Emotion, perception, and the self in moral epistemology

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue against a perceptual model of moral epistemology. We should not reject the claim that there is a sense in which, on some occasions, emotions may be said to be perceptions of values or reasons. But going further than this, and taking perception as a model for moral epistemology is unhelpful and unilluminating. By focusing on the importance of the dispositions and structures of the self to moral knowledge, I bring out important disanalogies between moral epistemology and typical cases of perceptual expertise. As a result, how we gain, or fail to gain, moral knowledge should not be understood in terms of the operation of a perceptual capacity.

1. The view that emotions are, or are importantly like, perceptions was arrived at from two directions that began to converge in the late 1980s. On the first, arising in psychology and philosophy of mind, philosophers argued that, unlike judgments, emotions can have intentional content that needn't be propositional or even conceptual in form; that their intentional content is intimately connected with their phenomenology; and that the attitude of the subject to the content is as to an 'appearance', and thus not necessarily affirmed. These features suggested an analogy with perceptual experience, and further similarities provided additional support, e.g. that emotions are perspectival (presenting the world as it seems in relation to the subject), passive (largely non-voluntary), and directly responsive to features of the world, rather than arrived at by derivation from general rules or inferential processes. Separately, psychologists noted that emotions affect sensory perception, focusing and directing perceptual activity upon particular objects or features of objects, identifying them as 'salient'. They thus help shape the deliverances of perception – the stream of perceptual information and its conceptual organisation – and so influence the perceptual beliefs we form. These effects are not coincidental, but part of the function of emotions, directing attention to what is of relevance and importance to us.

At the same time, a resurgent virtue theory reacted against Kantian and consequentialist models of practical reason as applying universal rules to particular situations, and a new account of moral judgment was propounded on the basis of Aristotle's remark that 'discernment rests with perception' (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1109b23). The account was filled out by invoking a central role for the emotions in our evaluative 'sensibility'. Like perception, our emotional evaluative sensibilities respond to particular instances, rather than being structured by general rules from which judgments in individual cases are inferred. Furthermore, the evaluative properties depicted by our emotions are conceptually related to the emotional experience of them in a way analogous to the conceptual dependence of secondary properties on certain forms of sensory experience (response-dependence). For example, a conceptual analysis of the property 'disgusting' requires mention of disgust as a conceptual analysis of colour requires mention of visual experience.

I believe that both sets of developments are substantially correct in their approaches to understanding the nature of emotion and its place in moral epistemology, and my remarks assume this framework. Drawing an analogy between emotions and perception has thus been highly important and productive in making the case that moral epistemology must find a central place for our sensitivity to the moral salience of particulars – specific events, contexts or properties – and that the values to which we are thus sensitive must be understood in conceptual relation to our emotions. It has carved out a new conception of the form of moral knowledge.

Once one has accepted the framework, the question arises as to whether we can say that moral values can be known by perception, i.e. whether the model supports some kind of emotion-based perceptual intuitionism. I shall argue that it cannot, that an epistemology of perceptual experience or perceptual expertise fails to enlighten us about the epistemology of our moral sensibilities. In §§2-4, I develop the strongest version of the theory I wish to criticise. The critical argument begins in §5, with an account of the development of the moral self which contrasts with the acquisition of perceptual skills. I then argue, in §6, that a satisfactory account of how we gain or fail to gain moral knowledge diverges significantly from accounts of perceptual knowledge. According to the response-dependence theory of value assumed here, evaluating the correctness of a moral judgment involves evaluating whether an emotion is appropriate, more precisely, 'fitting'. I argue that this involves evaluating the structure of self with the relevant emotional disposition, and as such, provides a strong contrast with evaluating the veridicality of perceptual judgments. §7 provides an extended example in relation to the idea of psychological defence. In §8, I briefly consider the objection that to evaluate the fittingness of an emotion can be done without drawing on our emotional dispositions, and outline a reply within the framework developed by the paper as a whole.

Our first task is to get clearer on the central idea of emotion as perception.

2. Despite the convergence on a perceptual model of emotion, psychologists and ethicists did not arrive at a univocal position on how the model is to be understood. What, we may ask, do emotions 'perceive'? There are three views in the literature.

Model 1: the psychological model: In a number of popular psychological accounts, an emotion is a combination of a perceptual (or other cognitive) state together with a felt, evaluative (and motivational) response (Frijda, 1988; Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). Its intentional object is thus simply the intentional object of the cognitive state; there is no distinct object to which the emotion is sensitive. The perceptual or cognitive element of an emotion's intentional content is not evaluative, while the evaluative element is typically understood in hedonic or conative, rather than cognitive, terms.

Model 2: the bodily model: on various neo-Jamesian views, what is perceived in emotions are bodily states. But this is not to say that emotions are *about* bodily states. According to Prinz (2004) and Deonna & Teroni (2012), the emotion represents an instance of its formal object, which is manifested in the relation between the subject and the world. Thus, the formal object of fear is danger, which is a relational property of the world to the subject. However, the way fear represents danger is via the state of the subject's body. The representation of an object or event that is dangerous causes changes in the subject's body; these changes are perceived, and their perception is the representation of the danger. That the object is dangerous, however, is not itself perceived.

