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# Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology

MARGARET OLIVIA LITTLE

*I develop two different epistemic roles for emotion and desire. Caring for moral ends and people plays a pivotal though contingent role in ensuring reliable awareness of morally salient details; possession of various emotions and motives is a necessary condition for autonomous understanding of moral concepts themselves. Those who believe such connections compromise the "objective" status of morality tend to assume rather than argue for the bifurcated conception of reason and affect this essay challenges.*

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Moral wisdom is hard to come by. It is usually a difficult and delicate job to discern the moral landscape accurately. Well we may ask, then, what is needed to make good moral judgments? What is the proper epistemic stance to adopt in our efforts to arrive at fair and reliable moral verdicts?

According to one central and influential tradition, the stance appropriate to moral wisdom is a *dispassionate* one. To make considered, sound moral judgments, we should abstract from our emotions, feelings, sentiments—what the eighteenth century would call "passions"—and from our desires, inclinations—what now go by the ungainly terms "pro" and "con" attitudes. Emotions and desires are not part of the equipment needed to discern moral answers. To be sure, their presence may be essential to our *responding* appropriately once we reach those verdicts—to act and to feel as we ought; but only trouble, it is thought, can come of their intrusion into deliberations toward the verdicts themselves. At best, they are irrelevant distractions, like so many pains and tickles. At worst, they are highly distorting influences: emotions "incite" and "provoke" us; desires "cloud" our judgment and "bias" our reasoning. This would be a problem in any epistemic endeavor, but it is disastrous to moral judgments, whose role is precisely to serve as corrective to the narrow, partisan

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focus of our sentiments. According to this view, then, to be objective is to be *detached*; to be clear-sighted is to achieve *distance*; to be careful in deliberation is to be *cool* and *calm*.

In contrast to this tradition, certain feminist theorists have argued that emotion and desire are valuable aspects of the wise person's epistemic repertoire. Certainly, our passions and inclinations can mislead us and distort our perceptions, but it is a falsely narrow perspective to think that they invariably do so or that they have nothing distinctive to offer epistemological projects. Distance does not always clarify. Sometimes truth is better revealed, the landscape most clearly seen, from a position that has been called "loving perception" or "sympathetic thinking."[1]

I think that such feminist approaches to epistemology are of particular importance in the moral domain, for morality is precisely the arena in which a proper epistemic stance demands the presence of what we might call "appropriate affect."[2] In this essay, I try to tease apart and articulate as clearly as possible the epistemic roles of emotion and desire in gaining moral knowledge. I delineate two different roles, both of which are crucial, but one of which more fundamentally calls into question the traditional compartmentalization of reason and affect. I first try to isolate what it is about *caring* that makes it so helpful to our attempts to determine what, in the face of complicated circumstances, ought or ought not to be done. I then argue that possession of various emotions and desires—care, concern, love, but also anger, revulsion, indignation—is not just immensely useful to seeing the moral landscape, it is a *necessary* condition of doing so. The idea of dispassion as the paradigmatic epistemic stance seems to me a dangerous one, for there are some truths, I want to argue, that can be apprehended only from a stance of affective engagement.

The claim is an important one, for, if correct, it means we must reject the "bureaucratic model" of morality that is implicit in so many ethical theories. On that model, moral agency involves a clear division of labor: reason is responsible for coming to the moral verdicts; it then passes its report on to the will, motivation, or emotion, which then does or does not issue the appropriate response. How good a person is at rendering accurate moral verdicts is quite independent of how responsive she tends to be to those verdicts. It is possible, on this familiar model, for people to combine tremendous moral acumen with completely atrophied affect: the best moral experts can be the least moral people. In contrast, the view under consideration claims that possession of certain desires and emotions is crucial for seeing what morality requires in the first place. The moral landscape will be opaque to those who are in no way moral.

Before turning to develop the role of affect in a feminist moral epistemology, it is worth pausing to confront more directly the view that counsels dispassion. The view is, in a sense, our intellectual inheritance. It tends thereby to retain

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a subterranean influence in shaping discussions, determining what gets marked as a departure or as standing in need of explanation, and handing down certain themes and metaphors which, because of their familiarity, may go unarticulated and hence unevaluated. Feminist perspectives in the history of ideas give us special reason to be wary of the themes and metaphors that tacitly underwrite the persuasive feel of the doctrine.

For all the hotly disputed debates in the history of philosophy, one theme that emerges with remarkable consistency is an association of women with affect and men with reason (Lloyd 1979, 1983, and 1984; McMillan 1982; Tuana 1992). The way in which this "association" is unpacked varies from philosopher to philosopher, but it is usually an interestingly tangled combination of empirical, essentialist, and normative claims. Claims include that women as a class are *in fact* more swayed by affect and less by reason than men are; that women *by nature* have less *capacity* for reason and more for affect than men have; or again, independent of any questions of capacity, that it would be *inappropriate* to woman's role for her to cultivate and act from reason and *appropriate* to cultivate and act from emotion.[3] (Kant is especially keen on the last claim, mentioning that women who learn higher subjects such as Greek might as well have beards, such is the departure from the role proper to their sex!) These relatively direct associations are reinforced by the fact that both women and affect share, in turn, an association with nature and the corporeal (Merchant 1980; McMillan 1982; Dinnerstein 1977; Ortner 1974).

For purposes of this discussion, I want to draw attention, not to philosophy's traditional view of woman, which is obviously (though depressingly) off-kilter, but to the resultant views of reason and affect themselves. The nearly ubiquitous and multilayered associations of affect with women, reason with men may well have influenced the ways in which affect and reason have been substantively conceived. Certain conceptions of affect and reason, that is, seem to be *gendered* conceptions: what is said about each—what functions they are capable of or supposed to play, what relationships they stand in with respect to each another, how they are each valued—seems to have been subtly shaped by their respective associations with certain narrow, distorted conceptions of female and male (a process that usually transpires by the unintentional exchange of metaphors used in each domain).

