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# INTUITIONIST MORAL PERCEPTION

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I defend a view in intuitionist moral epistemology on which some basic moral beliefs are justified by perception. Moral intuitionists, I argue, ought to hold that we have some justified particular moral beliefs. Since the paradigm non-moral case of a justified particular belief is perceptual, the possibility of justified moral perception ought to be of interest to moral intuitionists.

Drawing upon the work of Susanna Siegel, I argue that moral concepts can cognitively penetrate our perceptual content in the same manner as complex non-moral concepts. Like non-moral perceptual beliefs, moral perceptual beliefs arrive as perceptual seemings, and become fully-fledged beliefs only when we endorse their content. I argue that forming a conceptually rich moral perceptual belief entails taking on a commitment to certain core claims implicit in the associated moral concept: claims which, if false, render the associated moral concept defective.

I tackle two major problems with my account of intuitionist moral perception. First, that cognitive penetration, especially by a complex concept, entails that the penetrated belief is epistemically dependent on the relevant complex concept, and thus is inferentially justified if it is justified at all. Second, that my account of intuitionist moral perception would entail that very many bigoted moral perceptions are justified basic beliefs.

In response to the first, I rely upon Robert Audi's work on epistemic dependence. While cognitive penetration entails epistemic dependence, it only entails negative epistemic dependence and not positive epistemic dependence. Further, I argue that only positive epistemic dependence would require a justified belief to be inferentially justified. I distinguish between several ways in which a belief can be inferential and conclude that my view only entails negative epistemic dependence.

In response to the second, I outline a further criterion that must be met for a moral perception to be justified: that the perceiver is monitoring their suite of moral concepts in the right way. Drawing on Lorraine Code's work on virtue epistemology, I argue that one satisfactory monitoring process would involve the cultivation of epistemic virtue.

## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis contains only my original work towards the Master of Arts (Advanced Seminar and Shorter Thesis).

I declare that due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.

I declare that this thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of bibliography.

Sean Goedecke

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## INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I will outline and defend a moral epistemology where the justification of many of our particular moral beliefs is perceptual. On my view, we can literally see that an act is a murder and thus be non-inferentially justified in so believing, in the same way that we can see that an object is a table and thus be non-inferentially justified in so believing. This moral epistemology will be intended for an *ethical intuitionist*: somebody who believes that part of our moral knowledge is non-inferentially justified. Since perception is commonly supposed to be a paradigm source of non-inferential justification, the fit is natural.

In Chapter 1 I will explain why an ethical intuitionist might want to appeal to moral perception in order to explain the justification of our particular moral beliefs. I will go on to sketch some support for perception of complex properties in the philosophy of mind, and argue that moral perception is just a special case of perception of complex properties.

In Chapter 2 I will adapt what I have said about moral perception into an epistemology of perception. I will then outline two major problems with this kind of intuitionist moral epistemology: the Inferential Problem, which raises doubts about whether moral perceptions are really non-inferentially justified, and the Bootstrapping Problem, which raises doubts about bigoted or dogmatic moral perceptions.

In Chapter 3 I will address the Inferential Problem. I will argue that, although moral perception is necessarily theory-laden, it can still be non-inferentially justified.

In Chapter 4 I will address the Bootstrapping Problem. I will argue that, in order to be justified in forming moral perceptual beliefs, we must have developed

mastery over the relevant moral concepts in the right way. Further, I will argue that forming justified basic perceptual beliefs for the intuitionist requires us to be monitoring our conceptual machinery correctly. Moreover, forming justified *self-evident* beliefs also requires us to be monitoring our conceptual machinery. An account of such monitoring is thus very important to the intuitionist. As I will argue, this monitoring process requires cultivating the relevant intellectual virtues.

## CHAPTER 1: MORAL PERCEPTION

### Introduction

Ethical intuitionists have recently begun to advance accounts of moral perception: the view that we can “just see” that particular actions are right or wrong (Cullison 2010; Audi 2010, 2013; Cowan 2013). As I will argue, these accounts are intended to plug a hole in intuitionist moral epistemology. While intuitionists, notably Robert Audi, have argued that some of our general moral beliefs are non-inferentially justified via self-evidence, there is no dominant explanation for how some of our particular moral beliefs are non-inferentially justified. Moral perception is thought to provide such an explanation.

Unfortunately for the intuitionist, accounts of moral perception are likely to intersect with a current debate in the philosophy of mind. This debate is over whether complex properties can be perceived at all. Since moral properties are certainly complex properties, the outcome of this debate will have serious consequences for intuitionism. Given that, the intuitionist ought to model her view of moral perception on a strong account of how it is possible to perceive complex properties. In this chapter I will outline such a strong account and explain how it can be applied to the case of moral perception.

### 1. Why care about moral perception?

Intuitionists believe that some of our moral knowledge is non-inferentially justified. Traditionally, intuitionists like W.D. Ross have appealed to self-evidence as the source of this non-inferential justification. On a Rossian view of self-evidence, we

may be justified in believing some moral propositions just in virtue of understanding their content (1930, 21). However, as Russ Shafer-Landau has pointed out, only general moral beliefs may be self-evident. Particular moral beliefs cannot be (2003, 271). I might be justified in believing “killing is *prima facie* wrong” just by understanding the concepts “killing” and “wrong”. But I cannot be justified in believing “James’ killing of John was wrong” on the same grounds, because no understanding of concepts can justify me in the belief that James did in fact kill John.

We might say that all beliefs like “James’ killing of John was wrong” are justified by inference from self-evident general beliefs like “killing is wrong”. This would be a subsumptivist view, since it proposes to subsume the justification of all our particular moral beliefs under general principles. But a subsumptivist view is unattractive. One of the major motivations of intuitionism is to reflect something of the way we do in fact make moral judgements in practice. Given that, it certainly does not seem in practice like we are bringing to bear a general principle in each of our particular moral judgements. In fact, often our particular moral beliefs and judgements seem more solid than our general principles. For these reasons intuitionists tend to believe that our particular moral beliefs may be non-inferentially justified (Shafer-Landau 2003, 266; Audi 2008, 481).

Since self-evidence will not do the job, intuitionists need a separate account of how particular moral beliefs may be non-inferentially justified. A traditional intuitionist solution might be to appeal to a faculty of intellective intuition, which just gives us justified particular moral beliefs. However, I will be going a different route in this thesis. I will appeal to an already-existing faculty – perception – to give the necessary account of how our particular moral beliefs are justified. Although an

approach based on intellective intuition is defensible, I think an approach based on perception better captures the nature of many of our particular moral judgements.

Gilbert Harman's well-known example – in which Jim can immediately see that a group of cat-burners are doing the wrong thing – suggests the analogy between moral sensibility and perception (1977, 8). Our particular moral beliefs seem to be in some sense formed directly from perception: often we can just see that something is wrong. We can thus think of our particular moral judgements as moral perceptions. Like other perceptions, our particular moral judgements may be justified non-inferentially. Following this thought, many intuitionists have recently outlined accounts of moral perception (Audi 2013; Cowan 2013; Cullison 2010; McBrayer 2010).

However, there are two ways of reading the claim that our particular moral judgements are moral perceptions<sup>1</sup>. We might join the intuitionists in thinking that the moral properties ascribed in particular moral judgements are part of basic perceptual content, whatever that is. Alternatively, we might think that particular moral judgements are the result of an *inference* from basic perceptual content, along with some background moral beliefs. This second view looks more modest than the first. After all, moral properties are perhaps too complicated to be part of basic perceptual content, alongside colour, shape, and motion.

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<sup>1</sup> A third way, which I will not discuss, would be the view that we have a non-inferential disposition to form moral judgements on the basis of our non-moral perceptions. However, note that I will take a very broad view of what counts as an inference. Depending on how “non-inferential disposition” is cashed out, this third way could easily collapse into version of the second view I have described.

But the intuitionist cannot accept this second view. As Pekka Vayrynen argues, if moral perceptions are the result of a suppressed inference, then our particular moral judgements are justified inferentially (2008, 497). A belief we must come to via inference cannot be a basic belief. On Vayrynen's view, intuitionists must say that some experiences of an ethical property are not indirect or inferential perceptions, but actually "perceptions of this ethical property as being instantiated" (500). So the intuitionist – if she wants to hold onto a perceptual view of our particular moral beliefs – must defend this claim:

**Moral perception:** For many moral agents, moral properties can enter into basic perceptual content.

If moral perception is true, then it is possible to directly perceive that an act falls under a moral description: a murder, a lie, a wrong-doing, and so on. But "being a murder", "being a lie", and "being a wrong-doing" are all high-level properties. They do not seem to be simple concepts, like "being red" or "being a circle". We may distinguish two types of theory of perception. There are *broad* theories, on which we can perceive lots of different properties, some quite high-level (Bayne 2009; Siegel 2006; McBrayer 2010). Alternatively, there are *narrow* theories, on which the properties we can perceive are restricted to a small set of colour, shape, and object properties (Price 2009; Brogaard 2013, Burge 2003b)<sup>2</sup>. Any defense of moral perception must rely on a broad theory of perception:

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<sup>2</sup> Sometimes these theories are just called "high-level" and "low-level" theories of perception. However, due to concerns over what exactly makes a property "higher-level" than some other property, I will adopt the less-controversial (if slightly less popular) terminology of "broad" and "narrow".

**Broad perception:** For many people, complex properties can enter into basic perceptual content.

As Vayrynen notes, discussions of moral perception have often just assumed that some broad theory of perception is true (2008, 500). However, intuitionist views have recently begun to address Vayrynen's concerns. Andrew Cullison has explicitly relied upon the directness of moral perception (2010, 167-168). Philip Cowan admits that ethical perception "depends on the truth of the high-level view of perceptual content", and refers the reader to Susanna Siegel's method of phenomenal contrast (2013, 181). In the next section I will argue that Cowan is right. Siegel offers the best – indeed, the only – current broad theory of perception.

## 2. Siegel's theory of perception

In this section I will outline Siegel's broad theory of perception. Any broad theory of perception requires two components. First, it must give a story about how a complex property can enter into perception. Although it is plausible that we might be hard-wired to perceive redness, it is very implausible that we are hard-wired to perceive that an object is a pine tree, or that an act is a murder<sup>3</sup>. Properties like "pine tree" and "murder" must be learned by cognitive processes before they can be perceived. Broad theorists of perception owe us an account of how cognition can enter perception.

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<sup>3</sup> While implausible, it is certainly not impossible that we are hardwired to perceive some moral properties (just as we may be hardwired to perceive the high level property of causation). However, I will assume otherwise in what follows for two reasons: first, it would give the game almost entirely away to the intuitionist, which non-intuitionists will be reluctant to do; second, it would raise the tricky problem of why some of us can perceive moral properties that others cannot (and why we appear to be able to *learn* to perceive moral properties).

Second, a broad theory of perception must give us some methodology for working out which complex properties enter into perception and which do not. Even if we grant that the property of being a pine tree can be perceived, it is less plausible that the property of being a proton can be. So broad theorists of perception owe us an account of which complex properties can enter into perceptual content and which cannot.

The primary defender of the broad theory camp of perception is Siegel, who has vigorously argued that natural kind properties – and other complex properties – can enter into perceptual content (2006, 482). The debate over the contents of perception has recently become a debate over Siegel's main argument for her position: the method of *phenomenal contrast*, hereafter referred to as the MPC. Defenders of complex content in perception have generally attempted to shore up the phenomenal contrast argument (Cowan 2015; Bayne 2009). Critics of complex content have generally attempted to attack the phenomenal contrast argument (Vayrynen forthcoming; Brogaard 2013; Price 2009). Those who think there is no clear answer to the debate have supported their point by arguing that the phenomenal contrast argument is inconclusive (Prinz 2013; Logue 2013).

What are the two components of Siegel's broad theory of perception? The “method of phenomenal contrast” is the methodology which Siegel uses to determine exactly which complex properties are capable of being perceived. Siegel's account of how complex properties can enter into perception in the first place is “cognitive

penetration" (2012, 202). Since cognitive penetration is less controversial than the MPC, I will deal with it first<sup>4</sup>.

## 2.1 Cognitive penetration

Here is how Siegel defines cognitive penetration:

**Cognitive penetration:** An agent's perception P is cognitively penetrated just in case the agent possesses some cognitive state C, such that if C were removed, the content of P would be different even if the external objects being perceived were to stay the same (2012, 201).

Perception can be cognitively penetrated by knowledge: a Cyrillic sentence looks very different to a Russian than it does to somebody who can only read English. Perception can be cognitively penetrated by mood: as Siegel writes, depression can make everything seem grey (2012, 201)<sup>5</sup>. Perception can be cognitively penetrated by desire: Jane the gold-panner, desperate to find gold, might visually represent a shiny fleck in her pan as a fleck of gold dust.

We can see how this definition extends the notion of perceptual content beyond the properties that a camera would record. Since a camera cannot possess any cognitive states (I assume), there are some kinds of perceptual content that cannot be captured by a camera. Thus Siegel's view of perceptual content – of the way things can 'look' – includes properties that some might call interpretive or conceptual.

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<sup>4</sup> I don't mean to imply here that cognitive penetration is uncontroversial – merely that it is uncontroversial in the literature surrounding moral perception. A full defense of cognitive penetration from its opponents in the philosophy of mind is out of the scope of this paper.

<sup>5</sup> This example risks controversy: perhaps moods are not cognitive states at all, in which case they would not fit Siegel's definition. However, note that Siegel can retreat from this example without harming her overall case.

Robert Cowan notes that cognitive penetration can be both epistemically harmful and beneficial. Strong expectations or hopes, such as Jane's, can cause us to perceive content for which we have no justification. On the other hand, cognitive penetration can ground a story where we can perceive high-level properties, and thus gain "perceptual expertise" with their associated concepts (Cowan 2016, 3). We might be tempted to think that cognitive penetration by emotions is uniformly harmful, or at least risky, while cognitive penetration by concepts is uniformly beneficial (although Cowan himself does not seem to think so). However, we need not endorse this picture. On Audi's view of moral perception, not all emotions are epistemically harmful, and not all concepts are epistemically beneficial (2013, 22).

