction with the

background beliefs and affective dispositions Phil has accumulated over his lifetime pertaining to homosexuality.

Developing a Marcusean Affect theory by means of Buddhist concepts allows us to unpack our everyday moral perceptions. We can conceive of them as being founded upon one's store consciousness as the background epistemic resource by which a subject comes to see the world as having a value landscape. This perceptual ability carries the errors of subjectivity inasmuch as one's affective disposition, beliefs, and ways of thinking (i.e. one's sense-abilities) about the world influence one's moral perceptions of the world in an essentially compulsory way. This is the corner stone of DC.

DC articulates a complex model for understanding the epistemic subject as both affectively and rationally engaged in the world. Epistemic subjects exist in an information rich environment and, thereby, cannot be limited to the confines of contemporary theories of knowledge which exclude affects in favor of propositional knowledge. Affects reveal vital information about the world and how we come to see it. Moreover, DC amplifies and echoes claims made by Patricia Hill Collins's *Black Feminist Epistemology*. That is, lived experiences shape consciousnesses with epistemic access to concepts and modes of knowing that reveal dimensions of reality (i.e., through moral perceptions) initially unseen or overlooked by those outside that standpoint. Presumably, individuals who exist in intersectional epistemic locations are, by definition, exposed to affective forces and, thereby, would be expected to adapt one's accumulated affects and ways of thinking to the local environment.

DC also points to a deeper need to understand that freedom is not synonymous with being affect-free or existing as a purely transcendental subject. Marcuse makes this



observation in his lecture on “Nature and Revolution” and in *An Essay on Liberation*. In the former, he writes,

“... freedom is rooted in the primary drives of men and women, it is the vital need to enhance their life instincts. Prerequisite is the capacity of the senses to experience not only the “given” but also the “hidden” qualities of things which would make for the betterment of life ... the senses are not only the basis for the *epistemological* constitution of reality, but also for its *transformation*, its *subversion* in the interest of liberation.”<sup>249</sup>

Moreover, this echoes his earlier claims in the latter as he writes

“new sensibility, which expresses the ascent of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt, would foster, on a social scale, the vital need for the abolition of injustice and misery and would shape the further evolution of the “standard of living” ... [the] affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the *Form* of the society itself.”<sup>250</sup>

Given DC, the liberation of the human creature’s moral perceptions depends, essentially, on the cultivation of store consciousness which expose the cruelty of objects which do not actually carry the promises they appear to have as cause-objects. The cruel optimism of neoliberal capitalist sensibilities regarding the good life must be undercut by an affective disposition which identifies such things as life-hindering rather than life-affirming. Our affective and rational attachment to neoliberal objects of value are, as Marcuse puts it, forms of domination inasmuch they are mediated by the market’s depiction of false consumer needs or by the dominant class for the sake of maintaining existing power structures. We might say that these objects engender a cruel optimism in the Marcusean subject. As Berlant, a feminist affect theorist, puts it, this “optimism is cruel when it takes shape as an affectively stunning double bind: a binding to fantasies that block the satisfaction they offer, and a binding to the promise of optimism as such that the fantasies

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<sup>249</sup> Marcuse (1972) p. 243

<sup>250</sup> Marcuse (1969) p. 23 - 25

have come to represent.”<sup>251</sup> Or, as Ahmed puts it, “The promise of happiness takes this form: that if you have this or have that or do this or do that, then happiness is what follows.”<sup>252</sup>

Notably, Marcuse’s call for a new sensibility, in response to these epistemic obstacles, becomes a praxis by which the individual takes freedom to be a biological necessity. This is a mode of store consciousness wherein one experiences the world in ways that are incapable of tolerating surplus repression and demands no other forms of repression other than that required for the “amelioration of life.”<sup>253</sup> Marcuse’s new sensibility is, in this way, a call for a new form of experiential expression via our compulsory moral perceptions of occurrent experience and requires a renovation and cultivation of a new, life affirming, form of store consciousness. That is, it requires a revision and reinvestment into the praxis of cultivating life affirming sense-abilities.

### 3.6 Conclusion: Marcuse’s New Sensibility and Buddhist Ethical Concepts

As a last takeaway, I would like to suggest that the dimensions of a new sensibility cultivated within a Marcusean version of Affect Theory and informed by Buddhist philosophy must adopt and cultivate positive dispositions to at least three Buddhist philosophical concepts.<sup>254</sup> This new sensibility requires us to cultivate a store consciousness which emphasizes (1) the dependent origination/interdependent co-arising of our world, (2) the existence of dukkha and excess dukkha in our world, and (3) the

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<sup>251</sup> Berlant p. 51

<sup>252</sup> Ahmed, p. 41

<sup>253</sup> Marcuse (1969) p. 28

<sup>254</sup> (1) comes primarily from the Mahāyāna school, whereas the others are found in various forms in multiple Buddhist traditions.

essential role of compassion as an affect and way of thinking in the understanding of (1) and alleviation of excess dukkha.

To the first point, (1) articulates a new sensibility which acknowledges that the world is fundamentally relational and that one antinomy of action is that the world comes to be through the collective action of individuals together. We arise together and create the world we live in as a collective activity. A new sensibility which acknowledges (1) adopts a life-affirming affect towards the interest of individuals which make up a collective because, as the Dalai Lama writes, “it is in everyone’s interest to do what leads to happiness and avoid that which leads to suffering. And because, as we have seen, our interests are inextricably linked, we are compelled to accept ethics as an indispensable interface between my desire to be happy and yours.”<sup>255</sup>

To the second and third points, (2) seems clearly supported by current times. Suffering exists and there is excess suffering both in the form of physical suffering and in the surplus repression of the psyche to adopt forms of cruel optimism and dispositions of happiness towards harmful behaviors. (3) seems to articulate at least one affective force or personal affect which can grant epistemic access to identifying, via moral perception, the various forms of excess dukkha (physical or repressive). As an expression of Eros, the life drive, compassion can manifest either as self-love or the love of others. In this way, compassion articulates an essential tool for capturing unhappy affects and to intensify one’s motivational force to change the conditions which create such sufferings.

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<sup>255</sup> Lama, p. 47

Relatedly, Ahmed writes, “I think it is the very exposure of these unhappy effects [perhaps by the feminist killjoy] that is affirmative, that gives us an alternative set of imaginings of what might count as a good or better life. If injustice does have unhappy affects, then the story does not end there.... we might want to reread melancholic subjects, the ones who refuse to let go of suffering, who are even prepared to kill some forms of joy, as an alternative model of the social good.”<sup>256</sup> As I interpret this passage, it seems that through an expression of enlightened compassion, a sustained engagement with the suffering of others and ourselves, we can wrestle with sources of excess suffering in the world in order to open up the possibility for liberation. By refusing to accommodate or identify with systems of oppression, perhaps by refusing to express our compassion in ways prescribed by those systems, we can reject those systems and express compassion towards people in those systems. In this respect, I take being a Killjoy to be an act of intense compassion which acknowledges humanization and liberation over brutalization and domination.