The associations are perhaps most easily seen in the doctrines developed during the Enlightenment. We can begin by noting its themes about women and men. As many feminist scholars have noted, certain conceptions of men and women began slowly to solidify with the advent of the scientific revolution (Pateman 1989; Bordo 1986; Lloyd 1983; Okin 1979; Gatens 1991). Men and women were understood as having different appropriate spheres of functions. Man's central role was in the public sphere—economics, politics, religion, culture; woman's central role was in the private sphere—the domestic realm of caretaking for the most natural, embodied aspects of humans. The separation

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of spheres was understood to constitute a complementary system, in which each contributed something of value which, when combined, made an ideal whole (the marriage unit). Because the division was understood as grounded in the natures of man and woman, the separation was a rigid one: the idea that either side of the division could offer something useful to the other's realm would simply not emerge as a possibility. This picture of "fitting complementarity" was then complicated, and a deep tension introduced, by an added layer: the division did not involve halves of equal worth, for woman and the private sphere were seen as intrinsically less valuable. It is man, and what is accomplished in the public sphere, that represents the human ideal. Woman is understood as existing for man as his helpmate, and in this regard she may be valued, but in a romanticized and hence constraining way. Moreover, and very important, her association with the body and nature grounded an image of woman as a potential source of contamination, infection, and disorder (Merchant 1980; Dinnerstein 1977; Ortner 1974).

Now these are the *very* themes that arise in the views of reason and affect presented by many Enlightenment thinkers. Reason and affect have rigidly separate, complementary functions: reason reveals the way the world is; emotion and desire move us to respond to that world with action and feeling. Each is valued for its role, but the idea that they interact much or that they could contribute to the other's functions won't emerge as a serious possibility. Also, and in tension with this picture of complementary spheres, there is a tendency to view emotion and desire with deep suspicion, as something more to do with the body we have as animals than the mind we have as humans, and as something that infects, renders impure, and constantly threatens to disrupt—particularly in the epistemic arena.[4]

The Enlightenment conceptions of reason and affect, then, are marked by two themes. First, reason and affect will be conceptualized as radically separated in function, role, and ideal: that one should enter the sphere of the other will seem almost incomprehensible. Second, affect will show up in particularly devalued ways: it will be cast as a source of contamination, which we must control and, in the end, transcend. If such conceptions of reason and affect are assumed, one will inevitably and understandably valorize dispassion, detachment, and distance in epistemic enterprises. The question is whether the plausibility of such conceptions survives what seem to be historically gendered origins. Must we regard reason and affect as so rigidly bifurcated in function? Must we view affect solely as potential infection in moral epistemology? Leaving our ears tuned for recurrence of the metaphors discussed in this traditional view, let us turn to the positive task of addressing what the epistemic role of affect in morality is.

I want to separate out and develop two important roles for affect. To delineate the first role, let me begin with a now-familiar point about moral deliberation. Even if such deliberation is best characterized as the application

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of moral principles to a given situation, one obviously cannot start the enterprise unless one is aware of the salient features of the situation (that one's neighbor is in pain, for instance): one wouldn't know what to apply the principle *to*. Now, as several theorists have lately emphasized, awareness of the morally relevant features of a situation is no easy or automatic matter (Murdoch 1970 and 1956; Nussbaum 1985a and 1985b; Blum 1991). The details may be complex and subtle, and at any rate we are often obtuse creatures—it's all too easy to miss what's in front of one's own nose. Think of the workaholic spouse who is oblivious of her partner's growing despair, or whites who don't notice news reports of murder when the victim is black but always look up when the victim is white or from their neighborhood. Seeing what is important in the situations we face is not simply a matter of opening our eyes; as Iris Murdoch says, "It is a *task* to come to see the world as it is" (1970, 91). The natural question is, What is needed to achieve the type of awareness that goes into making good moral judgments?

One natural suggestion (and one Murdoch herself stresses) is that we must transcend our all-too-absorbing self-love. "The difficulty," as she puts it, "is to keep the attention fixed upon the real situation and to prevent it from returning surreptitiously to the self with consolations of self-pity, resentment, fantasy and despair" (1970, 91). But, although this is an important point to make, those immersed in Enlightenment conceptions of reason and affect are likely to pick this out as the *sole* feature of obtuseness: one is obtuse when something *obscures* one's vision, and affect is pegged as the source of obstruction. On this reading, emotion and desire once again get cast in the familiar role of contamination, here clouding what would otherwise be clear.

The view that obtuseness is caused *only* by the obscuring effect of emotion and desire, though, operates on the faulty picture that seeing is passive: were we just to clear our pathways of distorting affect, the information would come right in. This, of course, is not how it works. Think of what is really involved in seeing what is morally relevant. Often it means noticing what is *not* present: noticing that a student is not in class; spotting in a busy crowd that a child, though surrounded with adults, is not *accompanied* by any of them. Or again, noticing subtle patterns: that a patient asks for more pain medication on the nights after she has had a visit from her husband. Or again, noticing what is so pervasive that it tends to be invisible (notice how the movie *Fatal Attraction* or the actions of Lorena Bobbitt draw immediate and dramatic public moralizing, while the ubiquitous violence against women in film and reality continues with still too little comment). When Murdoch says that it is a task to see the world, she does not just mean that there is a task preliminary to seeing, like washing the windows before looking outdoors. She means that the seeing *itself* is a task—the task of being attentive to one's surroundings.