In what follows, I will be primarily concerned with one kind of beneficial cognitive penetration: cognitive penetration by *concepts*. In this paper, I will take Siegel's account of cognitive penetration as a paradigmatic example of cognitive penetration by concepts. She writes:

Suppose you have never seen a pine tree before, and are hired to cut down all the pine trees in a grove containing trees of many different sorts. Someone points out to you which trees are pine trees. Some weeks pass, and your disposition to distinguish the pine trees from the others improves. Eventually, you can spot the pine trees immediately. They become visually salient to you. Like the recognitional disposition you gain, the salience of the trees emerges gradually. Gaining this recognitional disposition is reflected in a phenomenological difference between the visual experiences you had before and after the recognitional disposition was fully developed. (2006, 491)

For Siegel, cognitive penetration by concepts is a matter of fostering a disposition. Note that this is not simply a matter of learning a set of criteria, or some general rule for identifying pine trees. In the beginning, you will have to puzzle out if a particular tree is a pine or not, relying on deliberate inference from immediately-perceived properties like “needle-like leaves” and “thin trunk” to the more sophisticated property “pine tree”. However, with practice, you can see immediately which trees are pines and which are not. At this point, your recognitional process does not explicitly refer to properties like “thin trunk”. Your visual phenomenology has been cognitively penetrated by the concept *pine tree*.

## 2.2 Method of phenomenal contrast

A defender of a narrow theory of perception might admit that cognitive penetration by concepts is possible, while denying that it ever actually occurs in the case of complex concepts and their associated properties. Against this view, the broad theorist – such as the ethical intuitionist – must deploy a further argument for showing that complex properties do in fact penetrate our visual experience. For Siegel, this argument is her MPC. Let us see how it works in the case of the complex property “pine tree”.

Suppose two people look at a pine tree. One is an accomplished botanist, who is able to instantly recognize that it is a pine tree. The other is a person who has grown up in the city and cannot distinguish a pine tree from any other kind of tree. Let us call the botanist’s visual experience E1 and the other person’s visual experience E2. Siegel constructs the following argument (2006, 491).

P0: The overall experience of which E1 is a part differs phenomenologically from the overall experience of which E2 is a part

P1: If P0 is true, then there is a phenomenological difference between E1 and E2

P2: If there is a phenomenological difference between E1 and E2, then they differ in content

P3: If E1 and E2 differ in content, then they differ with respect to the complex properties they represent

C1: Therefore E1 represents a complex property

C2: Therefore visual experiences can represent complex properties

Since this argument investigates a phenomenological difference, Siegel calls it the method of phenomenal contrast. Such a method can serve as a test for whether a particular property can be represented in perception. For any given property, we can construct a pair of contrasting perceptual experiences E1 and E2, such that E1 involves recognition of the property and E2 does not. We can then run through the premises of Siegel's argument. If there is no plausible objection to any of the premises, then we may justifiably conclude that the property is represented in perception.

What is the structure of the method of phenomenal contrast? Although it's valid, it's not very convincing as a deductive argument, since all the work seems to be done by posing a series of controversial premises. I suggest that we should follow William Lycan in reading it as a series of inferences to the best explanation (2014, 317). On this reading, P1 is intended to be the best explanation for P0, and P2 is the best explanation for P1, and so on all the way to the conclusion that a broad perceptual theory is the best explanation for the contrast case in P0. Reading Siegel

in this way explains why the objections to her premises are mostly alternate explanations that the narrow perceptual theorist takes to be more plausible.

I do not have space here to address objections to Siegel's theory of perception. However, I take the relevant literature to broadly support Siegel's view – or at least, to support it enough to treat it as a promising model for advancing a theory of moral perception.

### 3. What about moral perception?

It is easy to apply Siegel's broad theory of perception to the case of moral perception. As I have said, the two elements of her theory are an account of how some complex properties can be perceived, and a way to distinguish which complex properties can be perceived. Both of these elements work well with moral properties.

For Siegel, complex properties can be perceived when the relevant concept cognitively penetrates your visual phenomenology. Once a concept like *pine tree* has made its way in, you can perceive that something is a pine tree. On the face of it, there is nothing preventing moral properties from doing the same thing. If *pine tree* can penetrate visual phenomenology, why not *murder*?

On Siegel's view, the complex properties which can be perceived are the ones which survive her method of phenomenal contrast: in other words, the ones for which the visual experience representing that property is the best explanation for the phenomenal difference between experiences which are aware of that property and experiences which are not. Although I will not run through the details here, on my view the MPC can be applied to the property of being a murder as well as to the property of being a pine tree.

We can now see why Siegel's view ought to be appealing to the moral intuitionist. On this kind of view, moral perception is a wholly unremarkable variety of perception, alongside weather perception and cat perception. Our concepts about morality can penetrate our visual phenomenology in the same way that our concepts about weather and cats can. Thus proponents of moral perception need not take on the theoretical cost of proposing a separate faculty or kind of perception.

#### 4. Conclusion

In this thesis I want to set aside objections to the MPC, or to my application of the MPC to moral perception. My prime concern here is with the status of intuitionist moral perception with respect to epistemological concerns, not with respect to concerns in the philosophy of mind. In this section I have established that there is at least room in the philosophy of mind for a theory of moral perception, along Siegel-like lines. That is enough to be going on with.

What have we established so far? Ethical intuitionists rely on moral perception to explain the justification of our particular moral beliefs. As I have argued, in doing so they depend upon the truth of broad theories of perception like Siegel's, on which moral concepts cognitively penetrate the visual phenomenology of the agents which possess them.

## CHAPTER 2: TWO PROBLEMS

### Introduction

In this chapter I will convert the theory of moral perception in the previous chapter into an intuitionist *epistemology* of moral perception. I will argue that the justification of moral perceptual beliefs comes from moral perceptual seemings, which themselves cannot be justified but only warranted. I will explain how cognitive penetration affects the epistemic status of penetrated beliefs.

Then I will describe two significant problems for an intuitionist theory of moral perception. First, that moral perceptual beliefs must be inferentially justified, since they are dependent on the epistemic status of the penetrating moral concepts. Second, that a bigot's moral perceptual beliefs might be cognitively penetrated by unjustified bigoted beliefs, thus justifying them.

### 1. Epistemic properties

An epistemology of perception must give an account of which elements of perception are capable of bearing which epistemic properties. I will outline my account here. First I will give a non-epistemic story of various mental states involved in perception, and then I will explain which states can be justified, which can merely be warranted, and which admit neither of justification or warrant.

I will argue that epistemic properties can attach not just to beliefs, but to seemings, and even to our deployment of concepts. However, justification can attach only to beliefs. Seemings can only possess the weaker epistemic property of

“warrant”. Deploying a concept in perception which we are not epistemically entitled to will result in an unwarranted seeming and may cause an unjustified perceptual belief.

### 1.2 Beliefs, seemings, and concepts

In my perception of an object as a chair, I have both a perceptual *seeming* of a chair and a perceptual *belief* that this object is a chair. The seeming is just the perceptual content that my perceptual faculties deliver to my consciousness. The perceptual belief is that same content coupled with my commitment to its truth. Since the content is identical, we can safely call the transition from seeming to belief non-inferential. In the majority of perceptions, each seeming will be coupled to a corresponding belief: it seems to me that this is a coffee cup, and so I believe it, and so on.

Since I am endorsing a high-level theory of perception, I hold that the content of both my perceptual seemings and my perceptual beliefs may contain sophisticated properties. For instance, I might have a perceptual seeming of cruelty, or of Krauts, or of dole bludgers. So there are two mental states I am concerned with: perceptual seemings and perceptual beliefs.

However, note that in order to have perceptions with this rich conceptual content, I must first be disposed to deploy the associated concepts. As we will see, there is much to be said about our epistemic warrant to deploy a concept in perception. While there is also much to be said about what constitutes a concept, I want to avoid committing myself to a particular view of concepts. Aside from some

claims I will make in section 1.4 of this chapter, I take my theory to be compatible with many different theories of concepts.

### 1.3 Epistemic properties of seemings and beliefs

Why can beliefs be justified but seemings merely be warranted? I hope it is clear that perceptual beliefs, like other beliefs, are capable of being justified and unjustified. Perceptual seemings are a little trickier. I will be working with a view on which we see epistemic properties in terms of appropriateness. On this view, we can only be in violation of epistemic norms if we are somehow epistemically blameworthy. For my purposes, it does not matter precisely how we cash out “blameworthy”. However, one way to think of it would be this: a mental state S is epistemically blameworthy only if an epistemically virtuous person in our exact position would not possess S.<sup>6</sup>

We might therefore claim that a perceptual seeming can never violate epistemic norms, even if it is inaccurate, because we cannot choose what we perceive. We can only choose whether to believe it. However, this claim is not quite right. Although we cannot choose what to perceive at the moment of perception, there are some occasions where we are epistemically at fault for having certain inaccurate perceptual seemings. For instance, I might carelessly allow myself to get into the common habit of thinking of the homeless as lazy. If I then, glancing at a

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<sup>6</sup> Here I am understanding epistemic virtue along responsibilist lines, not reliabilist ones. In keeping with the broad outlook of this paper, I am concerned with internalist norms of justification, not externalist ones. A responsibilist view of epistemic virtue better captures the sympathies of internalism (Greco and Turri 2015). I will reveal further sympathies with a responsibilist view in Chapter 4, section 5.

homeless man, form a perceptual seeming with the content “lazy homeless man”, I am making an epistemic error<sup>7</sup>.

I do not want to commit myself to saying that these perceptual seemings are *unjustified*. We might think that being justified or unjustified has something to do with licensing inferential transitions, and a mere seeming cannot serve as a premise for inferences. However, since there is something epistemically wrong with those perceptual seemings, I will describe such perceptual seemings as “unwarranted”.

#### 1.4 Epistemic properties of concept deployment

What epistemic properties can attach to one’s deployment of concepts?

Following the strategy I used above, we might ask where one can be epistemically at fault in deploying a concept. Here is one way to go. We can distinguish two broad types of concepts, and thus two types of mistake that deploying a concept might involve. There is a difference between purely descriptive concepts, like “pain” and “homeless person”, and concepts that involve an additional evaluative element, like “cruel” and “vagrant”. Both kinds of concepts group together a set of objects or actions under what I will call a “grouping claim”. This is the claim that they represent a genuine group: a natural kind, a homeostatic property cluster, a group that is useful to a theory, or something like that, rather than a merely gerrymandered set. But, unlike purely descriptive concepts, some concepts suggest a further moral evaluation of the set of objects or actions: normal use of the concepts “cruel” and “vagrant” requires making a negative moral evaluation that would not be made by

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<sup>7</sup> In calling this a perceptual seeming, I am relying on Siegel’s notion of cognitive penetration that I discussed in Chapter 1.

using “pain” and “homeless person”. I will call this the “evaluative claim”. I will call concepts where either the grouping or the evaluative claim is false “defective concepts”, and concepts where both are true “effective concepts”.<sup>8</sup>

Deploying a concept in perception takes on a commitment – perhaps a provisional one – to these claims. If I look at a homeless man and form the perceptual seeming of a vagrant, I am disposed to make the claims that *vagrant* picks out a general group of people, and that this group merits negative moral evaluation. Even if I rightly refuse to turn that unwarranted seeming into a perceptual belief, doing so will involve a conscious act against my disposition. Am I at fault for merely having these dispositions? I take it that we can reflect on our concepts and decide whether to preserve or abandon them. Indeed, since these dispositions put us at risk of forming unjustified beliefs, we are epistemically obliged to.

We can now see two epistemic properties that apply to our deployment of concepts. We may be *entitled* to deploy a concept in perception. On my view, we are entitled to the vast majority of our concepts by default: we need not have reasons ready for the grouping or evaluative claim of every concept involved in our perceptions. However, we have an epistemic *responsibility* to monitor those entitlements.<sup>9</sup> All sorts of evidence can interrupt our entitlement to deploy a concept,

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<sup>8</sup> What I have said above suggests that any concept with an evaluative element can be disentangled into a set of purely descriptive claims and a separate moral evaluation. However, some philosophers have argued that some thick concepts cannot be disentangled in this way. John McDowell and Cora Diamond have suggested that using many thick concepts correctly requires “understanding the evaluations which are internal to the use of the concept” (McDowell 1981, Diamond 265 1988). On their view, it would be impossible to use such a thick concept correctly by fully understanding only its non-evaluative aspects. Despite appearances, I think McDowell and Diamond’s view is consistent with what I am laying out here. In fact, concepts that must be understood via their evaluative aspects seem to be concepts where the evaluative claim and the grouping claim are dependent: what makes the set of objects or actions picked out is only that they all merit a certain kind of evaluation.

<sup>9</sup> I will say much more about monitoring our entitlements in Chapter 4.

and if we fail to recognise such evidence we risk deploying concepts in perception that we are not entitled to. If we do so, those perceptual beliefs will be unjustified.<sup>10</sup>

### 1.5 Conclusion

We have arrived at an account of which perceptual states can bear which epistemic properties. A perceptual seeming cannot be justified or unjustified, but it can be *warranted* or unwarranted. We can choose to “throw our weight behind” a perceptual seeming and turn it into a perceptual belief, or to reject a perceptual seeming and form some other belief. Like other beliefs, a perceptual belief can be *justified* or unjustified.

Both perceptual seemings and beliefs can be penetrated by concepts, which group sets of things under claims about their similarity and, in moral concepts, their moral status. Our perceptual beliefs are only justified, and our perceptual seemings are only warranted, if we are *entitled* to deploy the concepts which they involve.

There are two necessary elements to entitlement. First, we are *prima facie* entitled to our concepts only if we have acquired them in an appropriate way.<sup>11</sup> Second, we have a *responsibility* to watch for evidence that can interfere with that *prima facie* entitlement. If we fail to recognize such evidence, we risk deploying concepts in perception that we are not entitled to. Any perceptual seeming penetrated by that concept will be unwarranted and its associated perceptual belief,

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<sup>10</sup> This breakdown of the epistemology of perception into justification and entitlement might be thought to echo Tyler Burge’s notion of perceptual entitlement. However, the view I am outlining is too internalist for Burge, who rejects any analysis of justification in terms of epistemic responsibility (2003 503). Burge is explicitly committed to externalism in the philosophy of mind, which he calls “anti-individualism” (505). Like Siegel, I prefer avoid taking a stand on this debate.