I take what has been presented here as the beginning of a process by which we can start to use the notion of the epistemic subject as a duality, as embodied and cerebral, to the advantage of social justice efforts because DC makes explicit the unfreedom of moral perception. This unfreedom must be addressed if we are to overcome the oppressive way our current society, and its members, facilitates false moral perceptions which take oppressive forms of life to be life affirming. Embodied affects and ways of thinking must not always serve the ends of neoliberal capitalist sensibilities. Rather, cultivating enlightened seeds of compassion, recognizing surplus dukkha in its physical and repressive

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<sup>256</sup> Ahmed p. 50

forms, and coming to see the deeply intersubjective nature of our existence can begin to shape one's store consciousness to see the world, not just as it is, but as it could be. Moral perceptions prompted from this position could be truly liberating.

Yet, how we respond to immediate experience may be prone to hegemony if we do not exercise a healthy amount of skepticism about our moral perceptions of occurrent experience because they are compulsory forms of knowing. In this way, there is hope because we do seem to have the capacity to influence our store consciousness by seeking out experiences and practicing ways of thinking which emphasize humanization and liberation over brutalization and domination. This capacity is the cornerstone to expressing our freedoms during immediate experience. To see suffering, to see its source, and to see the path to liberation we must begin by acknowledging that our immediate moral perceptions of the world are expressions of our unfreedom.

## CHAPTER 4. MORAL BLINDNESS AND MORAL REASONS

### 4.1 Introduction

The ability to access moral reasons during an encounter with an ethically pertinent moment is an essential dimension of moral living by virtue of its impact on our ethical reasoning. Without reliable access to moral reasons, a subject navigates immediate ethical situations with neither sign nor signal to act in ways which meet the demands of morality, whatever those demands turn out to be.<sup>257</sup> Accessing reasons for moral actions in immediate experience is essential to our existence as moral agents and, thereby, it should be troubling to us when we encounter those who seem incapable of accessing reasons for moral action in situations laden with oppressive potential. In a world where colonialism, racism, sexism, patriarchy, and other immoral social structures have resulted in an oppressive reality for many and where others invalidate or overlook reasons to repair those conditions, we should ask: what enables or maintains a subject's immediate insensitivity to those moral reasons which motivate humanization and liberation as antidotes to brutalization and domination?

In what follows, I investigate how socialization shapes subjective moral ignorances and thereby undermines a person's' ability to access (i.e., epistemically grasp) moral reasons in immediate perceptual experience. I argue that oppressive modes of socialization enable the cultivation of moral ignorance regarding the dignity and suffering of the other or self. That is, oppressive socialization coerces subjects to internalize normative expectations about the social world which causes pathological blindness to reasons (i.e., it

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<sup>257</sup> I'm inclined to think that freedom, recognition, and the preservation of dignity are *prima facie* reasonable concepts for determining some metric for normative ethics, but I will leave any justification for this view for a later project.

causes moral blindness) consequently threatening a subject's autonomy. In making this argument, I unpack and defend the epistemic foundation supporting relational views of autonomy. Given this, I end by suggesting that a fundamental reorientation of ourselves to the world's moral dimensions becomes imperative if we are to reliably access moral reasons during our immediate experiences of the world, reasons which motivate us to follow through on our obligations to others *and* foster conditions hospitable to moral autonomy.

#### 4.2 Immediate Experiences, Moral Reasons, and Autonomy

Under some accounts of autonomy, one is autonomous if and only if one's actions are self-regulated and where one chooses in accordance with the demands of reason by means of a self-driven deliberative procedure. This family of views are referred to as proceduralist views of autonomy. We have, among many others, Kant and, more recently, Gerald Dworkin to thank for this model of autonomy. Models of this kind stress the importance of self-reflection and procedural independence from coercive manipulation during choice-making processes in assessing the autonomous status of an agent. Dworkin (1989) adopts this view because, he claims, it ensures that the assessment of one's autonomy is independent from conceptions of value.<sup>258</sup>

It is worth noting that such views are often silent on what reasons are available to the agent during deliberation, relying on standards like competency or the authenticity of the held belief to define the subject's relationship to the epistemic environment.<sup>259</sup> As a

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<sup>258</sup> Dworkin, G. (1981), "The Concept of Autonomy", *Grazer Philosophische Studien*, Vol. 12/13, Retrieved from: <https://philpapers.org/go.pl?id=DWOTCO&proxyId=5443&u=http%3A%2F%2Fdx.doi.org%2F10.5840%2Fgps198112%2F1333>

<sup>259</sup> Christman, J. (2018), "Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/autonomy-moral/>.

result, those in heavily oppressive social situations who are competent thinkers that genuinely hold some set of beliefs can be described as adequately deliberating within the boundaries of those beliefs and thereby be referred to as autonomous agents. However, this idealization of autonomy as a socially-isolated procedural activity is problematic for reasons that Charles Mills brought to our attention during his critique of ideal ethical theories. They are “in crucial respects obfuscatory, and can indeed be thought of as in part ideological, in the pejorative sense of a set of group ideas that reflect, and contribute to perpetuating, illicit group privilege.”<sup>260</sup> As a result, proceduralist views seemed prone to overlook an essential component to autonomous living: those lived conditions which make autonomy possible in the first place. After all, as Axel Honneth points out, recognition in the form of acknowledged social, legal, and material needs is a precondition for the possibility of autonomy.<sup>261</sup> Procedural views of the concept often overlook the interdependent nature of our epistemic faculties in favor of idealizing our capacity for independent thinking by minimizing the impact of socialization and life’s experience on one’s agential existence. These views pull the subject out of their lived conditions and, in doing so, rob us of appreciating the fact that autonomy is practiced within lived contexts, often within a world shaped by an ideology of domination.<sup>262</sup>

In contrast, works by bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, or Paul Benson’s “Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization” challenge this perspective by addressing issues related to what reasons are available to an agent.<sup>263</sup> These kind of views support self-reflection and procedural independence but also argue for some kind of substantive interdependence

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<sup>260</sup> Mills, C. “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Summer 2005), pp. 165-84

<sup>261</sup> Honneth, A. (2014). *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition*. Hoboken: Wiley.

<sup>262</sup> This is a claim well documented in work by bell hooks and supported by Patricia Hill Collin’s work on webs of domination.

<sup>263</sup> Benson, Paul “Autonomy and Oppressive Socialization” *Social Theory and Practice* Vol. 17, No. 3 (Fall 1991) See also,



condition in their views on autonomy; these are relational views of autonomy.<sup>264</sup> Using Benson's work as an example, relational views challenge proceduralist views utilizing the following kind of observation:

“In some prominent cases, the general means by which oppressive socialization operates are no different than those which benign socialization takes effect. This indicates that the role of critical reflection in the will of agents whose autonomy is diminished could be largely the same as its role in the wills of those who enjoy greater autonomy. If this is true, then the sensitivity of conduct to critical reflection cannot be the sole determinant of autonomy.”<sup>265</sup>

The point is, simply put, that it is dubious for us to claim that two agents (A and B) are both autonomous when A and B are equal in their critical reflective capacity but have disparate access to reasons in an epistemic environment shaped by oppressive structures. This is to suggest that cages of oppression create striations in the environment which serve as autonomy-limiting boundaries for epistemic agents. For example, imagine that Jack and Pat work at a machine shop. Jack, a white male with a modest socioeconomic upbringing, wakes up one morning with a moderate headache. He decides to take a sick day because, upon reflection, he realizes he has an abundance of sick days, he can stay home today without expecting much decline in his social capital at work, and so on. Given the two options, work or stay home, he decides to stay home because the immediate reasons in his experience for doing so are evidently more persuasive inasmuch as he sees few reasons to reject the belief that sick days are to be used for self-care. He takes his headache experience to contain reasons to stay home that outweigh his non-experiential immediate reasons for going to work.