Now someone deeply wedded to a strongly bifurcated view of reason and affect might tend to interpret this task as equivalent to some consciously

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adopted assignment to be disciplined about gathering important information. Florence Nightingale offers an interesting example of this sort of intellectualist interpretation. A chapter of her short tract, *Notes on Nursing*, is devoted to the importance of observation (Nightingale 1969, 105-26). She notes with censure the lack of observation she sees among those who attend patients: they do not notice when food goes uneaten, whether a patient wants solitude or diversion—indeed, she says, they don't even observe *that* they don't observe. She then offers her recommendation for solving this problem: nurses should work on memory skills, stay more disciplined in focusing on their tasks, and practice surveying their field of vision while reciting what they see (she cites with approval the method used by one father, who had his small son rehearse the contents of a toy-store window each day after they passed by).

Nightingale's method limits the scope of attentiveness to conscious *observational vigilance*. But, while such effort is helpful at times (as when you mentally shake off your torpor to confront a difficult decision), this is not the central feature of attentiveness. For there is no exhausting ahead of time what one should be on watch for. There are indefinitely many things that may be morally relevant in a situation, features that are often present in novel or subtle combinations. The morally aware person, then, is not someone who approaches each situation with some conscious grocery list of things to check *for*. The required attentiveness is a background disposition for relevant details to come into your consciousness—for them to emerge for you as salient, to come to the forefront of your attention.

Given this, it turns out that what one is attentive to is largely a function of the one thing Nightingale does not mention, namely, one's affect. What one is attentive to reflects one's interests, desires, in brief, what one *cares* about. Think, for instance, as Sara Ruddick asks us to do, of the awareness displayed in paradigmatically loving relationships, such as a healthy mother and child relationship (Ruddick 1987). It is because the mother cares for her child that she is attuned to subtle dangers, picks up on delicate signals, notices when help is needed. More generally put, if one cares about something, one is prepared to respond on its behalf, and preparedness to respond is intimately linked with awareness of opportunities to do so. How reliable one will be in accurately discerning the moral landscape and knowing what ought to be done depends, then, not just on how good one is at weighing risks and foreseeing consequences, say, but on the nature of one's emotions and desires.

What kind of affect does one need to be reliably good at making moral judgments? The question is well worth pressing. Obviously, when thinking about what it takes to *be* moral, we think that people need to care about what might be called recognizably moral objects or ends—justice, the patient's interests, one's child. But it isn't as clear that one needs to care about such ends in order to *know* what it takes to be moral. After all, the lesson so far is quite general: to make reliable, considered moral judgments, one must be aware of

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morally relevant facts, and what one tends to be aware of reflects what one cares about. This in itself doesn't prevent us from finding moral expertise in one whose nonmoral interests, by happy coincidence, attune them to the sorts of details that turn out to have moral significance.

But in fact it is extremely unlikely that one will be reliably sensitive to moral saliences unless one cares about recognizably moral ends. To make good moral judgments, one must be aware of a complex set of details and the shape they form (Dancy 1993, chap. 7; Friedman 1989). Operating under the influence of other interests, sooner or later (and usually sooner), the contours of what is noticed will diverge from the contours of what is morally important. A pharmaceutical company marketing a new all-purpose painkiller, for instance, certainly has a very strong desire to maximize sales. Its marketing division, though, will not reliably notice instances of pain: it will reliably notice instances of affluent or insured people's pain. A sadist who delights in knowing of others' pain, on the other hand, will be exquisitely reliable at sniffing out all instances of pain, but he will be oblivious to the myriad other details relevant to determining what morally should be done *about* that pain. A constellation of features are salient to determining the answer to that question—the cause of the pain (torture or appropriate punishment?), the preferences of the one in pain (she might prefer the pain to the stupor the medication gives her), one's relationship to the person in pain (alleviating the pain of one's alcoholic husband may count as enabling instead of as helping him). The extent to which one actually cares about and is responsive to moral ends, then, has enormous impact on how accurately and reliably one sees the moral landscape, because what one is attentive to is deeply influenced by what one cares about, and caring about other than recognizably moral ends will significantly compromise one's propensity to notice the morally relevant set of details.

Those who work in the ethics of care have advanced a further and more specific claim. The attentiveness necessary to good moral judgment is best ensured, it is argued, when we care, not simply about impersonal moral ideals such as justice, but about *people themselves* (Blum 1988; Walker 1991). In order for Nightingale to encourage her nurses to be optimally observant of salient details, on this view, she should have urged them not just to care deeply about discharging well the duties of nurse, or even promoting the interests of the patient, but to care about *the patient herself*.

Now there is no doubt that caring for a person, if the caring is healthy and mature, helps keep one attentive to details important to her situation. One might well wonder, though, why we should accept the claim that caring for people carries any particular epistemic advantage over caring for impersonal moral ends. I think the answer lies in the importance of a particular kind of receptive listening that comes with properly caring for a person. Because the features relevant to determining what one ought to do are often complex, one

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must be receptive to the particulars of cases, to what is different and novel in a case, and not just notice what, at a lower level of resolution, appear as broad similarities. As these important particularities often have to do with details known only to the people whose interests are at issue—their fears, hopes, worries, how they conceptualize the situation—we will gain important information by listening to their narratives. So much is obvious. But notice, now, what happens when we do this with the stance of an investigator, asking questions of the person only because we see her as the source of important data unfortunately unavailable elsewhere (such as data about her mental states). When we listen from this stance, we objectify the person in a certain way: we see her as a means to aiding our agenda, including agendas as laudable as furthering justice or diminishing suffering.