<sup>11</sup> On my view, almost all of us will have acquire almost all of our concepts in the appropriate way. This is why we are entitled to most of our concepts by default. I will give a more detailed account of what the “appropriate way” is in Chapter 4.

if I have formed one, will be unjustified. If we are fulfilling this responsibility, then our entitlement to deploy concepts will be genuine entitlement, not merely *prima facie*.

## 2. Two problems with moral perception

We have now arrived at a general theory of intuitionist moral perception. Now I will describe two major problems with this theory, which I will call the *Inferential Problem* and the *Bootstrapping Problem*. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 I will address these problems.

### 2.1 The Inferential Problem

First, we might suspect that cognitively penetrated moral perceptual beliefs are arrived at by unconscious or implicit inference, and thus must be justified inferentially. If this is true, they cannot serve as an epistemically basic belief. I will call this claim - that moral perceptual beliefs must be justified inferentially - Inferential Moral Perception.

However, as we have seen, intuitionists need moral perceptual beliefs to be epistemically basic. Otherwise, they cannot play the role of our particular basic moral beliefs, as the intuitionist needs them to do. The claim that moral perceptual belief must be inferentially justified is thus a problem for the intuitionist. I will address this problem in Chapter 3.

### 2.2 The Bootstrapping Problem

The second problem is first raised by Susanna Siegel (2012). Siegel raises a worry about taking cognitively penetrated perceptual beliefs as epistemically basic.

Suppose I have an unjustified belief that my friend Jack is angry at me. That belief might then cognitively penetrate my perceptions of Jack's mood, causing me to perceive that he is angry when in fact he is neutral. If I then take that perception as providing additional epistemic support for my belief, it looks like my previously-unjustified belief has now acquired a more epistemically solid footing. Siegel calls this illicit "epistemic elevation" (2012 202). For clarity's sake, though, I will call it "bootstrapping", since we might say the belief is pulling itself up 'by its bootstraps'. For Siegel, an epistemological theory of perception ought to treat bootstrapped beliefs as unjustified, in almost all cases.

Does our intuitionist theory of moral perception tolerate bootstrapping? Even though I am concerned with penetration by moral concepts, rather than moral beliefs, I think that, for all that has been said, the theory might<sup>12</sup>. Perceptual beliefs can be and are often penetrated by defective moral concepts, like *dole bludger*. Suppose I am strongly prejudiced against poor people. My unjustified endorsement of the claims involved in the concept *dole bludger* may then dispose me to form epistemically basic perceptual beliefs about particular dole bludgers, thus providing epistemic support for my deployment of that defective concept.<sup>13</sup> My unjustified moral beliefs will thus have bootstrapped themselves to a more secure epistemic level.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I am concerned with penetration my moral concepts because I think the problem is more difficult, given how much more entrenched our concepts are than our beliefs. A solution to the Bootstrapping Problem that deals with conceptual penetration will thus also deal with the easier problem of belief penetration.

<sup>13</sup> So far we might think the link between forming perceptual beliefs, familiarity with a concept, and self-evidence is insufficiently explained. I will go into considerably more detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>14</sup> In Chapter 4 - where I will argue that my theory can avoid the Bootstrapping Problem - I will explain how the worry goes deeper still. Bootstrapping would allow me to see some false *general* beliefs about dole bludgers as self-evident, thus contaminating both my particular moral beliefs and general moral principles.

This is a more precise version of a familiar worry about intuitionist moral theories: that they allow for the justification of prejudice and bigotry by dogmatically appealing to biased intuitions.

What, minimally, does an intuitionist theory of moral perception need in order to escape the Bootstrapping Problem? Siegel outlines two ways to “get off the hook”: either the theory must show that bootstrapping does not actually happen, or the theory must show how bootstrapping is really not so bad after all (2012 212). I will focus on the first way. An intuitionist theory of moral perception must involve some account of how the bigot’s moral perceptions about dole bludgers do not, at least in most cases, provide epistemic support for his deployment of the defective concept *dole bludger*.

We could thus avoid the Bootstrapping Problem by appealing to an externalist notion of justification. If, in order to be justified, a moral perception must reliably track moral truth, and perceptions about dole bludgers do not track moral truth, then the problem appears solved: the bigot’s perceptual beliefs are not justified. Finding some solution along these lines would address Siegel’s concern.

However, I think a response like this would miss some of the force of the problem. Part of the worry about intuitionism and dogmatism, I take it, is practical: that intuitionists themselves will slip into bigotry through exercising too much trust in their own moral intuitions. Suppose externalism about justification is true, and their intuitions are not actually justified by externalist standards. Even so, this will not help the intuitionist recognise and throw off their own unjustified beliefs.

What I want to give is an account of how intuitionists can avoid cases of bootstrapping, not just an externalist account of how bootstrapped beliefs fail to track truth. In other words, I want an internalist account of how bootstrapped perceptual beliefs are unjustified.

In Chapter 4 I will give such an account. I will argue that we have an epistemic responsibility to monitor the coherence of our conceptual machinery, and that if we are not doing so then our perceptual beliefs are unjustified. Engaging in this monitoring process, on my view, will catch most cases of bootstrapping.

## CHAPTER 3: SOLVING THE INFERENTIAL PROBLEM

### 1. Introduction

As I have argued in Chapter 1, intuitionists ought to endorse an account of high-level moral perception: the theory that our perceptual content can, with the appropriate training, include moral properties. In training ourselves to recognise cases of deception, cruelty, kindness, and so on, the properties “deceptive”, “cruel”, and “kind” cognitively penetrate our perceptual content. Not all moral perceptual seemings must be of this form: some may be non-conceptual, such as a vague sense of unfitness. But our immediate recognition of something as a deception, a cruelty, or a kindness is on this view the direct perception of those properties.

Taking a position on the relation between concepts and properties involves some tricky metaphysical claims that I wish to avoid. For my purposes, I will assume that every moral concept has an associated moral property which characterizes particular instantiations of the concept, just as the property “cruel” characterizes instantiations of the concept *cruelty*<sup>15</sup>. Likewise, the moral properties I have been working with characterize instantiations of moral concepts. For the most part, they have been thick moral concepts like *cruel*, not thin moral concepts like *wrong*: that is, they contain substantial elements of both description and evaluation.

Concepts like *cruelty* and *murder* imply at least *prima facie* wrongness, even if sometimes being cruel and murdering is the right thing to do. For instance, the concept *cruelty* groups a set of descriptors – certain intentions, facial expressions,

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<sup>15</sup> For consistency’s sake, I will say that defective concepts pick out defective properties (which do not apply to anything in the world), rather than that they fail to pick out any property at all (due to being defective). Recall my discussion of defective concepts in Chapter 2 (section 1.4).

tones of voice, and actions – under the broad normative seeming or judgement that those descriptors constitute a particular type of wrong-doing. Sometimes this judgement can be outweighed by other factors, in cases where a cruel action is overall the right thing to do. But the concept *cruelty* can never be deployed without any hint of moral wrongness.

This characterization is intended to allow both generalist and particularist moral theorists to use moral concepts. Particularists like Jonathan Dancy and Margaret Little, who believe that no moral principle is true in all contexts, can still hold that describing an act as “cruel” typically carries with it a negative moral evaluation.

As I have argued, perceiving an act as cruel involves taking on a provisional commitment to the evaluative claim involved in the concept of cruelty. This explains how abstract moral reflection can affect our moral perceptions. Reflection might alter my conception of cruelty, causing me to perceive different actions as cruel or to take a different moral view of cruel actions.

Broadly speaking, intuitionist moral perception imports the moral attitudes implicit in the moral concepts possessed. But this move entails that moral perceptual beliefs are epistemically dependent. Our particular moral judgements, formed via perception, are only justified if we are entitled to deploy the moral concepts they involve.

In this chapter I want to investigate whether this version of moral perception can really count as a source of non-inferential or basic justification<sup>16</sup>. I will address the **Inferential Moral Perception** objection, which argues that our moral perceptions

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<sup>16</sup> I will treat the terms “non-inferential justification” and “basic justification” as equivalent.

are epistemically dependent and thus must be inferentially justified. As I will argue, this objection ultimately fails: epistemic dependence does not entail inferential justification. However, we will see that moral perception cannot be the only basic source of justification in an intuitionist moral epistemology. Although my account of moral perception is non-inferential, it must be accompanied by an account of where our entitlement to our moral concepts comes from.

## 2. Thick concepts and inferential moral perception

Here is the view I will be considering:

**Inferential Moral Perception:** any perceptual belief that involves thick moral concepts must be inferentially justified

If the intuitionist accepts Inferential Moral Perception, she must go looking for another source of justification for our particular moral beliefs. So there is a lot at stake here for a perceptual intuitionist moral epistemology.

How is the inferential moral perception objection motivated? First, we note that the use of a defective moral concept – e.g. *Kraut, chaste, dole bludger, junkie* – would, absent a very good excuse, render any associated moral perceptual belief unjustified.<sup>17</sup> This means that our moral perceptual beliefs are epistemically dependent on our entitlement to deploy the moral concepts they involve. I will use Robert Cowan's definition of epistemic dependence, slightly broadened to include

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<sup>17</sup> For more detail on what a “very good excuse” might be, and how precisely this works, see Chapter 4.

entitlement: a belief B is epistemically dependent on a mental state S if we must be entitled to be in S in order for B to be justified (2015 165).

We cannot be justified in a moral perceptual belief about dole bludgers without being entitled to think that some people really are dole bludgers. From this, we might conclude that our moral perceptions are inferentially justified, and cannot serve the intuitionist as a source of basic moral beliefs.

### 2.1 Epistemic dependence and inferential justification

Here is one way we might try to demonstrate Inferential Moral Perception:

P1: Any perceptual belief that involves thick moral concepts is epistemically dependent on those concepts

P2: Nothing epistemically dependent can be a basic belief

C1: Perceptual beliefs involving thick moral concepts cannot be basic beliefs

C2: Inferential Moral Perception is true

Since we have admitted that any perceptual belief involving an defective moral concept is unjustified, P1 is true. However, P2 is less secure. We can immediately see one problem. My ordinary perceptual beliefs are epistemically dependent on my eyesight, the fact that I am not hallucinating, the absence of an evil wizard manipulating the light-waves between the world and my retinas, and so on. Since all perceptions are epistemically dependent, P2 entails that perception cannot be a source of basic belief. Although this result should give us pause, it does not entail that P2 is false. After all, perception may not be a source of basic belief.

To see why P2 is false, we must appeal to Audi's distinction between positive and negative epistemic dependence (1988 95). For example, I positively depend upon my well for water, and I negatively depend upon the fact that others are not poisoning it (95). Positive epistemic dependence is justification: my beliefs positively epistemically depend upon the reasons I have for them. By contrast, negative epistemic dependence is just defeasibility, and almost all modern foundationalists believe that we can have defeasible basic beliefs. So while P2 may be true in the case of positive epistemic dependence, it is false in the case of negative epistemic dependence.

Could we amend P1 to claim that moral perceptual beliefs are positively epistemically dependent on our entitlement to deploy thick moral concepts? It does not seem so. In perception of complex properties, our conceptual machinery is the means by which we see, not the source of justification for what we see. If I see a cruel cat-burning, this perception negatively depends on my entitlement to the concept of cruelty. Likewise, it negatively depends on my glasses being in working order, the absence of an evil demon deceiving me, and so on.

A defender of this amended P1 faces two problems. First, they must make a principled distinction between the concepts which help us see more clearly and physical tools which do the same, like glasses or telescopes. Second, they must make a principled distinction between the simple concepts which help us see clearly, like *red* and *circle*, and more complicated concepts like *car* or *justice*. In the absence of these two distinctions, it is plausible to conclude that epistemic dependence on concept possession is merely negative.

We have shown that epistemic dependence by itself does not entail Inferential Moral Perception. However, we have not yet shown that Inferential Moral Perception is false.

## 2.2 Inferential justification in the literature

I intend to demonstrate that moral perceptual beliefs can be justified non-inferentially. We ought to begin such a demonstration with a definition of what exactly inferential and non-inferential justification involves. If a belief is justified inferentially, there must be some valid inference from a set of propositions J to the belief, and the believer must base her belief on J. Therefore the believer must have some access to J: she must believe J, or be able to quickly form the beliefs J, or be disposed to appeal to J when challenged, or something like that. Which of these access relations is required for inferential justification? As I will show, there is no clear consensus in the intuitionist literature.

Walter Sinnott-Armstrong holds that a belief that *p* is inferentially justified if the belief's justification depends on whether the believer can draw inferences to *p* (2002 309). On this view, non-inferential justification would have to be completely independent of any inferences the believer could draw. In fact, Sinnott-Armstrong writes that some people have some moral beliefs that are non-inferable: they are incapable of drawing any inference in support of those beliefs (2006a 187-188).

Against Sinnott-Armstrong, Tropman suggests that non-inferential justification might require the believer to be able to draw inferences to their belief (2011 360). For instance, justified belief in a self-evident moral truth about murder requires an understanding of the concept of murder (Audi 2004 101). As Tropman argues, we

might think that understanding a concept requires being able to draw basic inferences to and from propositions involving that concept (2011 361). So even a paradigm case of non-inferential justification like self-evidence might require the ability to draw inferences. Since I agree with Tropman that Sinnott-Armstrong's view of inferential justification is untenable, I will not be considering his view in what follows.

Tropman goes on to give a second account of inferential justification. For Tropman, a belief is inferentially justified if it is “based upon reasons” (362). On this view, a belief’s being based on a reason means that the believer has already made a tacit inferential connection between her beliefs. Tropman states explicitly that this inferential connection must be “available to her consciousness”: she must be able to appeal to the connection if challenged (362).