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<sup>264</sup> Christman (2018)

<sup>265</sup> Benson, pp. 385-408

In contrast, Pat, a white female from a modest socioeconomic upbringing, wakes up with a moderate headache. She is also aware that she has an abundance of sick days, that she could stay home today without expecting much decline in her social capital at work, and so on. Yet, she also believes, unlike Jack, that taking a sick day in this case would be a selfish expression of self-care. This last idea, that “self-care is self-indulgence”, is itself a socialized feature of Pat’s epistemic life and it has immediate justificatory import on her experience of her headache. It shapes the immediate experience she is having of her headache in such a way that devalues its importance when compared to those non-experiential reasons (i.e., those propositional reasons) to go to work. As a result, she goes to work. We should take note that Pat possesses the same critically reflective capacities as Jack, she is responsive to the demands of reason, and is deliberately competent, but nonetheless chooses to go to work because she takes self-care to be self-indulgence rather than an act of self-preservation. At first glance, Pat’s socialization undercuts her capacity to access or appreciate immediate reasons which prompt her to experience the need for self-care as justificatorially immediate moral evidence for taking care of one’s self.<sup>266</sup> Pat, under a relational view of autonomy, would be said to deploy her agency utilizing a limited exercise of autonomy whereas Jack seemingly enjoys a wider kind of autonomy. In contrast, under a proceduralist view, both Pat and Jack would be considered fully autonomous agents.

As used here, socialization should be understood as an epistemic process which motivates an agent to internalize some set of social sensibilities, or norms, so that these standards become an essential part of how that person encounters and interprets themselves

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<sup>266</sup> As Audre Lorde puts it in *A Burst of Light*, “Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

and the world. Focusing on appearance narratives for women, Benson observes that this “is why socialization of feminine appearance does not rely solely upon [explicit] coercion for its effectiveness.”<sup>267</sup> Benson rightly points out that a feature of oppressive socialization is that it indoctrinates targets to believe in *false standards* to the detriment of their epistemic worldview. Referencing cases of personal adornment, he writes “It is not true that feminine appearance is a necessary ingredient of a woman’s personal worth.”<sup>268</sup> Oppressive forms of socialization can systematically lead agents to “misconstrue many of the reasons there are for them to act” and, Benson claims, this operates to impair autonomy.<sup>269</sup> Put simply, it undermines autonomy because it undercuts the agent’s ability to see the self-evident force of reasons to act in morally salient ways, as seeing some reason as an efficaciously immediate justified reason-for-them.

It is worth observing that socialization inscribes epistemic sensitivities into the subject by means of life’s experiences. Life’s events sculpt our epistemic sensitivities by providing definition to our affective dispositions, habits of thought, and shaping our beliefs. These epistemic foundations are used to render our immediate experiences intelligible thereby materializing a set of reasons for the agent. Benson echoes this observation in the following passage,

“... feminine socialization gains much of its power by operating to deceive many women about the significance that cultivating an appearance which pleases men has for women’s worth as persons. Women’s autonomy is reduced to the extent that they are socially trained to be blind to the reasons there are for them to regard their appearance differently from the norms of femininity recommended. But, by the same token, men who develop their gender

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<sup>267</sup> Benson, p. 387

<sup>268</sup> Benson, p. 388

<sup>269</sup> Benson, p. 389

identity in societies that oppressively socialize women are also liable to be blinded systematically to important reasons there are for them to treat women different.”<sup>270</sup>

While Benson makes no claim about the perceptual nature of these reasons, I argue in other pieces that access to reasons in immediate perceptual experience is shaped by forces of socialization. As such, “to have access to moral reasons” signaling one to act in some morally demanding way, in my view, is an activity fueled by immediate moral perceptual experience (i.e., the moral perceptual experientialist view). However, if one takes immediate moral reasons to be judgements of morally neutral perceptual experience, then to have access to such reasons would be a function of one’s ability to infer, automatically or deliberately, moral judgements from morally neutral perceptual content (i.e., the moral perceptual judgementalist view). While I write from the experientialist perspective moving forward, I suspect that the judgementalist can read what follows as compatible with their views. However, the sense in which I claim later that one becomes *morally blind* to reasons in the experientialist view is itself not a metaphor as it would be in the judgementalist view. I will return to this later.

It is worth noting that there is something fundamentally disturbing about cases where there are reasons to do X in the world (say to treat women with respect) and an agent is experientially cut off from that reason as a reason-for-them (i.e., where it is encountered as having immediate self-evident justification for responding X-ly) in either the affective or cognitive sense. In cases relevant to this project, the disturbing nature of this scenario is seemingly a function of oppressive socialization’s propensity to systematically blind people to *important* reasons to act in certain ways.

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<sup>270</sup> Benson, p. 403. It is important to note here that Benson is not claiming that men and women are equally oppressed under patriarchy. He makes this explicit in the paragraphs that follow this point.

Salient moral reasons for acting X-ly may include the dignity of persons, the pain of others, thick evaluative content associated with certain terms like Courage or Violence, the future possibility of a more just world, or some other property presumably present during our engagements with the lived world. Regardless of kind, the opaqueness or absence of reasons in one's experience appears to correlate with how our epistemic sensitivities are fundamentally shaped by our rational habits, affective dispositions, and beliefs (i.e., by our moral perceptual orientation). That is, we come to make sense of our reality and this can, in cases where oppressive socialization occurs, limit or warp the set of immediate moral reasons available to us when making decisions. It is for this reason that Benson argues that oppressive socialization leads to a systematic undermining of autonomy in the relational sense of the concept.

That said, the goal of this section is not to produce a hard and fast defense of relational autonomy. The purpose of this interlude is to motivate our interest in the fundamental relationship between our ability to access moral reasons, ethical life, and socialization. Instead, this paper is intended to provide a framework for understanding the kind of phenomenon which often motivates relational views of autonomy. The aim is to provide a framework for understanding the moral epistemological foundations underlying relational views of autonomy. This should make clear why it is dubious to claim that two agents (A and B) are both autonomous when A and B are equal in their critical reflective capacity but have disparate access to reasons in the epistemic environment due to oppressive conditions that result in a shifting of the perceived experiential landscape. In this sense, to have disparate access to reasons means that A and B will have different access to reasons in the epistemic landscape because of one's access-enabling epistemic position

(i.e., one informed by an access-granting lived experience, bit of knowledge, affective disposition, and so on as argued by Patricia Hill Collin's postmodern yet intersectional articulation of standpoint epistemology) and the other's access-disabling position (i.e., an access-undermining lived experience, bit of knowledge, affective disposition, and so on). I develop this framework in what follows by first developing a conception of moral ignorance and then arguing that moral blindness to reasons is the result of oppressive socialization's capacity to construct modes of subjectivity marked by moral ignorance. Moral blindness is, at its core, a pathology spread by modes of socialization which perpetrate an ideology of domination through the reinforcement and replication of a society's webs of domination.