This stance of personal disengagement, however passionate one's desire to find out truths or to see interests advanced, carries with it tremendous epistemic danger. Most of us resist what is unique, and most of us have deep tendencies to project our own template of experiences onto others. We catalogue and classify others' experiences as soon as they are mentioned, eager for them to be confirming instances of our current favorite generality. (Here, ironically, we do have a desire that infects our epistemic efforts—the desire for intellectual closure.) One of the few antidotes we have against these tendencies is listening from a stance of caring for the person herself. In such a stance, we want to hear how it is for her, in a way that welcomes novelty or uniqueness, is slow to apply templates and open to changing them, is ready to reconceptualize what the agenda itself might end up being. This is not to be confused with patronizing agreement or the mindless suspension of judgment. Part of the love or caring here includes respect for the person as a responsible subject, which often entails voicing disagreement or even arguing (for more on the connections of respect and care, see Piper 1991; Dillon 1992). Indeed, to do otherwise is to view the person as an object in your agenda of "listening carefully to others."

The first lesson about affect's role in moral epistemology, then, is that from the valorized position of dispassionate detachment we are often actually less likely to pick up on what is morally salient. Emotional distance does not always clarify; disengagement is not always the most revealing stance. To see clearly what is before us, we need to cultivate certain desires, such as the desire to see justice done, and the desire to see humans flourish, but we must also, more particularly, work at developing our capacities for loving and caring about people.

The epistemic role so far outlined for affect is a deeply important one. I want now to argue that it is not the only one. It is, we can agree, extraordinarily unlikely that one will reliably tease out and notice all the disparate moral saliences of the complicated situations we face unless one has the affective propensities detailed above; but nothing said so far implies that it is impossible.

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After all, the features of a situation relevant to determining its moral qualities—the sociological, psychological, economic, or physical properties, say—are in *principle* available to anyone. Perhaps it is only because we are such "tawdry, inadequate epistemic creatures," to use Mark Platts's phrase (Platts 1979, 247), because we are so little and so selectively aware of our surroundings, that we need special affective interests in justice, or caring engagement with people, to get us to notice what is there, available to be seen. For all that has been said so far, then, the *ideal* knower, facing no such limitations, has no epistemic need of affect.

Here the traditional conception of reason and affect resurfaces, providing now the archetype of the ideal. The ideal epistemic stance is, after all is said and done, still the detached "point of view of the universe," from which all is seen but nothing is cared for. The province of knowledge turns out in the end to be a role properly reserved for reason alone; affect has merely a temporary role as a corrective. Affect serves as helpmate to reason as he struggles with his imperfections, but if all were right in the world, the separation appropriate to their natures would be restored. To be sure, affect is acknowledged as valuable for the aid she gives, but the value is only instrumental, and the acknowledgment is marked with the ambivalence one feels toward the crutch that is a reminder of one's defects. As far as epistemological projects are concerned, we can yearn for the day when affect will be left behind as superannuated. From a feminist perspective, of course, such a view has a depressing familiarity: once again, it is what is associated with man that defines the ideal. I want to argue now that the move is not just depressing; it is wrong. 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.

On reflection, most people would agree that there is a difference between acknowledging that an action causes pain, say, and coming to see it as *cruel*, a difference between noting that a homeless person is going hungry and seeing that *charity* is called for. The first sort of judgment concerns properties that are in fact morally salient, as we've put it; that is, they are the good- and bad-making properties, those in virtue of which the actions have the moral properties they do. But one can acknowledge such properties and not see *that* they are morally relevant, or what exactly their moral relevance comes to. One could, for instance, simply lack the moral concept at issue (perhaps some animals are like this, having the concept of pain but not the concept of cruelty). Or again, if one had the relevant concept, one could fail to see its application in the present instance. One could see the relevant pieces but not the proper gestalt; one could fail to see the moral meaning the elements together carry. There is, then, an important difference between judgments concerning properties that are in fact morally relevant and judgments that actually employ moral concepts.

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What is involved in ascension to the level of moral awareness? Put most generically, to conceptualize a situation in moral terms is to see it as meriting some response—one sees the situation as calling for some action, or again, as deserving some emotional response such as outrage or love (McDowell 1985; Wiggins 1987; McNaughton 1988). It is, in short, to see the situation in a way that is essentially *evaluative*: one who becomes morally aware has come to acknowledge the salient features of a situation as constituting a *reason* or a *justification* for some response. Thus the difference, for instance, between someone who discerns the painfulness of torture and someone who sees the *evil* of it is that the latter person has come to see the painfulness as a reason not to torture, to understand torture as meriting revulsion.

To see a situation in such light is to see it in a way that can rationally explain having the merited response. We understand why someone is angry if we learn that he believed himself the victim of grave injustice; we learn why someone performed an action if we learn she thought it her moral duty. More explicitly, the way in which the situation is conceptualized *itself* is sufficient to provide the explanation, to make it intelligible to us why the person had the merited response. While we would need to know more about an agent who rushed at an angry bull than is given by his testimony that it scared him (that he had accepted a dare to do something frightening, perhaps), we do not need similar supplementation when the agent explains his refusal to join in some teasing by saying he thought that, given the person's sensitivity, doing so would involve cruelty. With moral awareness, the very way in which the situation is conceived carries explanatory force. Thus when two people faced with the same moral requirement differ in their response, such that one has the merited response and the other has no response at all, there is some way in which their conceptions of the situation differ. They do not see it in the same light; they do not conceptualize it in the same way. Analogously, to give an example from another evaluative realm, aesthetics, a person who hears the particular beauty in jazz and the person who hears it as plain noise are not experiencing the music in the same way (McNaughton 1988, 112).