Robert Audi’s view of inferential justification is similar to Tropman’s. Audi takes inferential justification to draw on “structural inferentiality”, which is defined in virtue of a basing relation (1988 68). For Audi, one belief A is based on another B if my believing B “is at least part of what explains” why I believe A (68)<sup>18</sup>. Like Tropman, Audi thinks that the base belief must be explicitly believed. It does not matter whether I can, on reflection, produce several beliefs which would serve as adequate bases for my initial belief. If I did not hold those beliefs prior to forming my initial belief, then they cannot be its base.

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<sup>18</sup> Here I pass over two difficult matters: first, the question of how much “basing” a mere partial explanation can accomplish, compared to a sufficient explanation; second, the distinction between different kinds of explanation, some of which support the basing relationship and some of which do not. Audi discusses these points in more depth in (1988).

Pekka Vayrynen suggests that our notion of inferential justification may depend upon how broad our notion of inference is (2008 490). A very narrow notion of inference might lead us to think that inferential justification must proceed via a conscious mental inference. A very broad notion of inference might lead us to call a belief inferentially justified if the believer merely holds unarticulated or tacit beliefs that have served as premises in an unconscious inference.

So far I have discussed accounts of inferential justification that focus on the disposition or ability to give reasons for the justified belief. However, on John Bengson's view, a perception is inferentially justified in virtue of its phenomenology (2015 749).<sup>19</sup> On this view, there is something it is like for a belief to be inferentially justified: inferentially justified beliefs are experienced differently to non-inferentially justified beliefs. For Bengson, my perceptual belief with content *p* is inferentially justified if it seems to me 'that *p* is true by *q*'s also being true' (750). This is not a claim about a connection that one is disposed to draw when challenged, as in Tropman's view, or an explanation for why one believes that *p*, as in Audi's view. It is a claim that the believer's mental state encompasses not just the basing belief but the fact that it is a basing belief. We might call this a *phenomenal* account of the basing relation. For Bengson, a non-inferentially justified perceptual belief must be free of any phenomenal sense of the basing relation, or in his terms "translucent" (750). Note that on this view, unlike Audi's and Tropman's, it would involve substantial self-deception to mistake what one bases one's belief on.

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<sup>19</sup> Note that, unlike Audi and Tropman, Bengson only speaks about the justification of perceptions. He might have a very different epistemic story for non-perceptual beliefs. But as the topic of this paper is the epistemology of perception, it doesn't matter what Bengson thinks about other kinds of belief.

I am inclined to reject Bengson's view for the same reasons that Tropman rejects Sinnott-Armstrong's: it unduly restricts the set of non-inferentially justified beliefs. If, as Audi and Tropman claim, a belief can enjoy both inferential and non-inferential justification, then a belief can be non-inferentially justified without being translucent. Audi and Tropman deal with this by tying non-inferential justification to premise-independence, but this move is not easily available to Bengson. For Audi and Tropman, dependence and independence are modal notions which need not enter the phenomenology of perception. Bengson might respond by saying that in such cases the belief has a kind of dual phenomenology: the basing phenomenology is present, but with an additional sense of independence from the basing belief. For instance, it might seem to me 'that  $p$  is true by  $q$ 's also being true but also that  $p$  would still seem true were  $q$  not available to me'. This seems a little too overblown for ordinary phenomenology of belief, but I will not develop this argument here.

As I will argue later, if Bengson is right, Inferential Moral Perception is straightforwardly false. However, since I have shown that there is reason to prefer Audi's or Tropman's view to Bengson's, I will consider all three in what follows. I will eventually conclude that none of these senses of inferential justification gives us reason to endorse Inferential Moral Perception.

### 3. What inference is involved in moral perception?

If our moral perceptual beliefs are inferentially justified, then they are justified by inference from the claims involved in their moral concepts. Let us consider what this inference might look like in Harman's cat-burning case. In Chapter 2 I argued

that a thick moral concept combines some descriptive criteria D with an evaluative criteria E. For instance, cruelty will be composed of “causing pain”, “indifference”, and so on, coupled with a negative moral evaluation. I suggest this argument as a model:

C1: Action A meets the descriptive conditions D for thick moral property F

C2: If the conditions D are met, so are the evaluative conditions E for F

CC: A is F

I have three clarificatory notes. First, I hope that any alternative analysis of thick moral concepts can also be cashed out as a formal argument, substituting inference-licenses or something like that for descriptive and evaluative conditions.

My arguments in this chapter ought thus be consistent with a variety of views on thick moral concepts. However, I have no space to argue for this here.<sup>20</sup>

Second, note that C1 and C2 ought to be read *de re*, as a claim about action A meeting a certain set of descriptive conditions. Belief in C1 need not entail believing that D contains the conditions for thick moral property F, and belief in C2 need not entail believing that E contains the evaluative conditions for thick moral property F. To endorse the evaluative claim involved in the concept of cruelty, we need merely believe that indifference to causing pain, along with other more subtle criteria, entails a negative moral evaluation.

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<sup>20</sup> Dummett (1973 454) is one philosopher who would resist the idea that concepts have descriptive and evaluative conditions. However, with some alterations to the content of C1 and C2, I think that he and other inferentialists in the philosophy of language can take up my point here.

Third, I am working here with a notion of inference that is internally available to the subject, not a sub-personal or sub-doxastic notion of inference as mere information processing. I am certainly not claiming that cognitive science will uncover a module in perceptual information processing that moves from C1 and C2 to CC.

This argument shows us that claims like CC bear some inferential relation to C1 and C2. C1 and C2 guarantee the truth of CC. Does the fact that our argument C exists show that beliefs like CC will always be inferentially justified? To see why not, we must examine further the notion of inferentiality and inferential justification.

### 3.1 Types of inferentiality

Any adequate view of inferential justification will involve two criteria: a claim that some inferential relation holds between a belief and some other state, and a claim that the believer is basing her belief on that inferential relation. Before we talk about basing, we ought to get a little clearer on what inferential relation holds between a belief in CC and the propositions C1 and C2.

What qualifies as an inferential relation? Depending on how strong our notion of inference is, we might hold a variety of views here: about whether an inferential belief need be consciously or unconsciously inferred, whether we must explicitly or tacitly hold the beliefs that form the premises for our inferential belief, or whether inferential perceptual beliefs involve a special phenomenology. First, I will introduce the notion of episodic inferentiality:

**Episodic inferentiality:** My belief that  $p$  is episodically inferential if I have arrived at it via conscious valid inference from my other beliefs

The distinction between episodic inferentiality and episodic non-inferentiality does not exhaust the senses in which a belief can be inferential. First, an episodically non-inferential belief may have been arrived at via an automatic or unconscious inference from other beliefs. Second, a belief arrived at without any kind of inference may still require an appeal to other beliefs in order to be justified. We must consider the structural inferentiality of beliefs.<sup>21</sup>

**Structural inferentiality:** My belief that  $p$  is structurally inferential if I am aware of a valid inference to it from my other beliefs

Can we develop a weaker notion of structural inferentiality? If I hold an episodically non-inferential and structurally non-inferential belief that  $p$ , when challenged I might be disposed to immediately form the beliefs that might structurally justify my belief that  $p$ . With that in mind, might we articulate a weaker sense of structural inferentiality, on which I need merely be disposed to form other beliefs from which  $p$  could be inferred? Unfortunately, this weaker structural inferentiality cannot be a part of an account of inferential justification. In order to base my belief that  $p$  on some ground  $q$ , I must believe that  $q$ , not merely be disposed to believe that  $q$ .

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<sup>21</sup> The distinction between structural and episodic inferentiality is adapted from Audi's distinction between structural and episodic inferential justification (1988 68). For Audi, these notions involve a basing relation and are epistemic properties. However, at this point I am just sketching types of inferential relation. In the next section I will build them into epistemic properties.

We might draw a final sense of inferentiality from Bengson's account of perception. On his view, the basing relation is a phenomenal one: that is, all my inferentially justified perceptions seem 'true in virtue of something else'.<sup>22</sup> With this in mind, we might articulate a third account of inferential justification:

**Phenomenal inferentiality:** My belief that  $p$  is phenomenally inferential if it is accompanied by a phenomenal sense that  $p$  is true on the basis of my other belief  $q$

These senses of inferentiality do not map neatly onto one another. A belief may be episodically non-inferential but structurally inferential. However, episodic inferentiality entails structural inferentiality, and structural non-inferentiality entails episodic non-inferentiality. Phenomenal inferentiality also entails structural inferentiality, since I must actually believe  $q$  in order to phenomenally base my belief that  $p$  on  $q$ .

Some of these senses entail a basing relation. Episodic inferentiality entails that I am basing my belief that  $p$  on some of my other beliefs, and phenomenal inferentiality entails that I am basing my belief that  $p$  on  $q$ . However, structural inferentiality does not entail that I am basing my belief on anything at all.

Where does my perceptual belief CC stand relative to these senses of inferentiality? Since my belief CC is a perceptual belief, it cannot be arrived at via a mental transition from other beliefs. Instead, it is arrived at via a perceptual seeming, since as I have argued that is what it means for something to be perceived. So all moral perceptual beliefs are episodically non-inferential. Whether my belief CC is

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<sup>22</sup> The quotes here indicate the phenomenal content of the seeming.

structurally inferential depends on whether I hold the beliefs C1 and C2. Merely being disposed to form those beliefs is not enough, since as we have seen inferential justification requires that I actually hold beliefs to base my perceptual belief on. If my belief CC is structurally inferential, then it may also be phenomenally inferential, depending on the phenomenology of my belief.

### 3.2 Two types of inferential justification

Which of these notions of inferentiality should we draw on when talking about inferential justification? Episodic inferentiality seems immediately too narrow. I suspect that most of our inferentially justified beliefs are not actually arrived at via conscious inference: they pop into our heads when we are going to sleep, or occur to us as we are considering the issues. Moreover, when our episodically non-inferential beliefs are challenged, even weakly, we often feel obliged to give reasons for them. This would be quite odd if episodically non-inferential beliefs were basic beliefs. We ought not require our inferentially justified beliefs to be episodically inferential. That leaves structural and phenomenal inferentiality.

Adding in the basing relation to structural inferentiality, we now have two rival accounts for inferential justification:

**Phenomenal inferential justification:** A justified belief is inferentially justified if it is phenomenally inferential

**Structural inferential justification:** A justified belief is inferentially justified if it is structurally inferential, and the believer bases it on some of their other beliefs

I take structural inferential justification to be the view of Audi and Tropman, and phenomenal inferential justification to be Bengson's view. Recall that the claim in Inferential Moral Perception is not that CC *can* be inferentially justified, but that CC *must* be inferentially justified if it is to be justified at all. As I will argue, moral perceptual beliefs need not be either structurally or phenomenally inferentially justified. So Inferential Moral Perception is false on either of these accounts.

#### 4.1 Moral perceptions do not need phenomenal inferential justification

Do moral perceptual beliefs need phenomenal inferential justification in order to be justified? If so, then every moral perceptual seeming would be accompanied by some awareness of a link to a grounding premise. My perception of a cat-burning as cruel would have to be accompanied by the conscious awareness of it being cruel in virtue of being a causing of pain. Phenomenal inferential justification is a stronger view than structural inferential justification. On phenomenal inferential justification, all inferentially justified moral perceptual beliefs must be accompanied by a clear sense of the reasons I have for them, included in the perceptual seeming. Any perceptual belief that arrives without such a clear sense - I will call such perceptions "opaque moral perceptions" - cannot be phenomenally inferentially justified. So if we do in fact have justified opaque moral perceptions, then moral perceptions need not be phenomenally inferentially justified.

I take it to be pretty clear that we do have justified opaque moral perceptions. For instance, we might have a strong sense that a particular person's conduct is an abuse of power, without having a simultaneous sense of all the particular features

that make it an abuse of power. Since such particular features are likely to be various and complex, and related to each other in a holistic way, it is plausible that we might only be able to distinguish them after careful reflection. Such opaque moral perceptions may still be justified, even if we are not immediately able to pick out the features we are responding to. So our moral perceptual beliefs may be justified without being phenomenally inferentially justified.

#### 4.2 Moral perceptions do not need structural inferential justification

Let us turn to structural inferential justification. As I will argue, we can dismiss the idea that moral perceptual beliefs require structural inferential justification without even considering the basing condition. Justified moral perceptual beliefs need not even be structurally inferential, and therefore need not be structurally inferentially justified. Since whether my belief CC is structurally inferential depends on whether I hold the beliefs C1 and C2, I will argue that we may hold a justified perceptual belief CC without holding the beliefs C1 and C2. First, I will consider an intuitionist appeal to ordinary intuition, which I think is ultimately unsuccessful. Second, I will outline my own “temporal gap” argument.

A familiar appeal to ordinary intuition might ask us to consider Unreflective Lisa, who immediately sees a cat-burning as cruel.<sup>23</sup> She does not hold any explicit belief that what she is seeing is a causing of pain, or that the cat-burners are indifferent, or that indifferent causing of pain merits a negative moral evaluation.

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<sup>23</sup> For instance, W.D. Ross explicitly claims that the convictions of the unreflective “plain man” are often more epistemically secure than our best philosophical theories of ethics (1939 186-188).

Despite this, the intuitionists might say, her belief is still justified, so we need not hold explicit beliefs about C1 or C2 to have a justified moral perceptual belief that CC. However, this argument assumes that the relevant base beliefs must be explicitly held. Our version of structural inferential justification allows the basing beliefs to be tacitly held. Since it is at least plausible to think that Unreflective Lisa does in fact tacitly believe that she is observing a causing of pain, and that the cat-burners are indifferent, and so on, the familiar intuitionist appeal to ordinary intuition fails.