#### 4.3 Models of Ignorance

Linda Martin Alcoff describes models of ignorance as giving an account of “a type of subjectivity that forms patterns of perceptual attentiveness and supplies belief-influencing premises” which give the subject an incomplete account of reality.<sup>271</sup> Given this, any epistemology of ignorance should be understood as articulating a way of epistemically encountering the world that creates selectivities and blind spots in a subject's epistemic life by limiting their access to reasons. An epistemic agent should be considered ignorant if her/his cognitive or affective habits or beliefs are inadequate to access some area of inquiry; I refer to this model of ignorance as the **cognitive model of ignorance (CMI)**. *Moral ignorance in this model is a kind of subjectivity that results from articulated patterns of affective attunements, beliefs, and cognitive heuristics which manifest selectivities and blind spots in a subject's epistemic encounter with moral reasons in the*

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<sup>271</sup> Alcoff 2007, p. 47

*world*. Under CMI, an agent's morally articulated patterns of affective attunements, beliefs, and cognitive heuristics comprise what I call one's epistemic toolkit because they shape our encounter with the world. Thus, to be morally ignorant is to possess an epistemic toolkit that supports a lived subjectivity which effectively blinds a person to certain reasons in the moral landscape.

CMI is preferable to alternative views of ignorance for a few reasons. **Knowledge-dependent ignorance views**, like that articulated by Code (1993 & 1995), claim that an ignorant agent is described as such when he/she lacks the *knowledge* required to accurately access some area of inquiry. The white male subject is seen as epistemically hindered from or incapable of knowing about lived experiences associated with patriarchal or racial oppression, as areas of inquiry, because he is the benefactor of those systems. He lacks knowledge of the negative consequences of his privileged systems and thereby he does not gain access to their oppressive structures. Under this model, this lack of knowledge results in a lack of access to an important set of available reasons for action.

Clearly, a person cannot be justifiably said to have access to the quale of others or to say that one knows the lived experiences of others.<sup>272</sup> However, it does not follow from this that the socially privileged are incapable of coming to learn (i.e., acquire knowledge of) things about the experiences of oppressed peoples. To claim otherwise is untenable because such a position ignores the human capacity for empathic imagination, sympathetic understanding, and narrative sharing. Granted, access may be more difficult, but it is not *prima facie* denied to the socially privileged. It is conceivable that one could couple a

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<sup>272</sup> To illustrate, consider the unsound epistemic claim that a white male can *know* what it is like to be a black woman. At base, this is epistemically impossible if we expect him to understand the everyday lived subjective experience of her life. To demand as much would be epistemically irresponsible while also putting her subjectivity under erasure.

sustained empathic engagement with the scholarly or narrative projects (i.e., such as showing up in support of social movements) of marginalized populations in an effort to make strides towards understanding the alienated lives of the oppressed, to see oppressive conditions/structures as a moral failure of our society, and to take steps to change society or oneself based on that knowledge. Projects like Cherríe Moraga's and Gloria E. Anzaldúa's *The Bridge Called my Back* or Mishuana Goeman's *Mark my Words* are prime examples of resources available for such undertakings. Yet, such efforts are believed to be ineffective under the knowledge-dependent view. Thus, I take this view to be unattractive because it claims that one is epistemically cut off from more things than is the case.

Alternatively, **experience-dependent ignorance views** claim that one's social group identity is epistemically omnirelevant across contexts because identity defines one's epistemic standpoint. This model is often attributed to Sandra Harding (1991) and is characterized by the idea that social identity just is the driving force behind our epistemic lives. The ignorant agent here is defined as such when she/he possesses an underprivileged set of *experiences* towards some target of inquiry thereby limiting one's access to reasons for action. Rather than lacking some knowledge set, the subject experientially acquires ways of thinking or affective dispositions. As a result, "epistemic advantages and disadvantages accrue to social and group identities per se rather than to identities only in relation to a given context of inquiry."<sup>273</sup>

However, this model too closely entertains a version of epistemic identity essentialism. In this view, a subject is going to be beholden to a set of rigid expectations across contexts. In this way, a social identity becomes essential to the subject in the

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<sup>273</sup> Alcoff 2007, p. 45-46



epistemic sense because it has become a defining feature of how that person experiences the world regardless of context. This is problematic because it ignores the intersectional nature of human ontology. That is, it takes the socially identified subject as ontologically limited to one or two social positions and puts any deeper sense of subjectivity under erasure. The black body is essentially black, the female body is essentially female, and the black female body is essentially black and female in every context. Yet, a black female's public identification as a female can be more predominant in the formation of her experiences with black men and her identity as black can do the same for her experiences in white communities. Her experiences are not constituted the same way in all contexts, and the constellation of her formative social identities will be both dynamic over time and from context to context. The experience-dependent view problematically flirts with the possibility that the subject is epistemically cut off from certain knowledge because of a reductionary social ontology. This is problematic because it does not account for how shifting spaces and contexts impact lived experience or relationally constructed subjectivity.

In contrast, CMI's strengths are, in my assessment, fourfold. First, it gives an account of an epistemic standpoint as a function of socialization in the performative standards for socially constructed identities in various contexts thereby recognizing the intersectional nature of human ontology. Second, it acknowledges that those standards are accidental across contexts thereby granting that individuals maintain a sense of individual subjectivity in the larger scheme of a publicly assigned identity. Third, CMI theorizes that ignorance is a pervasive yet resolvable feature of human existence in many cases because every person, to some degree, inhabits an intersectional epistemic standpoint. Yet, CMI

also allows for the possibility of overcoming said ignorance if one commits to reshaping one's patterns of affective attentiveness, ways of thinking, and belief-influencing premises.

It is worth noting that CMI inherits its sense of subjectivity and consciousness from Hegel, Marx, and, in the contemporary sense, Patricia Hill Collins. Marx's *The German Ideology* proposes a kind of subjectivity wherein "Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life... [individuals] developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking."<sup>274</sup> As a claim about the epistemic structure of the human subject and the order of our world, Marx's life creating consciousness foreshadows the Hegelian-style work of György Lukács 1968 *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács points out that the position of the proletariat in society and history formulates a standpoint, a node of lived experience, which grants that population a kind of view from below. The view from below allows for enhanced epistemic access to certain features of the social world; features which go unseen and are perhaps difficult to see by the epistemically disadvantaged bourgeois who were said to be imprisoned in a kind of warped immediacy.<sup>275</sup> The bourgeois, in an uncritical and epistemically docile state, systematically lack access to reasons that are accessible to the exploited proletariat.