This is not to say that all moral conclusions, or even all sincere and deeply held moral conclusions, are followed by right action or displays of emotion. For one thing, the response is often overwhelmed or shunted aside by countervailing psychological forces. Overpowering sexual desire, the weight of depression, the dissonance of accommodating the full implications of a disturbing belief—all these can outweigh the moral motivations one genuinely possesses, can submerge emotional reactions to deeper recesses of one's psyche. The point is worth underscoring, for the fact that we do not immediately experience the responses we acknowledge as appropriate does not mean that they are not there, manifesting themselves indirectly in how they structure various aspects of our lives. Thus we speak of depression as *masking* rage, for

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when the depressive is finally ready to feel her rage, it is accompanied by the realization that she *has been* angry at her tormentor for years.

But the further and crucial point is that where one does fail to have the appropriate response, the failure will show up in how clearly or how fully one saw the moral status of the situation (see McDowell 1978 and 1979; Platts 1979; Nussbaum 1985b; Sherman 1989). One who fails to respond takes in the case, perhaps, but the perception is cloudy, incomplete, distorted in some way. Aristotle makes the point by reference to the difference between the truly virtuous person, who responds morally without struggle, and those who must battle (successfully or not) to do so. The difference, Aristotle notes, is a difference in the *quality of perception*: it is because the virtuous person sees more clearly that her response comes easily, directly, reliably (see, for instance, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1146b30-1147a4, 1147a10-24).

Take, for instance, someone who gives change daily to the homeless person near her office but who does so to qualm her furtive feelings of guilt, to compensate for the irritation she can't help feeling at his presence, and to maintain a self-image she can tolerate. Now imagine that one day, walking toward the homeless person, she suddenly sees the situation differently. Her perspective shifts; the elements fall into place; she has fit the case into a different context. Perhaps she suddenly sees in this person the loneliness she herself has felt, and the picture resolves itself into a simple case of helping a fellow human in a bit of need. This change is a change in her apprehension of the situation. This is not to say that she necessarily came to know some new detail of the case. Seeing more clearly is often a matter of discerning a different gestalt of the individual elements one already apprehends: one sees the elements in a way that lets one recognize some further property they together fix. (Someone who sees a nose, mouth, eyes but cannot recognize them as his lover's face suffers a kind of *blindness*.) And the better apprehension brings with it a better response: in our example, a kindly response feels *of a piece* with the new, more accurate way in which the woman apprehends the situation.

If this view of moral motivation is correct, then, in order to "see" the moral landscape clearly,[5] in order to discern it fully and properly, one must have certain desires and emotions. Caring, being outraged, being moved to act—all these are part of discerning moral features clearly. The ideal epistemic agent herself would have appropriate affect, for it is needed if one is to discern all that there is to see.

I find the theory just outlined persuasive largely because it fits and makes sense of a rich array of phenomena in moral psychology, but also because I find its traditional rival deeply dissatisfying. On the rival picture of moral motivation, the affective efficacy of moral awareness is completely independent of its cognitive quality, for motivation is the province of some separate domain: depending on the particulars of the theory, it is a function of will, practical rationality, a faculty of emotions, or of independently intelligible desires. Note,

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now, that such a "bureaucratic model," as I have called it, leaves open the possibility that there are certain creatures who fully apprehend the moral landscape—who gaze intelligibly at the moral order, in all its glory—and yet *never* respond as merited. They have, perhaps, some persistent practical irrationality and comprehensively fail to draw the practical inferences they ought to in this area; or, again, they are creatures who do not possess any capacity for anger, love, outrage; or again, they are creatures whose desires extend only to gratifying their own most immediate felt urges for food and sex. Such beings are nonetheless held to be creatures who understand and apprehend the cruelty in the torture they witness (or perform), who discern moral obligation when they see a hungry child, who reliably detect when courage is called for.

I think this profoundly empties and distorts what is involved in grasping "the point" of morality. More fundamentally, it makes no sense of why we come to use moral concepts, and leaves aside what it is to understand them. A person who never appropriately responds at any level to what he terms cruel or obligatory, I want to argue, does not have *autonomous* understanding of the concepts he invokes. Imagine a person who tries to understand what is meant by "*valuable*," who suddenly seems to catch on and says, "Yes, now I see!" but persistently tries to destroy what we point to as examples. Or again, imagine a person who seems to understand that a set of her beliefs constitutes conclusive "justification" for a proposition and yet, with full possession of her faculties, remains completely impassive at the notion of actually drawing the conclusion. In these cases, we do not credit the people with understanding of the *evaluative* concepts involved, precisely because they miss their practical force.

Of course, even the complete amoralist may use moral words: he may tell us in exasperation that he knows perfectly well that murder is evil and that giving to the poor is good. But his use of moral terms will not be born of his independent competence with the language, of his having autonomous knowledge of "how to go on." His use of moral terms, instead, is *essentially parasitic*. An example with color may help illustrate what I mean.[6] To use Frank Jackson's scenario, imagine a person who has lived all her life in a black and white room (Jackson 1986). If she is equipped with science textbooks on color and light waves, she can come to use the word "green" in completely appropriate ways; if she also has a light wave meter to consult alongside her science book, she would possess the ability to pick out green objects with perfect reliability. Still, it is when she finally steps out of the room into the sunlit forest that she has the concept of *green*, as opposed to having the concept of *light wavelength* and a conversion manual. In something analogous to this case, the amoralist can, as an outsider to the moral system, get a sense of how it goes. He knows empirically that we place great store by things labeled "good" and that we frown and punish when people do "bad." He can, then, begin to employ the terms himself. But, as in the case with green, the use is always a parasitic one: the amoralist is always glancing sideways, as it were, picking up on others'

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signals, and not responding *to* the *goodness* or *badness* in the situation. The amoralist, then, is not simply someone who fails to respond to the moral requirements he sees: rather, he does not himself autonomously see that a given situation is cruel, kind, right, or wrong.