#### 4.2.1 The temporal gap argument against structural inferential justification in perception

There is a better reason to think that justified moral perceptual beliefs need not be structurally inferential. Note that unlike C2, a belief in C1 cannot be held prior to perceiving the act in question. I cannot believe that what I am seeing fits all the descriptive criteria of a cruelty before I see it. In order for my belief CC to be structurally inferential, I would have to form the belief that what I am seeing fits the descriptive criteria of a cruelty *while I am gazing at the cat-burning*. But, if I am indeed having a direct moral perception of cruelty, I form the belief that I am seeing something cruel immediately. So structural inferential justification must come a moment or two after moral perception, which is implausible since moral perceptual beliefs seem justified at the moment of perception. I will call this the “temporal gap” argument:

P1: If justified perceptual beliefs must be structurally inferentially justified, then there must be a temporal gap between forming the perceptual belief and the belief's being justified

P2: It is implausible that there is a temporal gap between forming a perceptual belief and the belief's being justified

C: Therefore, it is implausible that justified perceptual beliefs must be structurally inferentially justified

Let us begin with the first premise of the temporal gap argument: that there must be a temporal gap between perception and its *structural* inferential justification. Why must structural inferential justification require a temporal gap? I will consider two accounts of perception that might not be compatible with the temporal gap argument: Audi's and my own.

On Audi's account of moral perception, we see that an act is cruel *in virtue of* seeing it to be an indifferent causing of pain (2013 14, 25). We might thus think that there is no temporal gap between seeing a thick moral property and seeing its descriptive conditions. Since C1 is thus formed instantly, and C2 can be a standing belief, we might say that a moral perceptual belief can be structurally inferential as soon as it is formed. However, I think this is a misreading of Audi. When Audi says that we perceive moral properties in virtue of 'perceiving' their conditions, I take him to mean 'responding to their conditions', not 'representing their conditions in perceptual content'. While the conditions of cruelty for a cat-burning might be obvious enough to make it into perceptual content, the conditions for more subtle cases - what I have called "opaque moral perceptions" in the previous section - will

not. When I see an instance of a complicated moral property, such as “abuse of power”, my perceptual content will not include all the myriad pieces of evidence I am responding to. For me to form a belief with that evidence as its content, and thus make my perceptual belief structurally inferential, would require at least a few moments of reflection. Audi’s account is compatible with the temporal gap argument.

On my account of perception, there is a temporal gap between forming a perceptual seeming and forming a perceptual belief. Perceptual seemings are formed instantly, and then when we make a commitment to them - by giving them an internal nod, or something like that - that same content becomes the content of a perceptual belief. So on my view there is a kind of temporal gap involved in all perceptions. Is this a problem for my argument? I think not. Forming a belief on the basis of our perceptual seemings happens near-instantly, while forming beliefs - even tacit beliefs - on the basis of other beliefs will always take longer. Since the temporal gap between seeming and belief is an order of magnitude smaller than the temporal gap between believing CC and believing C1, we need not be concerned about it. So there is nothing in my account of perception that is incompatible with the temporal gap argument.

An opponent here might claim that we do in fact immediately form tacit beliefs on the basis of our perceptual beliefs. Looking at a battered brown couch, I might form a number of tacit beliefs very quickly: that the couch is not new, that the couch’s surface is mottled, and so on. The key claim here will be that we never form one belief at a time, but instead form clusters of tacit beliefs around every explicit belief. I need not deny this claim in order to defend the temporal gap argument. I need only

say that, in the case of justified opaque moral perceptions, it is unlikely that the tacit beliefs we form will always be sufficient to inferentially justify CC. Often we must seriously reflect on a perceptual belief in order to see what aspects of the situation we were perceptually responding to. It is implausible to claim that we already held tacit beliefs about those aspects.

I will now move to the second premise of the temporal gap argument: that positing a temporal gap is implausible. I will argue that moral perceptual beliefs are justified at the moment of perception, not a few moments after when the perceiver forms the belief C1. I will give two reasons for this claim. First, it seems to me like my perceptual belief of a cat-burning as cruel is instantly justified, not instantly formed and then justified later. If I am an epistemic saint – someone who exemplifies epistemic virtue – forming the explicit belief C1 need not strengthen my conviction at all, although it might help me articulate my judgement to others. But for an epistemic saint, conviction will always track justification.<sup>24</sup> It is rather queer to think that something that, even on reflection, need not strengthen an epistemic saint's conviction can be the difference between being justified and being unjustified.

Second, if my perceptual faculties are accurately picking out the property "cruel", then it doesn't seem like forming the additional belief C1 later on is likely to be epistemically useful. An epistemically useful state is a state that will make it more likely for me to form accurate beliefs. However we define the state of being justified, it ought to be epistemically useful: a justified believer should be more likely to form

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<sup>24</sup> That this is true, at least where internal justification is concerned, can be seen by applying Montmarquet's test and asking whether an epistemically conscientious person would want to have such a trait (1987 489).

accurate beliefs than an unjustified believer. Since forming the belief C1 will not be epistemically useful, the justification of moral perceptual beliefs cannot require forming the belief C1, and therefore it cannot require strong inferential justification.

We have seen how to resist the view that moral perceptual beliefs must be strongly inferentially justified. Such a view would imply that a temporal gap exists between our perceptions and their justification, which is implausible on two grounds.

## 5. Conclusion

I have argued that, on Audi, Tropman or Bengson's view of inferential justification, moral perceptual beliefs are non-inferentially justified, despite being cognitively penetrated by thick moral concepts. The intuitionist can admit that moral perceptual beliefs are epistemically dependent on our entitlement to deploy their constitutive moral concepts. Inferential Moral Perception is false.

However, as Cowan notes, an epistemically dependent ground demands further theoretical work, whether it successfully supports non-inferential justification or not (2015 166). An adequate intuitionist moral epistemology cannot just be content with perception of thick moral concepts. Intuitionists still owe an explanation of where our entitlement to deploy moral concepts comes from, and how we might discharge our responsibility to monitor this entitlement.

## CHAPTER 4: SOLVING THE BOOTSTRAPPING PROBLEM

### 1. Introduction

In Chapter 2 I claimed that the epistemic status of our moral perceptual beliefs depends on whether we are entitled to deploy certain moral concepts in perception, which in turn depends on whether we have acquired the concept in the right way, and whether we have discharged our responsibility to monitor our conceptual machinery. In Chapter 3 I argued that this epistemic dependence does not mean that our moral perceptual beliefs must be inferentially justified. However, I concluded that the intuitionist must explain where our entitlement comes from, and how we can monitor it successfully.

In this chapter I will argue that one way we can acquire a concept in the right way is by gaining mastery over it.<sup>25</sup> I will outline one potential account of concept-mastery, and note how this process might go wrong. If nothing has gone wrong in that process, then I take it that we have gained mastery over that concept.

I will also sketch an account of what correct monitoring might look like. A plausible account of monitoring must not be too intellectualist: it must not entail that only moral philosophers can monitor their entitlement to deploy moral concepts. Setting aside its general implausibility, this kind of view would contradict the sympathy with the moral intuitions of non-philosophers that has been a defining (and appealing) feature of moral intuitionism. The account of monitoring I will advance need not involve any deliberate philosophical reflection.

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<sup>25</sup> I leave open the possibility of becoming entitled to a concept by deferring to experts, or by some other means.

My intuitionist moral epistemology will thus rule out almost all cases where moral perceptions are penetrated by defective moral concepts. This is a solution to the Bootstrapping Problem discussed in Chapter 2: the problem that a bigot may acquire justified bigoted beliefs by forming perceptions that have been penetrated by their moral concepts. On my view, these beliefs will only count as justified if the bigot is correctly monitoring their entitlement to their defective concepts. As I will argue, correctly monitoring a defective moral concept will generally reveal that it is defective. Thus my way of filling the gap revealed at the end of Chapter 3 will also solve the Bootstrapping Problem.

The particular account of moral concept-mastery I outline in this chapter is called the Intuitive Induction View. It is a slightly expanded version of the view Robert Audi holds, so it ought to be familiar to many intuitionists. However, although intuitionists do need an account of our entitlement to deploy moral concepts, they need not endorse my account. My main aim in this chapter is to show that an account like this is possible. I will leave open the possibility of there being other ways to become entitled to a concept, so I will not defend the Intuitive Induction View too vigorously. However, there are three broader claims about conceptualisation that I will defend in this chapter. All three claims are needed to solve the Bootstrapping Problem.

First, I contend that we can draw an intuitionist account of fallibility out of our account of moral conceptualisation. Although I will show how this can be done from the Intuitive Induction View, this step can be made on any account. The important move here is mapping failure points in the conceptualisation process to ways in

which we fail to develop entitlement to concepts. Intuitionists can thus explain how we form apparently self-evident but false moral beliefs. Since intuitionism has been trying to throw off the stigma of dogmatic arrogance since W.D Ross, this ought to be a welcome development.

Second, I contend that any epistemic account of moral conceptualisation must be accompanied by an account of how we can monitor our entitlement to concepts. The entitlement we get when the conceptualisation process goes well is just *prima facie* entitlement. What do I mean by *prima facie* entitlement? Not just that our entitlement may be taken away. On my view, all entitlement to deploy concepts may be taken away. For *prima facie* entitlement to become real entitlement, it must be accompanied by what I call “monitoring”: a consistent alertness for defective concepts.

Third, I contend that fulfilling our responsibility to monitor our entitlements requires the cultivation and practice of intellectual virtue. While there are many different ways to monitor our entitlements, any successful way must rely on the cultivation of a particular orientation to the world. Monitoring correctly requires developing and maintaining intellectual virtue over time: it is not something we can do correctly at one moment and incorrectly the next moment.

## 2. Intuitionist views of concept-mastery

I will now sketch the views of concept-mastery in Robert Audi and W.D. Ross. I will show that these views take conceptualisation to be a piecemeal process that builds up from many particular encounters with instances of the concept. Drawing on the common elements in their positions, I will work towards a composite view of

concept-acquisition and concept-mastery.<sup>26</sup> Borrowing a term from Ross' reading of Aristotle, I will call this the Intuitive Induction View.

### 2.1 Ross, Audi and moral conceptualisation

What did Ross think about the way we form moral concepts? In *Foundations of Ethics*, Ross discusses the historical development of the notion of rightness:

We must suppose that when a certain degree of mental maturity had been reached, and a certain amount of attention had been, for whatever reason, focused on acts which had hitherto been done without any thought of their rightness, they came to be recognised, first rather vaguely as *suitable* to the situation, and then, with more urgency, as *called for* by the situation... their rightness was not deduced from any general principle; rather the general principle was later recognised by intuitive induction as being implied in the judgements already passed on particular acts. (1939 170)

Here Ross is writing on the origin of morality. Since Ross wrote this passage, a great deal of empirical work has been done on this topic. It is hard to read Ross' speculation here as being an interesting contribution to this field. However, we can adapt this passage into an account of individual moral development. I will now take Ross' theory about how the notion of rightness first came into the world, but instead apply it to how each of us develops the notion of rightness. As I will argue later, Robert Audi has done something similar in his work.

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<sup>26</sup> From now on, when I refer to the process of "concept-acquisition", I mean the process of acquiring mastery over a concept (rather than mere familiarity or linguistic competence).

We are not born with a full set of moral concepts. Instead, we must acquire them either by working them out from our “already passed” judgements, as the first humans did, or by being taught them by adults. How is this acquisition supposed to work? On my view, it involves taking some set of instinctive or taught examples and grasping the common thread between them. Initially this grasp is rather vague, but it gains more clarity and urgency as our moral development proceeds. The expression “grasp the common thread” is so far pretty unexplained. Ross says two things about this process: first, that it is not a matter of deduction from general principle, and second, that it involves “intuitive induction”. What is intuitive induction?

When Ross writes about “intuitive induction”, he is referring to the process of concept-formation that he reads Aristotle as describing in the *Posterior Analytics*.<sup>27</sup> For Ross, Aristotelian intuitive induction is the process by which we can pass from particular examples to a general principle or concept - not by reasoning but by “direct insight” (1949 49). This is very different from ordinary enumerative induction. Indeed, Ross makes the extravagant claim that “for a person of sufficient intelligence one example might be enough” (49). Here is the relevant passage from Aristotle:

Thus the states [of understanding universals] neither belong in us in a determinate form, nor come about from other states that are more cognitive, but from perception - as in a battle when a rout occurs, if one man makes a stand another does and then another, until a position of strength is reached... when one of the undifferentiated things makes a stand,

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<sup>27</sup> I want to bracket issues about the correct interpretation of Aristotle. Jonathan Barnes notes that there is an ambiguity in the relevant passage about whether Aristotle is talking about propositions or concept-acquisition (1975 249). Whichever it is, Ross reads Aristotle as talking about concept-acquisition, and I am primarily interested in Ross’ model of concept-acquisition.

there is a primitive universal in the mind... again a stand is made in these, until what has no parts and is universal stands. (II 19 100a10-17 100b1-3).

On Ross' reading, grasping the common thread between examples is just something that our mind is constituted to do. As undifferentiated perceptual experiences flow through our mind, some elements of those experiences - those elements which are not part of a particular instance but instead are definitive of the concept - are retained and linked (Ross, 1949 85). In Aristotle's terms this is a "primitive universal", but we might call it a "proto-concept". As our proto-concept becomes more developed, we begin to acquire the concept itself. For instance, we might begin to feel that there is a distinctive kind of wrongness involved in killing a parent - a wrongness not present in the killing of strangers or even friends - long before we develop the concept *parricide*.

I do not think the above account does a very good job of de-mystifying intuitive induction. The theory I am beginning to build by adapting Ross' historical view cannot rely on brute appeals to how our mind is constituted, or upon vague statements like "some elements of those experiences are retained".

However, there are two useful insights in Ross that I will retain in my discussion of moral conceptualisation. First, we ought to choose a set of particular examples as the starting point of moral conceptualisation, rather than (for instance) innate moral concepts or the operation of some spooky moral sense. Second, I think it is true that moral conceptualisation can proceed at radically different speeds for different people. Some people might be able to grasp the entire structure of injustice

based on one particular instance, while others might experience example after example without making the necessary links. As we will see, Robert Audi retains these insights while adding some much-needed clarification to the Rossian view.