Patricia Hill Collins continues this line of reasoning in the development of her views on black feminist epistemology. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins synthesizes feminist standpoint theory with post-structuralism in an effort to articulate, among other things, a centrality thesis: that scholars from marginalized populations must be the core

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<sup>274</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01a.htm>

<sup>275</sup> Hegel's master and slave dialectic makes these same claims about the epistemic status of the master being more limited than the slave, who is still toiling with the world and its possibilities.

contributors to identity-based knowledges. Black feminist thought must be informed by black feminists because that population is epistemically sensitive to the lived experience of the black woman due to the fact that they have the right epistemic toolkits for the task. Experiential centrality, thereby, reveals structures in the lived world which are opaque, but not inaccessible, to others. What is more, Collins's theoretical framework does not mix and stir identity categories in the development of an epistemic standpoint. Rather, standpoints become historically and structurally shaped by larger social narratives, heuristics, and by a subject's lived experiences. Thus, epistemic standpoints are cultivated by the web of power relationships and one's experiences articulate positions for understanding the lived world while not invalidating other standpoints as lacking access to the features of that world.<sup>276</sup> Instead, the subject's epistemic access to the world is always partial and always shaped by, but not wholly determined by, the lived experiences of the subject's identity.

It is also worth noting that, as a theory of cognition, CMI echoes Miranda Fricker's views in *Epistemic Injustice*. She writes "the virtuous agent's perceptual capacity is accounted for in terms of a sensitivity to morally salient features of the situation confronting him."<sup>277</sup> She goes on to say that this "sensitivity is underwritten by a set of background assumptions about the trustworthiness of different social types in different sorts of context."<sup>278</sup> Admittedly, Fricker's major focus in *Epistemic Injustice* is the epistemology of testimony. However, she is also giving a description of the epistemic role heuristics can play in an agent's cognition of the world. Fricker argues that the epistemic differences between the racist hearer's rejection of and the non-racist hearer's acceptance

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<sup>276</sup> Collins, p. 292

<sup>277</sup> Fricker, p.72

<sup>278</sup> Fricker, p.72

of testimony given by racially identified subjects follow from the heuristics developed throughout one's life. These heuristics create a cognitive framework which guides our sense of value in the world and, thereby, leads us to experience the world as a canvas of values and moral impressions. Similarly, Margaret Olivia Little's feminist moral epistemology (1995 & 1997) claims that the virtuously attuned agent possesses knowledge of the moral terrain as a conception of how to live. She rightly claims that the characteristic difference between a virtuous and non-virtuous person's cognitive state is that the former has this sort of broad conception whereas the latter does not. This means that the moral landscape, as a space of reasons for action, is cognitively different for the virtuous and non-virtuous person as a feature of each's cognitive states. Little's epistemic project engages itself with the notion that one's character states impact the way one experiences the world. Taken together, Fricker and Little both hold that two subjects with two different sets of background beliefs or affective dispositions regarding moral value will invariably come to understand the same experiences as containing different moral content. CMI holds the same.

#### 4.4 Moral Ignorance and Moral Blindness

Charles W. Mills argues that white ignorance manifests under certain conditions where the dominant social group of whiteness has a positive interest in seeing the world inaccurately. In my language, a dominant social group has a positive interest in preserving a social advantage which correlates with a positive interest in encountering certain privilege-preserving reasons in the world rather than privilege-dismantling reasons. Mills's view, articulated by means of CMI, proposes an account of ignorance where the material existence of the white subject shapes the very form of his/her consciousness. Mills's

account of white ignorance is an archetypal example of how one might utilize CMI to interpret the epistemic resistance displayed by the socially privileged. He shows us how a subjectivity sculpted by ignorance challenges the intuition that we always have an overriding invested interest in seeing the world as it is or in seeing every salient reason in the moral landscape.

His account of white ignorance also supports the claim that ignorance is not always willful. One's epistemic toolkit does not always contain willfully selected contents but rather it carries historized content which often conforms to a social structure whose effective project is to reinforce domains of ignorance in the subject -- Mills's focus being racial constructions of ignorance.<sup>279</sup> Ideology, so conceived as the superstructural region of society, assembles the cognitive framework of the agent in a socialization process thereby reinforcing self-policing behaviors, affective attunements, and thinking habits in conformity with the dominant ideology. Ideologies themselves "have a materialist genealogy and can be explained in terms of people's "historical life-process."<sup>280</sup>

As such, Mills rightfully claims that white ignorance is an epistemic practice which systematically shapes an agent's experience of reality. It does so to the extent that structures of white supremacism prescribe "an epistemology of ignorance [as] a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions producing the ironic outcome that whites will, in general, be unable to understand the world they themselves have made."<sup>281</sup> Stated in terms of CMI, white subjects have maintained and adopted an ideology of domination which systematically shapes one's epistemic toolkit in ways which pathologically

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<sup>279</sup> Mills 2007, p. 20

<sup>280</sup> Mills 2003, p. 16

<sup>281</sup> Mills 1997, p. 18

undercuts the white subject's access a swath of reasons in the moral landscape. As a result, the privileged white subject often faces a potent insensitivity to aspects of the world as experienced by the oppressed; all done seemingly for the sake of preserving social advantage or priority. He concludes that those infected by white ignorance<sup>282</sup> will come to live in a "racial fantasyland" wherein ignorance is the "cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement."<sup>283</sup> These agents will thereby come to see meritocracy as the prevailing law of the land even though there exists overwhelming evidence showing that certain classes of the population are systematically underprivileged and oppressed categorically by race, class, gender or sexuality.

As a result, the truths articulated by these lived realities of the oppressed *are not accessible reasons, observations that call for action or knowledge acquisition, for those plagued by systemic forms of ignorance*. As Mills describes it in *The Racial Contract*, one's cognitive model can distort reality in virtue of its historically generated content. He writes, "concepts orient us to the world, and it is a rare individual who can resist this inherited orientation. Once established in the social mindset, its influence is difficult to escape, since it is not a matter of seeing the phenomenon with the concept discretely attached but rather of seeing things through the concept itself."<sup>284</sup> And this is the central concern of this paper, understanding what it is like to see things through our moral conceptions as rendered by our background beliefs and affective dispositions.

Abstracting from Mills's example, those peoples who operate under a species of ignorance so defined by CMI, be it white, male, or heteronormative ignorance, continue do

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<sup>282</sup> Mills himself claims that this infection isn't limited to the white population and I expect that he would say the same about forms of Male Ignorance and Heterosexual Ignorance.

<sup>283</sup> Mills 1997, p. 18-19

<sup>284</sup> Mills 1995, p. 27

so because they (1) believe in the dominant view about the general nature of society that represents basic forms of oppression and exploitation as basically just and (2) they possess beliefs, cognitive heuristics, or affective sensitivity (i.e., an epistemic toolkit) which resists countervailing evidence to their beliefs about this dominant view.<sup>285</sup> Stated otherwise, they possess an epistemic toolkit prone to self-preservation of personal advantage by means of perpetuating some form of ignorance. They are attached to this perspective of the world and preserve that perspective for existential-preserving reasons. To reiterate, there is an invested interest by those whose reasoning and affective dispositions align with CMI to stay ignorant because it preserves their worldview. In these cases, we can see that people either want “not to know” or are compulsory moved “not to know” even if they are not, strictly speaking, willfully ignorant.<sup>286</sup>

Now, it should be noted that Mills goes on to say the following: “I want a concept of white ignorance broad enough to include moral ignorance -- not merely ignorance of facts with moral implications but moral non-knowings, incorrect judgments about the rights and wrongs of moral situations themselves.”<sup>287</sup> However, it is unclear as to whether moral ignorance is a broader category than white ignorance or vice versa for Mills. I suggest that moral ignorance provides the ground by which a subject can sustain a multiplicity of ignorances. That is, moral ignorance is distinct from and required for other forms of ignorance.