Now, in the case of green, of course, absence of understanding does not compromise one's reliability in indicating green. Armed with your light wave meter and conversion manual, you'll get it right. If this were true of moral concepts as well, a modified version of the bureaucratic model would remain open: although an amoralist could not be said to have moral understanding or moral knowledge, he would, with proper training, be able to deliver accurate moral judgments. (He could be not a moral expert, but an expert moral consultant.)

But morality is crucially disanalogous to color here. Moral properties do not map onto nonmoral properties the way color maps onto light wavelength (see McDowell 1981; Wiggins 1987; McNaughton 1988, chap. 13; Dancy 1993). Items grouped together under moral classifications such as "cruel" do not form kinds recognizable as such at the nonmoral level. For one reason, there are infinitely many ways to be, say, cruel: there is no way to mark out in purely nonmoral terms why kicking the dog, verbal taunting, and forgetting to invite the neighbor's child to your daughter's birthday party get classified together. For another, as Jonathan Dancy and David McNaughton point out, considerations seem to carry their reason-giving force holistically in the moral domain: the contribution made by any given feature to an action's moral status depends, in a way that escapes codification, on what other features are present or absent (so, for instance, the fact that an action is fun is often reason in its favor but might be precisely what makes hunting animals morally problematic).[7]

This means that there are no conversion manuals—not even immensely complex ones—for inferring moral properties from nonmoral properties, no algorithms into which one can feed the latter to derive all and only the right moral answers.[8] Those then with merely parasitic competence in morality will go wrong. They can mimic genuine practice well in certain easy cases, for there are obvious rules of thumb to make use of. But their epistemological expertise will be compromised, and usually severely. It is no accident that amoralists, when trying to display their moral competence, tend to recite the crudest mantras about morality ("killing is wrong"; "feeding the hungry is good"); for the subtle contours displayed by the moral landscape of lived experiences will escape them.

Affect, then, has an ineliminable role in moral epistemology. For while affect is contingently (though significantly) important to our noticing the natural properties that are in fact good- and bad-making properties, appropriate affect is a necessary component of apprehending the moral properties themselves. If we were to succeed in transcending our affect and occupying a dispassionate

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epistemic stance, then, we would be blind to some of the most important truths there are, namely, moral truths.

The traditional partition of reason and affect shows up in one final and very important way in discussions of morality. Historically, many who have granted morality's intimate connection with affect have concluded that the connection comes at a price: it reveals that there are in fact no moral properties or moral truths. Philosophers from Hume to Mackie have argued that the necessary connection of a moral verdict to affect gives us *in-principle* and *ex ante* reason, in advance of any substantive investigation into moral systems, for concluding that those claims do not correspond to the way the world is (a short list of skeptical classics would include Hume 1978; Ayer 1936; Stevenson 1959; Mackie 1977; and Harman 1977). If the use of moral concepts is necessarily tied to the possession of affective states, after all, then one's choice of moral concepts and the moral conclusions one arrives at turn out to be constrained, and in this sense determined, by the specific palette of emotions and desires one happens to have. This means, it is thought, that moral verdicts cannot be genuine products of reason, and hence cannot be cases of discerning the way the world is, for they do not result from proper employment of some epistemic method such as perceiving, weighing evidence, or reasoning. Thus, while it may look at first sight as though the motivational and emotional states we've discussed are cases of discerning moral properties, in fact what we "discern" is the result of projecting those affective states onto the world: our deep moral convictions reflect the nature of our own hearts rather than the nature of the world.

Such moral skeptics acknowledge (indeed, insist upon) affect's role in the production of moral verdicts, then, but they retain the view that affect's role is not an epistemological one, in any robust sense of the term, for it has no role in finding out what is true. For indeed, it is affect's presence in morality that ensures there is no truth there to be found. Here, once again, affect is cast as a contaminating factor. Its differential presence is sufficient to valorize science over morality: the former, whatever other problems it faces, can at least aspire to truth, while the latter, whatever other importance it may carry, is in the end merely a matter of taste. Anything too tightly associated with emotion and desire, it turns out, is metaphysically a second-class citizen.

Now, debates over moral realism—over whether there is knowable moral truth—are as complicated as any. I don't pretend to mount a defense of moral realism in this essay. What I do want to register is my skepticism of the claim that morality's connection to affect provides a *principled* basis for rejecting moral realism. The fact that moral verdicts sustain a necessary tie to affect does not itself force us to abandon the idea that such verdicts are products of reason, for it may be that some products of affect are also products of reason. That is, the fact that the moral views we hold are logically constrained by the affect we have does not itself obviate the possibility that the views are epistemically

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sound, that they are reached by our sensitivity to the way the world is, or that their best explanation lies in the fact that they are true: for it might be that affect is revealing of truth. Why think that the connection to affect compromises the robustly cognitive status of moral verdicts, instead of thinking that such status extends in a meaningful sense to affect? In short, the skeptic needs an argument to explain and defend his premise that products of affect cannot be products of reason. And here, I think, the arguments proffered often simply beg the question. Let me give a couple of examples of the sort of problematic argumentation I have in mind.