In Audi's work we begin to see a more explicit treatment of moral conceptualisation. Audi describes three stages of conceptualisation (2008 482-483). First comes a grasp of some particular cases: a child can see that a particular act is a lie, and that another particular act is a lie. Note that this "seeing" occurs *de re*, since the child as yet has no ability to say "this is a lie". The child's grasp manifests in an ability to respond differently to lies and non-lies, for instance to get angry when confronted with the first but not with the second. Second comes the ability to name what the particular cases have in common. Now the child can describe some actions as lies. As Audi notes, this requires grasping "a kind of generality" across particular actions (483). Third comes the ability to form propositional beliefs about lies: that this kind of thing is a lie, that lies are wrong, and so on. Audi writes:

The perception of the instances, *given* appropriate discriminative capacities and sufficient conceptual capability, puts us in a position to conceptualise those instances; we can then readily apprehend fittingness relations between them; and on that basis (though perhaps not only on that basis) we can come to believe corresponding general moral propositions and, eventually, to understand those adequately for justified belief and knowledge of them. (2008 483)

As that last line suggests, and Audi goes on to say, this account is intended to show how we can grasp concepts well enough to find some moral propositions self-

evident (483). It is clear that Audi's notion of building up concepts via linking perceptions of instances is very similar to Ross' appeal to intuitive induction. Audi is building on Ross here.

Audi's theory holds onto the insights I mentioned in the previous section. For Audi, possession and mastery of moral concepts begins with access to particular instances. And on Audi's view, some people will require more particular instances than others: as Audi says, "there are fast and slow learners" (483).

However, his theory rests on an unexplained appeal to "sufficient conceptual capacity". This is not much better than Ross' claim that our minds are just constituted so as to be capable of forming concepts. In the next section I will build up an Audi-style theory in as much detail as possible, so that we can see just how much additional explanatory work needs to be done.

### 3. The Intuitive Induction View of moral conceptualisation

I will now describe what I will call the Intuitive Induction View of moral conceptualisation. This view is essentially Audi's own account filled out with a more explicit treatment of the parts he borrows from Ross. According to the Intuitive Induction View, how do we acquire moral concepts and master them?

#### 3.1 Initial ingredients

We must start with some initial ingredients. What does one need to have in order to be able to begin the process of moral conceptualisation? On Ross' reading, Aristotle describes "some capacity" of apprehending particulars which is present in us (II 19 99b33). Later he explains our ability to perform intuitive induction by

asserting that “the mind is such as to be capable of undergoing this” (100a14). So far this is pretty underspecified.

In the moral case, Ross fills it out somewhat by referencing Aristotle’s claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we naturally possess an impulse to disinterestedly help others: most strongly in a parent-offspring relation, but also between all human beings (Ross 1939 169). It is this impulse towards helping others that Ross thinks first motivated us to do the right actions “without any thought of their rightness”, thus providing the moral particulars for us to intuitively induct universals from (170). In support, Ross approvingly quotes Aristotle’s claim that “we may see even in our travels how near and dear every man is to every other” (qtd in Ross 1939 169). However, it is unclear what this quote is supposed to mean - taken literally as a universal claim, it seems obviously false. The Intuitive Induction View will need to go into more detail on this point.

Does Audi do any better? Interestingly, his only example of conceptualisation - learning the entailment relation - begins with the child being explicitly told what is a valid syllogism and what is not (2008 482). As Audi writes, “we illustrate; we draw diagrams; and the child ultimately grasps the entailment relation *in those cases*” (482). There is nothing here about how we might learn these things on our own. Later on, Audi takes pains to note that encountering instances of a property only puts us in a position to conceptualise them if we have “appropriate discriminative capacities and sufficient conceptual capability”. Perhaps this is his account of the initial ingredients. If so, it is like Aristotle’s in that it consists of two parts: a capacity to apprehend particulars, and a capacity to join them into concepts. However, Audi

does specify that the first capacity is a capacity to respond differently to different types of action.

We might fill out Audi's account with a somewhat more modest version of Ross's. Our initial ingredients will then be two capacities: first, an ability to respond differently to some moral actions and situations than to immoral ones; and secondly, an ability to reflect upon our memory of exercising this first capacity and make general links. We need not claim, like Ross did, that everyone is naturally disposed to help everybody else in order to explain this first capacity. We merely need to claim that we have a disposition to disinterestedly help *some* others in *some* contexts. If this is a moral sense, it is a very primitive one. The second capacity, along with our ability to engage in rational reflection more generally, has a great deal of work to do in order to produce recognisable moral impulses.

Note that the Intuitive Induction View is not committed to any particular theory about how this initial moral disposition works or was developed. The Intuitive Induction View only relies upon the claim that we do actually possess some basic capacity for altruism. Unlike Ross, I am agnostic as to the historical or biological basis for this capacity.

There is a third, optional ingredient that Audi suggests: the presence of adults who can give examples of and point out the presence of moral properties. This is a way to short-circuit the laborious two-ingredient process of forming moral concepts. Supplementing our source of particulars with a set of already-classified examples can make it substantially easier to acquire simple moral concepts, and eventually to

acquire more complex ones which depend on already possessing simple moral concepts. Acquiring complex moral concepts on one's own<sup>28</sup> is possible, on this view, but it would require one to either have a great deal of time or be a very fast learner indeed.

To sum up, the Intuitive Induction View holds that in order to form moral concepts, we must have (a) some primitive moral disposition, even if it is only to our immediate family, and (b) an ability to retain memories and draw parallels across a body of remembered data. Although not strictly necessary, it would be a very great help to have (c) somebody who possesses the relevant moral concepts who can point out particular instances.

I have offered almost no argument for this list of initial ingredients: we could easily disagree about the contents of the list. For instance, we might think that the third ingredient is not optional but essential to forming moral concepts; if so, we would be committed to denying that somebody could develop moral concepts if they grew up in a society wholly devoid of them. Alternatively, we might propose a fourth ingredient, such as the presence of a community to discuss or negotiate moral concepts with.

As I have said, the Intuitive Induction View is mainly a placeholder which I can use to demonstrate my claims about monitoring our entitlement to deploy moral concepts. I have only mentioned these initial ingredients because they are the ones

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<sup>28</sup> By "on one's own" I do not mean "alone on a desert island" - in that situation, I wonder if we could acquire any moral concepts. I mean in a situation where one is living with other humans but there is nobody to teach you about moral concepts.

in Audi's view. We will see below how my broader view in this chapter can accommodate different lists of initial ingredients.

### 3.2 Stages of conceptualisation

Once we have these ingredients, what next? Suppose we have acquired and remembered a set of percepts of a particular kind of thing, as yet undifferentiated by us. We must now acquire the ability to differentiate these percepts. We might acquire this ability in two ways: either by reacting to them differently, via our primitive moral disposition, or by being explicitly taught that some of these percepts are of a certain kind. From our memory of previous percepts, now differentiated, we can use our conceptual capacities to draw parallels between them. Elements of those percepts will "make a stand", in Aristotle's metaphor, and begin to form a concept in our minds.

We have now reached what Audi describes as the first stage: the ability to discriminate future percepts as we encounter them. As we encounter more instances, or reflect further on our memories, this discriminative ability will become firmer and clearer to us. We will be able to put a name to the kind of thing we are recognising: to point to something and say "murder!" This is the second stage in Audi's account.

Once this has been reached, we can proceed to the third stage in Audi's account. If we are learning to conceptualise *murder*, we can now form beliefs not just about particular murders, but about murder itself. For instance, we can form the belief "murder is wrong". Such a belief may be self-evident to us, since by forming the belief "murder is wrong" we will only be articulating what is already contained in

our implicit grasp of the concept: that, in discriminating murders from non-murders, we are sensitive to the features that make murders specially wrong.

The Intuitive Induction View of moral conceptualisation thus proceeds like this.

Suppose you are interested in conceptualising F, where F is a moral property:

- 1) Start with (a) a primitive moral disposition, (b) basic memorial and conceptual capacity, and possibly (c) the presence of a teacher
- 2) Using (a) or (c), differentiate a set of Fs, then use (b) to draw parallels between them
- 3) Hone this discriminative ability on future examples of F until you can name them as Fs
- 4) Form more general beliefs about F that may be self-evident

Does this view restrict the set of moral concepts we can form to the things our primitive moral disposition can react to? If so, we would be in a bad state, since our primitive moral disposition is not by itself a very good guide to moral action. I do not think so. Note that we can be taught moral concepts by others, as in (c). However, this cannot be the whole story, because we must ask how they developed their more sophisticated moral concepts.

The main reason we can develop sophisticated moral concepts is that the primitive moral disposition in (a) is the disposition to exercise a discriminative capacity. Like other discriminative capacities, it can be developed. Once we have conceptualised F, for instance, we may develop the disposition to respond in certain

ways to Fs. This more refined disposition can then serve as the ground for the conceptualisation of a further concept G, and so on. Once we have multiple moral concepts, we can compare them with each other and with our moral perceptions - as I will argue later, effectively getting something like reflective equilibrium. In this way we may go beyond our primitive moral disposition.

This work we do in developing more moral concepts does not die with us: it goes into the language over time, and is then passed down to future generations. This is the kind of thing J.L. Austin is discussing here:

...our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth marking, in the lifetime of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonable practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our armchair of an afternoon – the most favourite alternative method. (1961 130)

From a tiny seed of moral sense, we have developed a vast and sophisticated conceptual machinery to evaluate moral situations.

### 3.2.1 Addressing potential circularity

I will now address two potential objections to the view I have just outlined.

Is there a fatal epistemic circularity in the Intuitive Induction View? If, in order to be entitled to deploy a concept in perception, we must have acquired this concept through building up a discriminative capacity from perceptions involving that concept,

we might think the task impossible. We would have to be already entitled to deploy the concept in order to have the initial perceptions that we build our discriminative capacity from. Thus if we start by being unentitled to deploy the concept, then we cannot begin the process that makes us entitled to it.

However, the initial judgements or percepts in (2) do not include the moral property in question in their content. They are perceptions *of* that property, so a trained perceiver would include that property in their perceptual content. But at stage (2) we are not yet a trained perceiver. Our entitlement to deploy the concept in perception arrives at stage (3), when our implicit conception has sufficiently developed as to be a reliable indicator of which particulars fall under the concept and which do not.

Is there a fatal temporal circularity to this account? Suppose that we require the capacity to discriminate instances of G to form judgements about which elements in a set are instances of G. But in order to form that discriminative capacity in the first place, we need a differentiated set that our conceptual capacities can go to work on. So we can never get started.

The Intuitive Induction View does not display this kind of circularity either. As I have argued, there are three initial ingredients for the process: conceptual capacities, a basic moral disposition, and possibly the presence of a teacher. A teacher can provide us with a differentiated set, thus breaking the circle. But even without a teacher, our basic moral disposition can tell us that murders share a distinctive kind of wrongness, thus providing us with the beginnings of the differentiated set we need to get the conceptualisation process going.

We might think that handing the problem off to a “basic moral disposition” in this way is a return to the bad old days of dogmatic moral sense theory. But note that a basic moral disposition is very basic indeed: it is non-conceptual, tentative, fallible, and so on. By itself it is insufficient to justify the vast majority of our moral judgements. All it can do is provide the seed for a more sophisticated process of moral conceptualisation. If this is a moral sense theory, it is a humbler one than its predecessors.

### 3.3 Drawing out an intuitionist account of fallibility

Now that we have the Intuitive Induction View out in the open, I will show how we can begin to draw out an intuitionist account of fallibility from it. The Intuitive Induction View is not just an account of how we do in fact develop moral concepts. It is also an account of how we might *correctly* develop moral concepts. If the process described goes well, then we will be at least *prima facie* entitled to deploy the resulting concepts. If the process goes badly, we will not be. The justification of our perceptual beliefs depends on how well the conceptualisation process has gone, which in turn depends on the quality of the initial ingredients. Each potential failure in the conceptualisation process or initial ingredients will thus map onto a way in which we might acquire concepts we are not entitled to deploy.

Looking at the initial ingredients, there are three ways in which our moral conceptualisation might go badly wrong. First, we might have a defective initial moral sense, if it has been corrupted by previously learnt defective moral concepts or is just naturally weak. Second, we might have unreliable conceptual capacities, if we are disposed to draw connections between things that are just not similar in morally

relevant respects. Third, we might have had a bad moral teacher, who misled us as to which particulars fall under certain concepts. Even with appropriate initial ingredients, the main process itself might go wrong in a number of ways.<sup>29</sup>

A view with a different set of initial ingredients to my Intuitive Induction View will draw out different ways in which moral conceptualisation might go wrong. For instance, if we think we must discuss moral cases with other people in order to develop - perhaps together - a moral concept, then moral conceptualisation can go wrong if this discussion goes wrong in one way or another. From any potential list of initial ingredients we can derive possible points of failure for the conceptualisation process.

The ways in which the conceptualisation process goes wrong will be hard to catch. Although I will go on to describe a monitoring process which can pick up on errors like these, any monitoring process can fail. What happens when an error goes unnoticed? In such a case we will have mastery over a defective concept, unaware that it is defective. We will then be disposed to deploy the defective concept in perception: in other words, to make unjustified snap moral judgements. For instance, we might automatically register a homeless person on the street as a *bum*, which will change our demeanour and influence our actions towards them.

Worse still, an error like this can also affect our moral principles. As I will argue in the next section, forming self-evident propositions involves making explicit the claims that are implicit in our mastery of concepts. If we have mastery over a defective concept, then we will form claims that we take to be self-evident but are

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<sup>29</sup> I do not have space here to go into a full analysis.

really false - sometimes perniciously so. In the worst case, we will use those false principles and perceptual beliefs to support other false principles and perceptual beliefs, building up an edifice of defective moral concepts and unjustified moral judgements.

Again, the important step in what I have just said is the move from an account of conceptualisation to an account of fallibility. I have used the Intuitive Induction View merely as an example. Whatever account of conceptualisation intuitionists subscribe to, they ought to make this move. An account of how our moral perceptions and self-evidence can go wrong is essential to the intuitionist, if they are to solve the Bootstrapping Problem - or, more broadly, to respond to accusations of dogmatism.

#### 4. Raising the stakes: self-evidence, and conceptual containment

We are beginning to get a sense for why we need some kind of monitoring process. There are very many ways in which the conceptualisation process might go wrong. As I will now argue, the stakes for the intuitionist are huge: the two largest epistemic foundations of our moral belief, self-evident principles and moral perceptual belief, are vulnerable. A mistake on this foundational level can infect a massive percentage of our non-basic moral beliefs.