This seems correct given that CMI structurally points to the acquisition of deficient moral affects, beliefs, or reasoning habits in one’s an epistemic toolkit as a precondition

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<sup>285</sup> Alcoff 2007, p. 48

<sup>286</sup> Alcoff goes on to claim that this kind of unwilful ignorance is a side effect of what Horkheimer calls the *Eclipse of Reason*. We might also see this as a kind of unwilful ignorance caused by what Marcuse would call *one-dimensional thinking*.

<sup>287</sup> Mills 2007, p. 22

for the possibility of identity-based ignorances like white ignorance. Such deficiencies manifest as *false standards* in one's epistemic toolkit for making sense of experience. These can be *false beliefs* regarding the dignity of persons (e.g., taking someone to lack personhood), *false ways of thinking* about the other or self (e.g., heuristics which impose identity credibility deficits), *false affective responses* to the suffering of others (e.g., feeling positively attracted to oppression perpetuating violence), *false beliefs* regarding the existence of rigid social performative expectations (e.g., women must be submissive to be attractive), and so on. Briefly put, where an epistemic toolkit preserves practices of brutalization and domination over humanization and liberation, we should expect to find some morally deficient tools for accessing salient reasons in the moral landscape. Additionally, we should also be cautious of epistemic toolkits which enforce a pathological one-dimensional form of consciousness, one unwilling to acknowledge any internal contradictions in an epistemic toolkit and motivated by an existential attachment to one's perspective of the lived world.

To be clear, I am claiming that if you suffer from white ignorance, then you suffer from moral ignorance. Moral ignorance makes possible other forms of ignorance, white or otherwise. Again, *moral ignorance is a kind of subjectivity that results from morally articulated patterns of affective attunements and moral belief-influencing heuristics which manifest selectivities and blind spots in a subject's encounter with moral reasons in the world.* According to CMI, a subject's encounter with the world and its moral dimensions is a function of our consciousness's articulation of those experiences by use of our epistemic toolkit. This process reveals or conceals reasons for action in the experientially



immediate sense and involves affect attunements, beliefs, and ways of thinking (i.e. rational habits and heuristics).

Kant famously argued that perceptions without concepts are blind. I am inclined to propose further that moral perceptions without concepts are blind, but **also** that moral perceptions with concepts can blind. This turn of phrase succinctly articulates the idea that moral beliefs, affects, and habits of thought in our epistemic toolkit serve as the cognitive scaffolding by which one's understanding renders experiences intelligible. The view of the epistemic subject which grounds my observations about moral ignorance amounts to the claim that between the perceiver and the perceived exists epistemic mechanisms which render our encounters with the world into coherent experiences, thereby revealing reasons to the epistemic subject. The unmediated "given" would be an incomprehensible bloom and buzzing confusion without the various aggregates within our epistemic toolkit. Mills seems to make a similar observation in "White Ignorance" where he writes "perceptions are in general simultaneously conceptions, if only at a very low level."<sup>288</sup>

To summarize, our epistemic toolkit facilitates our understanding of the world thereby allowing our experiences to become intelligible. With this epistemic framework in mind, we would expect to find and do find, that those who possess epistemically disabling toolkits (i.e., one which is access-undermining) will possess a kind of morally warped experience of the world.<sup>289</sup> Mills's work on white ignorance gestures at this general phenomenon and ultimately concludes that the conceptual package associated with white

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<sup>288</sup> Mills 2007, p. 24

<sup>289</sup> Please note, the phrase "perception of the world" shares conceptual similarities with "experience of the world" in this literature. As such, Mills and others use the term here in such a way that it is reasonable to see perception being used in a metaphorical sense to gesture towards the experience of perceptual content rather than brute sensory experience. However, for now, I will remain agnostic as to whether Mills and other CMI users are offering a theory of perception.

supremacy “is driving the perception, with whites aprioristically intent on denying what is before them.”<sup>290</sup> CMI and socialization’s epistemic impact shows us how a systematic moral blindness is functionally connected to an agent's propensity for moral ignorance. That is, our epistemic toolkit blocks our coming to see certain reasons in the moral landscape and this inability to see is moral blindness, something too often maintained by an existential attachment to seeing a world as familiar.<sup>291</sup>

A provocative consequence of this line of reasoning suggests that racist, sexist, oppressive gendered content, and so on in one’s epistemic toolkit results in a kind of false consciousness.<sup>292</sup> There exists some kind of illusory experience of reality in virtue of one’s moral blindness: one’s inability to encounter some set of reasons in the moral landscape. If we define an illusion as those occurrences where one experiences the world not as it is, then we should expect a reality warping and access-undermining epistemic toolkit to consistently result in an epistemic agent viewing the world falsely because they are experiencing it not as it is. Given this, I take it to be less contentious to claim that the agent plagued by oppressive ideologies suffers from a kind of massive illusion or even a kind of hallucination about the world because he/she already suffers from a morally deficient or impaired epistemic toolkit, something Mills articulates as experiencing a “fantasyland.” If one is morally blind to some set of reasons, then one is morally ignorant and if one is morally ignorant then one’s epistemic toolkit systematically articulates a false consciousness about the moral landscape. As a result, one suffers from a moral illusion caused by moral blindness under a subjectivity of moral ignorance.

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<sup>290</sup> Mills 2007, p. 24

<sup>291</sup> Mills 2007, p. 27

<sup>292</sup> “False consciousness” here amounts to a false view of the world in the Buddhist sense or, as Ahmed (2017, p. 62) puts it “we use this term to show how there is something false about our consciousness of the world.”

The claim here is that any form of ignorance which follows the CMI model, be it white or male or heterosexual or other ignorances, is a symptomatic manifestation of a deeper, more basic, form of moral ignorance. To drive this point home, one should note that Mill's's notion of white ignorance is categorized by two features: First, a belief in the dominant view about the general nature of society that represents basic forms of oppression and exploitation as basically just and, second, a possession of cognitive norms by which to resist countervailing evidence to their beliefs about this dominant view. I am merely pointing out that adopting the dominant view about the general nature of society just means to adopt a certain ideology. If one thinks in cognitive models of white ignorance, then one takes up some ideology by virtue of having adopted certain moral commitments in one's epistemic toolkit. For example, if one affirms "all are created equal" as a deeply held identity forming moral commitment at the expense of countervailing evidence in the real world (as one does when infected by white ignorance) then one must also lack further moral considerations towards the other and their dignity as persons with lived-experiences in favor of a kind of one-dimensional and morally false consciousness. One can singularly commit themselves to the dominant ideology that people are created equal and, thereby, conscious experience warps to fit this attitude because of a moral ignorance about our obligations to acknowledge the lived experiences of others on their terms. Moreover, critical engagement with the world, under an oppressive socialization scheme, becomes whittled down in favor of a dogmatist approach which feeds a vicious circle of self-reinforcement because we experience the world the way we take it to be. For, as Marcuse wrote in *One-Dimensional Man*,