One recent skeptical argument defends its claim that moral verdicts are not products of reason by appealing to desire's "direction of fit" (Smith 1987). The argument is aimed against the suggestion that moral conclusions can be products of reason, despite their connection to desires, because *desires* can be products of reason. The suggestion, that is, is that we can come to have intrinsic desires in response to evidence that the end in question is a morally worthy one. The skeptical argument, currently much discussed, claims to show that the very nature of desire precludes this possibility: intrinsic desires are not the *sort* of thing we can come to by sifting through evidence, for they do not have the proper direction of fit. The argument goes something like this.

Beliefs and desires, we are reminded, are each intentional mental states, in which a particular kind of attitude is directed toward a proposition (the idea is first set out in Anscombe 1957). A believing attitude, we might say, is an attitude of "regarding as true" some proposition, while a desiring attitude is one of "regarding as to be brought about." Beliefs, more specifically, have a mind-to-world direction of fit: they try to match the way the world is. This means that, in putting forward a belief, we regard ourselves as obligated to offer and respond to considerations that seem to bear on the truth of its propositional content. It also means that, to count as a belief, a mental state must display some level of counterfactual sensitivity to evidence about its propositional content—at some point, disregard for evidence about the truth of one's assertions indicates that one is not, despite first appearances, really making a claim about the world. Desires, in contrast, have a world-to-mind direction of fit: they don't try to match the world; they try to change it. They thus tend to persist, not disappear, in the face of evidence that their contents are false; and, because they aim at making the world match their propositional contents, desires ground dispositions to act in ways the agent believes will lead to their realization.

The charge is now made, on the basis of these quite neutral and perfectly acceptable characterizations, that desires cannot be the products of reason. Desires, it is claimed, are simply not held accountable to how the world actually is. While beliefs should change in the face of evidence, normative assessments of desires are insulated from such considerations: we do not appraise an agent's desires by looking at any of the evidence she has. And desires do not display

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even the minimum counterfactual sensitivity to evidence that beliefs must: desires do not alter according to evidence. It is concluded, then, that intrinsic desires cannot be "contrary to" or "conformable to" reason, as Hume put it, because they, like pains or tickles, are not the sort of thing we come to by sifting through evidence about how the world is.

But this argument, as it stands, does not succeed. Although analysis of desire's direction of fit isolates an important aspect in which desires have evidential immunity, the aspect is a very narrow one, and in its own right does nothing to foreclose the possibility that desires can be products of reason. The analysis makes explicit that a desire is neither sensitive to nor judged by reference to evidence about its *own* propositional content: the desire that *p* is neither responsive nor responsible to evidence about whether *p*. But nothing in that definitional point indicates that desires cannot be responsive to or judged by evidence about some *other* proposition, that its possession or rejection is immune from *any* evidential considerations. More specifically, nothing said so far bars the claim that sometimes an intrinsic desire for some end is developed as a response to genuine evidence that the end is a morally worthy one. To put it schematically, the desire that *p* may be sensitive to evidence that *p is good*. Such a mental state can be thought of, if one likes, as a state that has two directions of fit toward two different propositions, respectively: it is a believing attitude directed toward the proposition *p is good* (it is responsive to evidence about whether *p is good*), and it is a desiring attitude directed toward the proposition *p* (it grounds a disposition to perform actions the agents believes will bring it about that *p*). There is nothing in the mere definition of belief or desire that stands in the way of this suggestion: there are, for instance, no conflicting instantiation conditions involved in such a scenario. One will see in these neutral characterizations an indication of desire's inherent disreputable epistemic status only if one has already started with the historically traditional tendency to segregate reason and affect—here, by assuming that no mental states instantiate features of both belief and desire.

Another recent skeptical argument is provided by Bernard Williams, who offers an argument from rational convergence to explain why, while "science has some chance of being more or less what it seems . . . ethical thought has no chance of being everything it seems" (Williams 1985, 135). In science, Williams states, we can well imagine that all suitably equipped investigators might ultimately converge on one theory, and in a way that would be best explained by the truth of that theory. But we have, he says, "no such coherent hope" in ethics (1985, 136). Precisely because of their intimate connections to our desires and motivations, ethical views are destined to remain local in a way scientific theories are not: any convergence we might witness would be serendipitous, not best explained as the result of the theorists having exercised their sensitivities to the world as it really is.

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On what is this confident prediction based, though? A thought experiment is tacitly invoked, in which we are to imagine that similarly situated and suitably trained investigators—those equipped with the proper epistemic resources—will not converge onto any one ethical theory however long they investigate, or will do so only for reasons unrelated to evidence (mass brainwashing, say). But of course, this thought experiment proceeds as planned only if it is assumed that possession of certain affective states is not *part* of being properly epistemically equipped. If we regarded the capacity to respond with certain emotions and desires as part of what is needed to apprehend the world, ethics would be seen as being just as susceptible to rational convergence as any other domain (however much or little that might be).

To disqualify affect as an epistemic resource—and not simply beg the question by assuming it is not—one must have some nontendentious criteria of what things count as epistemic resources and what things do not, and none is forthcoming. In point of fact, I don't think we have *ex ante* any substantive picture of what sorts of things are properly thought of as epistemic equipment—some independent, settled list of the sorts of things that help gain access to truth. Rather, we fill in our picture of epistemic access and our picture of the way things are concomitantly, each reciprocally influencing the other. The list of epistemic equipment may be modified, then, by reference to the sorts of propositions we come to regard as true: if we have strong reason to believe that some things are good or courageous, and such beliefs are necessarily tied to desires and emotions, we will find ourselves with good reason for regarding affect as an epistemic precondition for apprehending certain truths.