In this section I will explain why self-evidence is vulnerable to the same error as moral perception. I will first explain what self-evidence is, and argue for a “conceptual containment” view on which forming a self-evident belief involves making explicit what is already implicit in one’s mastery of the concepts involved. I

will arrive at a troubling conclusion: that moral self-evident beliefs epistemically depend upon monitoring just as much as moral perceptual beliefs do. If we are not correctly monitoring our entitlement to moral concepts, *none* of our moral beliefs are justified: whether self-evident, perceptual, or inferred from either basis<sup>30</sup>.

#### 4.1 Self-evidence

According to Robert Audi, self-evidence is supposed to explain how we can non-inferentially know general moral principles like “murder is wrong”. For Audi, self-evident propositions are:

truths such that (a) adequately understanding them is sufficient justification for believing them (which does not entail that all who adequately understand them do believe them) and (b) believing them on the basis of adequately understanding them entails knowing them. (Audi 2008 478)

For Audi, we can come to know all sorts of things about what is right and what is wrong just by sitting and thinking. However, Audi's account of self-evidence is more modest than the traditional intuitionist account. For Audi, it is possible to adequately understand a self-evident proposition without believing it, if we have not yet reflected adequately (1997 45,46). Even if we grasp a self-evident proposition, we might not realise that the proposition itself is self-evident (38). Moreover, our apprehension of self-evidence can be fallible or defeasible: I might wrongly think a

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<sup>30</sup> One caveat: if we allow a third source of basic moral belief, such as testimony, it is possible that these beliefs (and those inferred from them) will not be dependent on correct monitoring. At any rate, I have no space to discuss the point here.

proposition is self-evident, or new evidence might convince me that something is not in fact self-evident. Finally, self-evident propositions might also be justified inferentially. It is thanks to Audi's caveats that self-evidence is no longer considered to be a reflection of dogmatic arrogance.

Arrogant or not, self-evidence remains somewhat mysterious. As Bedke notes, the definition of self-evidence involves a claim about the epistemic role self-evident propositions are supposed to play (2010 1071). What is needed, Bedke continues, is an account of the non-epistemic nature of self-evident propositions which makes it plausible that they would have "the claimed epistemic roles or properties" (1071). Whether Bedke is right that a non-epistemic story is needed, I agree that it is not enough to simply assert that certain propositions may be justifiably believed just on the basis of understanding them. The self-evidence theorist must give a convincing account of why self-evident propositions are self-evident.

Bedke acknowledges that Audi has taken steps to give such an account (1071). Audi suggests that self-evident propositions are special because of "conceptual containment": the concept of the subject contains the concept of the predicate (Audi 2008 479, Bedke 1071). On this kind of view, the proposition "that an action would cause pain is a reason not to do it" is thus self-evident only if the concept *causing pain* contains the concept *moral reason against action*. As Bedke notes, an appealing feature of the conceptual containment view is that it allows us to explain the epistemic status of self-evidence by appeal to concept-possession (1072). I will go on to defend a version of this conceptual containment view.

#### 4.2 What is concept-mastery?

In my opinion, the most serious issue with the conceptual containment view is that it places an enormous weight on concept-possession. In what relation must we stand to a concept in order to detect interesting self-evident truths about it? It cannot simply be acquaintance with the term that picks out the concept, because if I do not know what “causing pain” means I will not know about what concepts it contains. It cannot be the ability to correctly use that term in sentences, since two competent users of the term “causing pain” might disagree about whether it is a moral reason against action, even on reflection.<sup>31</sup> In order to detect self-evident truths about causing pain, one must have a very good grasp indeed of what causing pain involves. I want to say that one must have *mastery* of the concept *causing pain*.

We can thus explain self-evidence in terms of conceptual containment and concept-mastery. But by itself this explanation is insufficient. Like concept-possession, mastery of a concept is something that can go epistemically well or badly. We might fail to achieve mastery in a variety of ways that make us unentitled to deploy that concept in perception.<sup>32</sup> In order to get a grip on the limits of self-evidence, the intuitionist thus needs an account of how we can acquire concept-mastery.

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<sup>32</sup> Note that the degree of mastery over a concept and the quality of the concept itself are different issues. I can have mastery over a defective concept, or fail to achieve mastery over an effective concept.

Fortunately, I believe I have just given such an account in the Intuitive Induction View.<sup>33</sup> As I have argued in section 3.3, we can use the Intuitive Induction View to analyse how we can acquire concepts we are not entitled to. I will argue that we can form apparently self-evident - but false - beliefs in the same way.

#### 4.3 Self-evidence and perceptual justification

What is the relation between the Intuitive Induction View and self-evidence's role in the justification of perceptual beliefs? On the Intuitive Induction View, we can be entitled to deploy a concept in perception, and thus we can form justified perceptual beliefs, before we are able to form *a priori* or self-evident propositions involving that concept. Therefore the justification of our perceptual beliefs cannot wholly depend on our recognising the self-evidence of the core claims of the relevant concepts, since the second can come well after the first.<sup>34</sup>

As I have argued in section 3.3, there are at least three ways in which our perceptual beliefs might go badly wrong: a defective initial moral sense, unreliable conceptual capacities, or a bad moral teacher. All three of these problems operate covertly. If we are indeed afflicted by them, it will be difficult for us to find out. And the result of these problems will be a mastery and endorsement of a defective concept. Thus some false moral claims involving those concepts – the explicit articulation of those concepts' false core claims – will seem to us to be self-evident.

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<sup>33</sup> Although Robert Audi does not set out a theory of concept-acquisition in any great detail, I have tried to construct the Intuitive Induction View from the few things that Audi has said about concept-acquisition. At the very least, the Intuitive Induction View is consistent with what Audi has written about concept-acquisition. Therefore I want to note here that Audi has already met this particular challenge (or could very easily meet it).

<sup>34</sup> Remember, we have already ruled out a temporal gap between forming a perceptual belief and its being justified (Chapter 3).

We can now see the great significance of an intuitionist account of fallibility. If we fail to catch errors in our concept-acquisition, we are in very serious trouble: our moral perceptual beliefs will be vulnerable to the Bootstrapping Problem, and our apparently self-evident moral principles will be vulnerable to the problem I have just outlined. We have arrived at the point I set out to argue for. If what I have said is true, it is not just perceptual moral beliefs which epistemically depend upon the believer monitoring correctly<sup>35</sup>. Self-evident beliefs do as well.

How can the intuitionist address this worry? As I will argue, with an account of how we can monitor our entitlement to deploy moral concepts.

Since attempting to form self-evident principles can get the quality of our conceptual machinery out in the open, can we use self-evidence to construct an account of monitoring? If the self-evident principles we formulate do not mesh well with our other moral concepts - for instance, if the principles involved in the concept *dole bludger* turn out to contradict the principles involved in the concept *cruelty* - we will have good reason to think that those principles are not self-evident, and thus that the concept is a defective one. Likewise, if the explicit principles we formulate do indeed mesh well, or clarify the principles involved in our other secure moral concepts, their self-evidence will rightly reassure us that our concept is an effective one. In this way self-evidence can operate as an explicit way to check for coherence

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<sup>35</sup> If self-evident beliefs epistemically depend upon something else, does that make them necessarily inferentially justified? No. As I have argued in Chapter 3, epistemic dependence does not entail inferential justification.

between our moral principles and perceptions, and thus to monitor our entitlement to deploy moral concepts.

However, I will argue in section 5 that a self-evidence-focused account of monitoring would be overly intellectualist. If we want a theory of monitoring that can be practiced by people who are not moral philosophers, we will have to look elsewhere.

### 5. Monitoring

In section 4.3 I loosely characterised one specific monitoring process: trying to form self-evident principles which cohere with each other. I have argued that doing this is a way of checking up on our entitlement. However, this monitoring process cannot be the only way to appropriately monitor our entitlement to deploy moral concepts. If it were, only those greatly concerned with moral principles would be able to form justified moral perceptions. But very many non-philosophers are not greatly concerned with moral principles. It would be very implausible to say that all their moral perceptions are unjustified. Moreover, even some moral philosophers are not greatly concerned with moral principles. So there must be some other, less intellectualist way to monitor our entitlement.

In this section I will outline a monitoring process that is much more inclusive. As I will argue, this monitoring process is best understood as a set of background conditions that need to hold for us to be entitled to our moral concepts. The *prima facie* entitlement delivered by the conceptualisation process going well is only converted into real entitlement if we are already embedded in an ongoing context of

monitoring. Moreover, I will argue that something like this must be a part of any plausible moral epistemology. If we are not alert for evidence which might problematise our moral beliefs, we are not justified in holding them.

### 5.1 Triggering a check

Here is a non-moral example of the kind of thing I mean. Suppose I leave my hat outside in a storm, in a place where it could be blown away by a gust of wind. Once I return inside, I am only *prima facie* entitled to believe my hat is where I left it. I cannot maintain entitlement to my belief by merely avoiding the evidence: for instance, by going into my basement and listening to loud music. If I am not listening for gusts of wind or periodically sticking my head outside to check on my hat, I am not entitled to this belief at all. To be entitled to my belief that my hat is where I left it, I must be in a position to be aware of at least some things that could make my belief false<sup>36</sup>.

The moral case is more complicated than this example, since I must be aware of not physical events but (perhaps among other things) incoherence between beliefs. However, the fundamental principle is the same. To be entitled to my belief that murder is wrong, I must be in a position to be aware of evidence which would suggest that my belief is false. How might I be in a position to be aware that a moral belief fails to cohere with my other moral principles or perceptual judgements?

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<sup>36</sup> Here I assume that I need not be aware that I am not being deceived by an evil demon, and so on.

One candidate answer, borrowed from the hat case, is what I will call the **Checking Theory** of monitoring. On this theory, we are only entitled to our moral perceptual judgements if we have deliberately checked over our conceptual machinery at some point within a reasonable period of time. So remaining entitled to deploy our moral concepts in perception depends on whether we have engaged in reflection about the coherence of our moral beliefs in the last week, or month, or whatever the preferred time frame. We might add a second condition here, to match the element of the hat case where we might hear a loud gust outside, such that an event of some sort may trigger the need for immediate reflection, or we forfeit our entitlement. For instance, if I have based a number of my moral beliefs on an erroneous scientific theory of race, my coming to doubt this scientific theory will mean I must reconsider my moral beliefs and concepts that depend on it - and until I have done so, I will be unentitled to deploy those concepts in perception. Thus there are two parts that make up our monitoring responsibility: we must engage in regular checks, and we must respond adequately to events that trigger an irregular check.

I think the Checking Theory is insufficient, for two reasons. First, it makes little sense to talk about explicitly reflecting on the coherence of our moral beliefs. On my view, we have so many moral beliefs, on so many different topics, that it is psychologically implausible to sit down and go over their connections explicitly. I invite anybody who disagrees to try to list all the moral concepts that form part of their vocabulary.

Second, characterising and recognising the kind of event that triggers the need for immediate reflection is considerably more difficult than I have just made it sound. Realising that we have just learnt something that throws into question some

of our moral beliefs is almost never as simple as debunking a theory of race. Often the relevant event is much subtler: witnessing an action or reaction that does not quite fit one's picture of the situation, or unexpectedly experiencing a kind of emotion. The Checking Theory offers no help for the problem of how to notice subtle events like these. But I suspect that being sensitive to this kind of thing is where almost all the difficulty in moral monitoring lies.

The two problems with the Checking Theory shed light on the two major difficulties that beset any theory of monitoring. Firstly, what are we to do when we discover evidence of a problem in our moral beliefs? We cannot go through all our moral beliefs one by one, after all.

Secondly, how can we notice evidence of a problem in the first place? Noticing the kind of thing that ought to trigger a check of our moral beliefs is not trivial. When we are morally mistaken, the clues that could lead us to get it right are often subtle and easy to miss<sup>37</sup>. It is simply not the case, as the classical intuitionist stereotype goes, that wrongdoers are generally acting contrary to their own clear moral intuitions. While wrongdoers generally do have moral intuitions that they are disregarding, these moral intuitions often appear in consciousness as a vague feeling of disquiet, or a sense that something is not quite morally adding up. Monitoring our moral beliefs must involve possessing a sensitivity to feelings like these.

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<sup>37</sup> There is one common clue that is not so easy to miss: other people's challenges and negative reactions to our behaviour. However, we will not always have clues that are this obvious – and even clues like this can be misinterpreted or disregarded.

I will not be discussing the first difficulty in detail. While it does require an answer in its own right, I need not answer it in order to produce a monitoring theory that can avoid the Bootstrapping Problem. Strictly speaking, all I need here is a way for individuals to notice cases of blameful bootstrapping: cases where their perceptual content is being penetrated by a defective moral concept that they ought to have weeded out. I do not need to describe a way for an individual to improve their set of moral beliefs more generally.

In what follows, I will advance a theory of monitoring that addresses the difficulty involved in noticing blameful bootstrapping.

## 5.2 Virtue Theory

The theory I want to offer might be called a **Virtue Theory** of monitoring. On this view, monitoring correctly should not be thought of as a matter of knowing when and how to check up on our moral concepts, but instead as a matter of generally maintaining particular intellectual or epistemic virtues. This is more of a development of Checking Theory than a replacement. We still need to check up on the state of our moral concepts, after all - it's just that doing so requires cultivating the right attitudes and habits over a long period of time.

As a starting point, note that we can pick out epistemic vices that are *inconsistent* with monitoring correctly. For instance, imagine the Dogmatist: somebody who thinks that their every moral belief is a luminously self-evident truth, capable of being doubted only by those of inferior moral character. Such a person will not be inclined to seek out incoherence between their moral beliefs. Indeed, they

are already committed to the impossibility of such incoherence, since propositions which cohere cannot be mutually inconsistent. Moreover, they will be impervious to the criticisms or negative reactions of others.

Likewise, imagine the Cavalier: somebody who pays minimal attention to their moral beliefs and attitudes, taking them entirely for granted, who therefore never engages in moral reflection or explicit consideration of their own attitudes. While they might be less dogmatic than the person I have described above, they will be no more likely to seek out incoherence between their moral beliefs.