“... the “inner” dimension of the mind in which opposition to the status quo can take root is whittled down. The loss of this dimension, in which the power of negative thinking- the critical power of Reason- is at home, is the ideological counterpart to the very material process in which advanced industrial society silences and reconciles the opposition. *The impact of progress turns Reason into submission to the facts of life, and to the dynamic capability of producing more and bigger facts of the same sort of life...* There is only one dimension, and it is everywhere and, in all forms,... the “false consciousness” of their rationality becomes the true consciousness.”<sup>293</sup>

#### 4.5 Conclusion: The Need for a Fundamental Self-Reorientation Towards Values

The upshot here is that oppressive modes of socialization regularly cause subjects to internalize normative expectations about the social world which, in turn, causes a pathological blindness to moral reasons for liberating action. Interestingly, agents ensnared by access-limiting epistemic toolkits due to oppressive socialization *can still* exercise appropriate proceduralist practices defined by self-regulated and self-directed agency in ways that are both competent and genuine. As Marcuse and Mills points out, the faculties of the subject can assent to the “facts of life” as rendered by an one-dimensional or ignorant way of experiencing the social world. The takeaway is that exercising one’s agency within a social system of values, meanings, and reasonings allows one to make self-directed, self-regulated, genuine, and competent choices *within that system*. As a result, oppressed morally blind subjects are classified as autonomous agents under the proceduralist view of autonomy. One can be autonomous in this sense even though one cannot see beyond what an oppressive system guides one to see.

Yet, this inability to access or the possibility of being cutting off from reasons in the epistemic landscape, especially in the moral landscape, is itself the very phenomenon which relational views of autonomy take as salient to an agent’s autonomy. Authors like

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<sup>293</sup> Marcuse (1964) p. 10-11. Emphasis added

Benson observe that agents can “misconstrue many of the reasons there are for them to act” and the consequence is an impairment to one’s autonomy wherever this occurs as a result of oppressive social structures. It is this link between the social structure and its impact on the individual’s epistemic access by means of socialization which indicates that the relational view of autonomy gets the picture right in these cases. The proceduralist view overlooks this link.

The reader is asked to consider the epistemological relationship between an agent’s judgments, her/his epistemic toolkit, and the space of reasons available to her. General intuitions about illusions suggest that they should be avoided. When walking in a desert, one does not want to see a mirage of an oasis; rather an actual oasis is preferable when making life-saving judgments. The shadow-puppets of Plato’s cave were not real but imperfect imitations of the real and, thus, rejected as sources of knowledge. Descartes’s first meditation articulates a narrative whereby the author is plagued by the possibility that all he experiences is merely an illusion crafted by a malicious demon; an argument that must be resolved for the sake of securing knowledge. Nozick’s famous experience machine suggests to us that the very idea of having a simulated, i.e. illusory, experience just is unpalatable for the very reason that it is not substantially connected to reality in a meaningful way.

However, if these were accurate intuitions about our disposition towards illusions or if veridicality is both epistemologically and psychologically preferable to illusion, then why have so many people failed to cast off the illusory world that has taken up residence in the real? What force keeps race, class, and gender biases on the proverbial table given that they entail a false consciousness of the world? The answer, I submit, is a combination

of moral blindness caused by socialized moral ignorance and one-dimensional thinking. Together, these produce a condition preserved by our existential attachment to our existing worldview.

To be clear, moral ignorance should not be confused with the non-moralist or amoralist position. Where the non-moralist rejects the very idea that morality exists at all and the amoralist acknowledges the existence of moral imperatives but rejects the bindingness of those claims, the agent plagued by moral ignorance can and often does believe in some set of moral principles. The morally ignorant agent may even sincerely aim to live a life according to those principles. However, there are two traits that mark someone as a morally ignorant agent.

The first is that he/she possesses a set of deficient moral beliefs, affective attunements, or habits of reasoning which mirror (in most cases) the kind of domination model of social relationships where there is value found in dominating the other. The morally ignorant agent can claim to have and be dialogically responsive to accurate, albeit vague, moral claims like “people should be treated justly” and “I believe in the American value of freedom.” However, the morally ignorant agent will consistently endorse judgments about particular cases which contradict said beliefs by preserving structures of domination. For example, they may endorse claims like “women just need to work harder to earn better pay” or “black people just need to be less lazy” when confronted with counter-evidence regarding equality in today’s world.

The second trait is the idea that the morally ignorant agent knowingly or unknowingly resists efforts to detect or correct illusion producing aspects of their epistemic toolkit. Where the knowingly ignorant agent resists as an act of active choice, the

unknowingly ignorant agent is plagued by the deeply resistant nature of moral ignorance itself since not knowing is signaled as permissible or where a false moral claim is endorsed as true in the social milieu. Existential threat and personal attachment to their worldview mark this kind of behavior.

Ultimately, as I use the term, the agent plagued by *moral ignorance is one whose overriding but deficient epistemic toolkit informs a false consciousness of the world and who resists any efforts to acknowledge those defects or to reorient oneself*. Taken together, these features entail that the morally ignorant are plagued by a one-dimensional form of thinking. It is to adopt a view of oneself that is simultaneously resistant to modes of thinking differently *but also* a fundamental resistance to changing one's affective attunement to the world. Because of this and because the morally ignorant use a deficient epistemic toolkit to render immediate perceptual experience intelligible, ***the morally ignorant agent is plagued by moral blindness to moral reasons in immediate experiences of morally pertinent situations.***

Moral ignorance and blindness results, in what Marcuse called, a smooth democratic unfreedom because one feels no need to refuse, to be skeptical, about the way one encounters the world. This insight, I believe, informs Marcuse's call for a new sensibility in his *Essay on Liberation*. He writes,

“The new sensibility, which expresses the ascent of the life instincts over aggressiveness and guilt, would foster, on a social scale, the vital need for the abolition of injustice and misery and would shape the further evolution of the “standard of living” ... it emerges in the struggle against violence and exploitation where this struggle waged for essentially new ways and forms of life: the negation of the entire establishment, its morality, culture; affirmation of the right to build a society in which the abolition of poverty and toil terminates in a universe where the sensuous, the playful, the calm, and the beautiful become forms of existence and thereby the *Form* of the society itself.”

From this, we see that the antidote to dehumanization and domination is a new form of perceiving the world, one antithetical to moral blindness. If this is the goal of the ethical life, then the possibility of moral ignorance, and subsequently moral blindness, seemingly places certain moral obligations on the epistemic agent.

Those plagued by moral ignorance are resistant to correcting their defective set of moral categories because they have an invested interest in remaining ignorant; they have an interest in preserving a cognitive model that aligns with their deeply held identity forming moral commitments and thereby suffer from one-dimensionality. ***Challenging moral ignorance and moral blindness means that an agent must seek out some form of transformative experience.*** In one sense, this experience can manifest as a prolonged and gradual change over time in a person's dispositional habits or character. Such transformation happens, for example, during mindfulness training or during one's educational development. This kind of change, as a reshaping of one's epistemic toolkit, doesn't happen overnight. In other cases, there may be a kind of transformative shock or personal self-rupture wherein one feels turned inside out and fundamentally reoriented to the world; becoming a parent may be an example of this for some but the thought is that some form of existential crisis or shift occurs for the agent in these cases. Given this distinction, we see that such transformations will come about as a result of both willful effort *or* through our nonvolitional interaction with the world even though we want to encourage people to be open to experiences that enable positive transformations and resistant to those that enable negative ones. In either case, resistance to this kind of crisis becomes the mark of the ignorant agent. Ultimately, however, it is not that white ignorance



is to be broadly conceived as the parent to moral ignorance. Rather, it is the prevalence of moral ignorance across the social milieu which makes white, male, heterosexual, and other ignorances possible and systematically persistent. One's deeply held and identity-forming moral commitments come first; racism and sexism are the symptoms of a deeper cognitive pathology, one perpetuated by an ideology of domination.