Attempts to maintain divisions of labor between reason and affect have appeared in many realms. We have seen them surface in certain traditionalist views of marriage, where the man is assigned the thinking work and the woman assigned the emotional work for the two, and again in certain traditionalist views of health care roles, where the doctor is supposed to handle the curing while the nurse handles the caring. These bureaucratic divisions work out in moral epistemology no better than they do in those other contexts. One must be someone who is at least somewhat *responsive* to moral considerations to be someone who can reliably discern moral considerations. For affect, it turns out, is crucial to moral knowledge, and in two independent ways. First, given our human epistemic limitations, caring for recognizably moral ends is crucial to being attentive to the morally salient details of the situations we face. This is an important point in its own right. For even if the ideal epistemic stance turns out to be a dispassionate one, we will not make the (oddly common) fallacy of taking features of the ideal as direct guides to what we should strive for. (Sometimes getting better means cultivating precisely those features not found in the ideal.) Second, possessing appropriate affect turns out to be a necessary precondition for seeing the moral landscape. This need not render morality some poor second cousin to science, for affect may be revealing of truth.

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## NOTES

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1. See, for instance, Lugones (1987), Jaggar (1989), Walker (1992). Here, as often, work explicitly labeled feminist finds friendly parallels with work by the neo-Aristotelians. See Nussbaum (1990), Sherman (1989), McDowell (1978). Affect's role in scientific investigation is a popular, though less well developed thesis in feminist philosophy of science: see, for instance, Keller (1982), Rose (1983).

2. Throughout this essay, I use the term "affect" as a generic label for desires and emotions. It is a somewhat misleading label, because "affect" carries the connotation of feelings, and I mean it to include desires and motivational propensities that are not felt.

3. Indeed, it is often difficult to separate out which thesis is being advanced within a given philosopher's views. Philosophers who discuss the issue in depressing fashion include: Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252a ff., *Generation of Animals*, 1.20 and 2.3; Rousseau, part 5 of *Emile*; Kant, sec. 3 of *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*; Hegel, *Philosophy of the Right*. (An excellent article on Aristotle's argument regarding women's irrationality is Spelman [1983]). Early and eloquent defense of women's equal rationality is found in Mary Wollstonecraft, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, but of course Wollstonecraft does not challenge the gendered nature of the reason she is so eager to attribute to women.

4. Thus, for instance, in setting out to provide a unified method for discerning truth, Descartes' injunction to transcend the particular, the parochial, and the perspectival quickly translated into an injunction to transcend inclination, emotion, and desire. Interestingly, it is the connection to body that seems operative here. According to Descartes, affect is associated with the body, and the corporeal always confuses (indeed, he thought emotions were simply confused beliefs). (See especially his *Discourse on Method* and *The Passions of the Soul.*)

Kant, we all know, had a tremendous general suspicion of emotion and inclination: he regarded affect as squarely on the side of the empirical, the determined, and the psychological, which was why he believed that affect could not form the paradigmatically proper impetus for moral action. This is not to say he left no moral role for affect: neo-Kantians such as Barbara Herman (1985) have taken pains to emphasize the role of sympathy in Kant's later work, *The Doctrine of Virtue* (see for instance p. 126). But my own reading of his text is that, even where he does concede a role for affect in moral life, it is only the role of helping us respond and act as we should (supplying motivation when the motive of duty fails us), not helping us to discern what morality requires of us in the first place: that epistemological project is still the sacrosanct domain of reason. For the record, I might add that, while I find the recent work of neo-Kantians rich and interesting, I do think it is important to record where Kant himself, as well as the Kant of traditional interpretation, fails to acknowledge or to highlight something as important as affect's role in moral epistemology. As feminists have often pointed out, what is not said or not emphasized in a tradition is as telling as what it advances and underscores.

Hume presents perhaps the most interesting case. As a member of the Scottish Enlightenment—as a Moral Sense theorist—he of course regarded passions and senti-

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ment as indispensable to moral judgment. The argument, familiarly, is that reason alone cannot yield moral verdicts, for such verdicts move us to act, and reason itself is impotent on this score. Hume thus receives high marks from many feminists, for reason turns out to be the slave of the passions in practical deliberations (see, for instance, Baier 1989). But in a very deep way, I think Hume's theory only reinforces the traditional view. It is precisely because he thinks that moral verdicts are importantly determined by our passions that he regards them as impossible candidates for truth (see the penultimate section of this essay). According to Hume's view, there are no moral truths. When we think we detect them, we are in fact simply reading off what we ourselves have put there—our sentiments projected onto the world as it really is. Affect, then, still has no role that we would call epistemological in any robust sense of epistemology, for it does not help us gain true belief or help us determine how the world is. Quite to the contrary, its presence is precisely that which contaminates the moral verdict's claim to full epistemic respectability (see *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2.3.3 and 3.1.1).

5. Throughout this essay, 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). Of course, a full theory of moral epistemology would provide an account of how and when such judgments are justified. I do not take myself to have offered any such account in this essay.

6. My thanks to Gene Mills for suggesting this example.

7. The example is cited in Dancy (1993, 61); he attributes it to Roy Hattersley, who explained "slaughter should not be fun."

8. This is not to deny that moral properties are fixed by the nonmoral ("good-making") properties in a given situation. It is rather to agree with Aristotle that there are no principles codifying the myriad ways in which nonmoral properties can fix the moral ones. Murdoch (1970) argues that we are tempted to insist that there must be such principles in the offing, despite the enormous variations we experience in actual cases of cruelty, kindness, obligation, only out of anxiety at the complexity of the world. McDowell (1978) argues that the urge to posit such principles is born of misplaced loyalty to a falsely narrow notion of consistency: namely, one that counts us as "going on in the same way" when applying moral terms only if the sameness of situations can be seen at the nonmoral level.

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