What is the opposite of the Dogmatist and the Cavalier? I suspect there are many ways of being in the right position to tell if our moral beliefs fail to cohere. But all of these ways must involve a kind of humility towards our moral beliefs that the Dogmatist lacks, and a seriousness that the Cavalier lacks. Although more work needs to be done to nail down the virtues involved in monitoring correctly, looking at obvious vices gives us a good start.

### 5.2.1 Why Virtue Theory?

So far I have just argued that some epistemic vices can interfere with correct monitoring, not that having the right virtues is central to monitoring correctly. In this section I will give a brief argument for the latter claim. In doing so I will make use of philosophical work on implicit bias.

Monitoring our conceptual machinery involves rooting out defective concepts that operate below the level of consciousness. Cognitive penetration and perception are fast cognitive processes, and relatively automatic: while we can occasionally interrupt our perceptions, such as when we force ourselves not to fall for the Muller-

Lyer illusion, this requires an unusual effort. Thus monitoring is by its nature a difficult task. How do we interrupt cognitive processes that are habitual, automatic, and almost always over before we notice that they have happened?

This kind of problem has already been addressed by philosophers working on implicit bias. Implicit bias is bias which operates below the level of belief: that is, at the level of automatic or near-automatic cognitive processes<sup>38</sup>. Daniel Kelly and Erica Roedder describe how a computer-based “Implicit Association Test” can measure implicit bias by giving a simple example.

Suppose we test how quickly a person can sort a list of White-coded names, Black-coded names and normatively-loaded adjectives (2008 525). The subject of the test is asked to sort the list into two categories: White names with positive adjectives in one column, and Black names with negative adjectives in the other column. Kelly and Roedder predict that most will perform this task more quickly than the reverse: sorting White names with negative adjectives in one column, and Black names with positive adjectives in the other column (525). If this is true, it suggests a pervasive racial bias operating just below the level of consciousness, even in those who would sincerely avow anti-racist beliefs.

Eric Schwitzgebel proposes another example. Consider Juliet, a White philosophy professor who has a strong, educated belief that there are no racial differences in intelligence. Nonetheless, her snap judgements about which students

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<sup>38</sup> Note that Eric Schwitzgebel, since he holds a dispositionalist account of belief, denies that implicit bias operates below the level of belief (2010 533). Nonetheless, he agrees that it operates as a near-automatic cognitive process.

“look brighter than others” always pick out White students and never Black ones (2010 532). Juliet thus harbors implicit racial bias.

Every case of implicit bias is not the result of endorsing defective concepts. But endorsing defective concepts will almost always result in implicit or explicit bias. As I have argued, deploying a concept in perception involves a tacit endorsement of the core claims involved in that concept – claims which we may well explicitly reject, if we were ever asked about them, just as Juliet would reject the claim that Black students are less “bright” than White ones.

Despite being disposed to deny such claims, we are disposed to act as if they were true: for instance, by treating a homeless person as “just another bum”. This is classic implicit bias. General strategies for combating implicit bias will thus double as strategies for monitoring our conceptual machinery.

Kelly and Roedder suggest that we might have no control over our implicit biases (2008 532). However, they express some doubt about this conclusion, since “narrow-mindedness” might partially explain “the acquisition of implicit racism” (532). It is worth noting the connection between implicit bias and the vice of narrow-mindedness. Might there be a similar connection between implicit bias and virtue, as Virtue Theory suggests? If practicing vices can lead to acquiring implicit bias, perhaps practicing virtues can shield us from acquiring implicit bias, or being influenced by it once we have acquired it.

Can we simply choose not to act on our own explicit bias? Keith Frankish argues that implicit bias can be overridden when an unbiased explicit belief counteracts a biased implicit belief (forthcoming, 39). On Frankish's view, overriding an automatic process like implicit bias requires the subject to be consciously aware of their belief, commit to acting on the basis of it, and follow through on that commitment (40).

Overriding our implicit bias is possible. If Juliet – the professor in Schwitzgebel's example – were aware that she habitually excluded Black students from her “looking smart” category, she could consciously remind herself of this bias before asking her students a question, and thus prevent her automatic surprised reaction when a Black student gave a clever answer. However, as Frankish says, it requires a substantial amount of cognitive effort. Teaching a class is already a cognitively demanding task. Teaching a class while double-checking yourself for implicit bias is significantly more demanding – so demanding that we might doubt that the majority of us can do it.

Frankish argues that even remembering our explicit anti-racist beliefs might be too much to ask, if we are engage in a task that challenges our working memory already (42). He concludes that an explicit anti-racist belief and an explicit desire to be fair is insufficient to counteract implicit bias: we also require “a strong *implicit metacognitive desire*” to be fair and anti-racist (42). On his view, combating implicit racial bias requires more than just an occurent anti-racist belief: it requires a *standing* desire to live up to one's anti-racist commitments.

What happens if we lack a strong standing desire like this? As we have seen, a deliberate attempt to directly override our implicit bias is cognitively stressful and imposes a heavy burden on memory. Worse still, these factors make such an

attempt *unreliable*. As Frankish suggests, a slip of our memory or attention not only stop us keeping implicit bias from affecting our actions, but stop us even realising that this has happened. By just “choosing not to act” on our implicit bias in the moment, we might be successful in some cases, but it is certainly not a good long-term strategy. A better strategy would involve cultivating standing desires and dispositions that counteract our implicit bias.

Miranda Fricker has a similar view in her well-known discussion of what she calls testimonial injustice (2007). Fricker’s solution to testimonial injustice is to cultivate “a corrective anti-prejudicial virtue” (91). In Gus Skorburg’s words, testimonial injustice manifests in “automatic, non-reflective, non-inferential judgements about the credibility of the speaker” – typically when the speaker belongs to a socially marginalized group (2015 2). Like implicit bias, testimonial injustice operates at the “spontaneous, unreflective level” (Fricker 2007 89). I will follow Skorburg in taking Fricker’s testimonial injustice to involve “the operation and expression of implicit biases (4). Given that, Fricker’s appeal to virtue as a solution lends weight to the Virtue Theory of monitoring.

### 5.3 What is intellectual virtue?

For the sake of argument, suppose that Virtue Theory is true. We know that the self-righteousness of the Dogmatist or the disinterestedness of the Cavalier represent vices. But how might we characterize intellectual virtue? In this section I will sketch out what is involved in cultivating the intellectual virtue required for correct monitoring.

I will follow Lorraine Code in describing the intellectually virtuous agent as committed to “a form of realism”: somebody who places great value and importance in “how things really are” (1984 44). This kind of person will avoid partial explanations when full explanations are available, and resist the comfort of a life “well-tinged with fantasy or illusion” (44). The counterpart intellectual vice here involves succumbing to the temptation to persuade oneself into things: for instance, that your favourite theory is true, despite nagging doubts, or that a particular subject matter is too difficult for you so you need not bother trying to tackle it (44).

A commitment to realism, in Code’s sense, would be a great help in weeding out defective moral concepts. After all, many defective moral concepts - take *dole bludger*, or *bum* - involve commitments that we can be tempted to persuade ourselves into. If the homeless person I see at the train station is just a bum, then their situation is their responsibility and not mine, and I am thus not obligated to help. Like the concept *bum*, many defective moral concepts assuage feelings of responsibility or guilt. Reliably resisting the temptation to persuade ourselves into using these concepts requires a longstanding commitment to understanding how things really are.

In section 5.1 I described the two core questions a monitoring theory must answer: first, how we go about checking whether our moral concepts are defective, and second, how we can know when we need to check up on our moral concepts. What does Virtue Theory have to say in response to these questions?

Let us take the second one first. Following Code's description of intellectual virtue, we can know that we need to check up on a moral concept if we are strongly tempted to deploy it. If thinking of someone as a bum makes us feel more comfortable, that is a warning sign that the concept *bum* needs to be checked.

Of course, not all concepts that make us comfortable are defective. Following up on a warning sign will not always lead to the identification of a defective concept. Also, there are warning signs that do not involve a feeling of complacency or comfort. In fact, sometimes a feeling of discomfort in deploying a concept can be a warning sign. This is especially true when there is a serious contradiction between various elements of our conceptual machinery. Somebody who endorses a series of concepts in feminist discourse and yet occasionally deploys the concept *bitch* is likely to feel uncomfortable about deploying that concept, even if they cannot quite pin down why. Following up on this discomfort can be an important step in weeding out a concept like *bitch*.

There is a mild tension here. If a feeling of comfort when using a concept can be a warning sign, and discomfort can also be a warning sign, won't there be a warning sign involved in every deployment of a concept? To this, I can only say that there is a specific kind of comfort we get from deploying a concept that quiets our sense of guilt, and a specific kind of discomfort involved from deploying a concept we feel unconsciously guilty about. Developing intellectual virtue requires developing a sensitivity to these particular kinds of comfort and discomfort, among other things<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>39</sup> Although I do not have space to list them here, I can think of several other kinds of warning sign an intellectually virtuous agent must be alert to. For instance, a virtuous agent ought to be sensitive to somebody else plainly *telling* them that a particular concept they have used is defective. Thus the intellectual virtues involved in monitoring include an openness to what others have to say.

We can see here as well why it is too late to start monitoring when we form a particular moral belief. Whether we pick up on a warning sign will depend on how sensitive we are to warning signs in general, which we have little to no control over at any particular moment. Sensitivity has to be practiced over time, like virtue.

How do we check up on a concept, once we have identified a warning sign? According to Virtue Theory, we ought to take a hard look at the way the world really is. In the case of the homeless person who we are tempted to think of as a bum, this will require an outward focus on the homeless person and their situation. It will involve a real attempt to understand what is going on with that person. Note that this awkward, potentially embarrassing attempt is precisely what the use of the concept *bum* insulates us from. To check up on a concept we suspect is defective, we ought to investigate further the thing that made us uncomfortable in the first place.

This advice is very different to the monitoring process I discussed earlier in section 4.3. There I suggested sitting down and forming self-evident beliefs about the moral concept in question, and comparing those beliefs with other self-evident moral beliefs one possesses. The focus there was internal, while here it is very much external: towards the entities in the world which the concept refers to. To my mind, this is a point in Virtue Theory's favour.

#### 5.4 Why any reasonable moral epistemology must make room for Virtue Theory

Theory

Someone might object that Virtue Theory is just a very expensive way to cover the gaps in my intuitionist epistemology. If my preferred epistemology needs

this much baggage in order to be plausible, the objection might run, perhaps it is not such a good theory after all.

In response to this point, I want to argue two points. First, as I have shown, errors in acquiring moral concept-mastery will have disastrous effects not just for moral perception, but for self-evidence in general. So there is a gap that needs to be covered even for the intuitionist who denies moral perception. Even if Virtue Theory does involve taking on a number of expensive commitments, it offers the intuitionist good value for money.

Second, any reasonable moral epistemology - intuitionist or not - must be able to make room for something like a Virtue Theory of monitoring<sup>40</sup>. As I said in the previous section, the relevant intellectual virtue involves placing great importance on how the world really is, and resisting the temptation to persuade ourselves into a comfortable state of self-deception. Whatever epistemic theory we subscribe to, we will be tempted to settle on beliefs that are good enough, or that serve the practical purpose of making our lives more pleasant. The virtue that does the work in Virtue Theory is not just important for forming justified moral perceptual beliefs. It is important for forming justified beliefs in general.

## 6. Conclusion

I have plugged two holes in an intuitionist epistemology of moral perception. First, I have provided an account of how we can appropriately acquire moral concepts: the Intuitive Induction View. I have argued that if the process described

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<sup>40</sup> Similarly, normative ethical theorists like consequentialists and deontologists can and should make use of virtue theory without becoming virtue ethicists.

therein succeeds, then we are entitled to the resulting moral concepts. The intuitionist is not committed to the Intuitive Induction View, so long as they can provide a view that does the same work. For any such view, we can identify potential points of failure and thus ways in which we can acquire moral concepts we are not entitled to deploy, like *dole bludger*.

Second, I have provided an account of how we can monitor our entitlement to moral concepts. I have argued that we can monitor our entitlement by cultivating intellectual virtue<sup>41</sup>. On my view, monitoring correctly requires a standing orientation towards how the world really is, and a practiced resistance to comfortable self-deception. A full defense of this account would require more argument than I have given. However, I take myself to have demonstrated the possibility of a virtue-focused – if not virtue-based – account of entitlement to moral concepts. As I have argued, we cannot begin monitoring correctly at the moment we acquire a moral concept. If we are not already in possession of the intellectual virtue required, we are not discharging our responsibility to monitor our entitlement.

In plugging these holes, I have provided a solution to the Bootstrapping Problem. Not all cognitively penetrated perceptions are equal, epistemically speaking. Perceptions can only justify beliefs if we are entitled to deploy the concepts which penetrate them, and we are only entitled to deploy moral concepts if (a) we have developed them in the right way, and (b) we are correctly monitoring our entitlement to them. As I have argued, it is rare that we will meet these conditions for

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<sup>41</sup> I leave open the question of just how useful moral principles – even self-evident ones – will be to this endeavour.

defective moral concepts. On my view, the possession of defective moral concepts will not routinely lead to false basic beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

I have argued that ethical intuitionists ought to endorse a theory of moral perception on which moral properties can be part of our perceptual content. Although moral perceptions are theory-laden and epistemically dependent on our entitlement to deploy the relevant concepts, I have argued that they are nonetheless non-inferentially justified.

Entitlement to deploy concepts in perception – and in forming self-evident principles – comes from our mastery over those concepts. Therefore, an epistemic theory of moral perception must come with a theory of moral concept-mastery, such as the Intuitive Induction View which I have tentatively given. As I have argued, it must also come with an account of how we can monitor our entitlement to our moral concepts, by being alert to and weeding out defective concepts. On the account I have given, weeding out defective concepts requires the cultivation of epistemic virtue: in particular, a standing commitment to resisting the temptation to persuade ourselves into comfortably false beliefs. My epistemic theory thus avoids treating bigoted moral perceptions as foundational moral beliefs.

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