It is worth noting that Marcuse's *Essay on Liberation* can optimistically shape how we ought to approach the practical issue of moral blindness. In this essay, he makes it a point to describe a new sensibility by calling for the development of a reformed aesthetic environment. This reaffirmation of the life instincts in the form of liberated consciousness would, he claims, be characterized by (1) a reframing of rational expressions regarding what to produce and how it is to be produced, (2) a reframing of epistemic potentialities for the protection and gratification of life, (3) an invalidation of the distinction between logos and eros, and (4) the creation of a reality principle which is sublimated to the beautiful life<sup>294</sup>. This new sensibility would emerge in the struggle against violence and exploitation by standing for social justice. A great refusal occurs where this new sensibility allows one to see one's self outside the personal horizons prescribed by society and it expresses a commitment to the life instinct. It rejects states of aggressiveness or guilt and manifests as an imaginative awareness of the transcendent possibilities of freedom which "prepare the soul for this revolution"<sup>295</sup>.

In *One-Dimensional Man*, published before *Essay*, Marcuse describes the process of cognizing the world as a specific historical project. Uncritical, one-dimensional

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<sup>294</sup> Marcuse 1969, p. 24-25

<sup>295</sup> Marcuse 1969, p. 23

thinking, gives itself over to the historical project. He writes, “Neither the most refined aesthetic sense nor the most exact philosophical concept is immune against history”<sup>296</sup>. I, thereby, see Marcuse’s new sensibility as the salve for relieving the pain and irritation of our historically determined moral ignorance. By rejecting false needs and false views on the obscene, Marcuse’s new sensibility replaces excess repression with an aesthetic ethos—an ethos which refuses to let society undermine the dignity of life by participating in a *refusal, perhaps a Great Refusal*, of oppressive socialization.

Given the one-dimensional nature of moral ignorance and blindness in its resistance to critique, it is an open question as to what role a new sensibility might play in the epistemic liberation of individuals from the chains of moral ignorance. In a provisional sense, it seems reasonable to predict that a new sensitivity requires at least one feature: a sensitivity to the dialectical nature of moral commitments. That is, a willingness in peoples to be sensitive to counter-evidence and the cultivation of one’s self-image as a consistent work in progress. In this way, Marcuse’s new sensibility becomes a kind of new sensibility since a moral commitment to X would carry an epistemic commitment to understanding the challenges of X’s manifestation in the lived world. It requires, what Mills calls, a sensitivity to a non-ideal morality.

Given this, I expect the epistemic agent to possess a supervening commitment to be compassionate and sensitive to others as moral works in progress. Compassion in this sense requires a consistent engagement with the needs and lived realities of the other on their terms, an expression of mutual recognition which, if actualized, can liberate us from the oppressive forces of socialization under an ideology of domination. It could, perhaps,

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<sup>296</sup> Marcuse 1964, p. 216

unshackle our efforts to be morally autonomous by revealing reasons-to-act beyond what we currently encounter. In this way, the new sensibility affirms the life instinct by acknowledging that to be alive is to be in a state of moral becoming and that the struggle to make accurate moral commitments is a winding path. Receptive moral sense-ability is the road and social justice is our destination.

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## VITA

### I. Education

Graduate Certificate in Gender and Women's Studies (2018), The University of Kentucky

Graduate Certificate in College Teaching and Learning (2017), The University of Kentucky

Graduate Certificate in Social Theory (2016), The University of Kentucky

M.A. Philosophy (2013), Boston University

M.S. Management (2013), Lasell University

B.A. Philosophy (2011), University of Illinois at Springfield

B.S. Mathematics (2007), Eastern Connecticut State University

### II. Professional positions held

Senior Lecturer (Part-time) of Philosophy, The University of Louisville (July 2020 - Present)

Graduate Student Community Enhancement Coordinator, The University of Kentucky Graduate School (August 2019 - Present)

Graduate Assistant - Graduate Student Congress President (Elected by the Graduate Student Body), The University of Kentucky Graduate School (Summer 2018 - Spring 2019)

Teaching Assistant – Philosophy (Instructor of Record), The University of Kentucky (2013 - 2018)

Research Assistant – Philosophy and Community, The Society for Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) (2016-2018)

Clinical Internship – Clinical Ethics and Bioethics, The University of Kentucky Healthcare Program in Bioethics (Spring 2018)

Area Coordinator & Student Conduct Officer, Lasell University Department of Residential Life (2007 - 2013)

### III. Scholastic and professional honors

2020 UK Philosophy Department Outstanding Teaching Award

2020 Dr. Morris Grubbs Award for Dedication of a Faculty/Staff member to the UK Graduate Student Congress

2019 UK Office of Institutional Diversity Inclusive Excellence Project Grant

2018 Society of Philosophers in America Community and Philosophy Project Grant

2017-2018 University of Kentucky Philosophy Department Dissertation Research Fellowship  
2018 American Philosophical Association Central Meeting Graduate Student Travel Award  
2017 Graduate Student Congress Conference Travel Grant

#### IV. Professional publications

2021. "Developing a Philosophy Summer Camp at the University of Kentucky," Manuscript accepted. C. Buchanan, S. Chaudhary, C. Graham, A. Van't Land, L. Dickey, and C. Smith (coauthors). Claire Katz (ed), *Growing up with philosophy camp Volume II*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
2019. "Foundations for Communities of Philosophical Conversation", *Public Philosophy Journal*. 2 (1): (Co-authored with Andrea Christelle, Sergia Hay, and Eric Thomas Weber)
2018. "Review of Moral Brains: The Neuroscience of Morality." *Journal of Cognition and Neuroethics* 5 (2): 75–81
2018. "Good Will and the Will to do Good.", *Society of Philosophers in America One-Sheet Publication for Public Philosophy Meetings*. (Co-authored with Eric Thomas Weber)
2018. "Kneeling and Civil Protest", *Society of Philosophers in America One-Sheet Publication for Public Philosophy Meetings*.
2018. "Guidelines for Successful Philosophical Dialogues", *Society of Philosophers in America One-Sheet Publication for Public Philosophy Meetings*.
2018. "Molemen and Plato's Cave Today", *Society of Philosophers in America One-Sheet Publication for Public Philosophy Meetings*.
2017. "SOPHIA Chapter Handbook: A Guide for Creating Philosophical Community", *Society of Philosophers in America Chapter Resources*.
2016. "Translocational Social Theory After "Community": An Interview with Floya Anthias," *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory*: Vol. 25. (Co-authored with Matt Bryant Cheney and Lucía M. Montás)

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