Model 3: the metaethical model: By contrast, on the third view, we *are* said to perceive that a situation has an evaluative (or deontic) property (De Sousa, 1987, Tappolet, 2005, Döring, 2007, 2008). So in fear, we can be said to perceive that an object or situation is dangerous; in anger, that an action is offensive; and so on. On one popular development of this view, we perceive that some feature of the situation provides a reason for some form of response. Our emotions are sensitive to the 'salience' of the features (which we can elaborate in terms of formal objects and reasons for response). We can see the dog snarling; we pick up the salience of this – its dangerousness and reason for caution – through our emotional sensitivity to the world.

It is with model 3 that I am concerned. For all I say below, either of models 1 or 2 may be correct; I am not seeking to argue that there is no sense in which emotions can be called perceptions.

The metaethical model is associated with McDowell, but while he endorses elements of it, he rejects a perceptual model of moral epistemology. Instead, he uses the analogy with perception to establish two specific conclusions *and no more*. These are the uncodifiability of ethical

knowledge – that moral cognition (like perception) is not a matter of applying rules to situations (McDowell 1979, 73; McDowell 1998b, 28); and the response-dependent nature of value – an account of value as a disposition to elicit a merited response (McDowell, 1985). So he describes our ethical sensibility as 'a sort of perceptual capacity' (McDowell 1979, 73); and he notes that because 'evaluative thought presents itself as a matter of sensitivity to aspects of the world… it is virtually irresistible to appeal to a perceptual model' (McDowell 1985, 131). But, he argues, being aware of a feature of a situation as meriting – comprising a reason for – some response is an 'intellectual', not perceptual, matter (McDowell 1985, 131-2). On McDowell's view, reasons are not 'extra features' of the world that 'impress' themselves on a quasi-perceptual faculty (Dancy, 2012). Instead, they are rational connections between features of the world and responses, which connections we come to learn through the development of our capacity to reason (McDowell's (1995, 1996) idea of our 'second nature'). Crucially, perception can be explained as a causal matter, but our sensitivity to moral reasons is essentially a normative matter. Modelling it on perception mistakenly deploys a familiar, though indefensible, metaphysics of 'facts and our access to them' based on natural science (McDowell 1987, 162). Such an approach 'turn[s] the epistemology of value into mere mystification' because it has 'nothing helpful to say about how such a faculty might work' (McDowell 1985, 132).

One way of reading McDowell's reservations here is in light of the idea of perceptual modalities: the analogy between emotional evaluative sensibilities and perception can't work without positing some kind of moral perceptual modality (Whiting 2012).[1] And this is a non-starter. But there is a much more promising approach, viz. acquired perceptual abilities (McGrath 2004). As Dancy and others have noted in objection to McDowell's argument, there is no hard and fast distinction between perception and acquired rational capacities, as we can acquire new perceptual abilities through training. These new abilities may involve developments in sensitivity, conceptualisation and recognition. The expert can perceive the call of a lark or the taste of a Chablis, while the novice cannot. Thus the claim that we become sensitive to reasons

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[1] In his (1987) discussion of Hume, Wiggins contends that Hume appeals, in both his moral and aesthetic theory, to the 'true judge'; it is the verdict of such judges that fix the relevant normative standards. But, Wiggins continues, in defending this claim, Hume places great weight on the analogy between value judgments and the deliverances of sense perception, noting how the various faults that can bedevil our sense organs undermine our judgments. Wiggins then comments that 'in the absence of any possible story about something comparable to sound organs of perception, it leaves us with insufficient grasp, and an insufficient account of our actual grasp… of what *constitutes* a good critic or judge' when it comes to ethics (1987, 192). There is no parallel to causal accounts of perceptual errors, detailing effects on the perceptual organ (jaundice) or effects related to features of the setting (Müller-Lyer lines).

In fact, Wiggins misrepresents Hume, according to whom emotions are impressions of reflection, not sensation. So there is no organ of perception, as they are caused by some other impression or idea in the mind. In the case of moral sentiments, we need to consider a whole set of 'circumstances' and 'relations' surrounding the actions and character of a person, including motives, mitigating conditions, expected consequences and so on. Much reasoning will be needed for a correct emotional response (*Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, Appendix 1). Furthermore, the emotional response should be from the common point of view, and we may be confused over this, misidentifying self-interested feelings for moral ones, or more generally, personal feelings for ones we feel when occupying this point of view. If our moral judgment does not express a feeling that others hold in the common point of view, then it is false, as moral terms apply to precisely those properties that are accessible through universal feelings (see Cohon 2008, Ch. 4-5, esp. 153-5). If we ask now how we may attain truer judgments on Hume's picture, the proposals noted in §6, rather than anything analogous to correcting the mistakes of sensory organs, recommend themselves.

through acquiring rational capacities does not *by itself* entail that this sensitivity is disanalogous to perception, or more specifically, an acquired perceptual capacity.

3. We have arrived at the idea that our emotional evaluative sensibilities are akin to an acquired perceptual capacity that enables us to perceive that certain objects or situations have certain evaluative properties. However, the examples given, of birdcalls and wine, do not address McDowell's concern that perception is not normative. For this, we need to turn to the perceptual abilities that come with the development of a practical skill. This leads in turn to the skill model of virtue, which draws an analogy between possessing a virtue and possessing a practical skill (e.g. Jacobson 2005, 389; Annas 2011, 1).

We commonly talk of people with a particular practical expertise, especially when this cannot be codified, as being able to see what to do in certain situations. Jacobson (2005) and Goldie (2007) both use the examples of chess and kindness to make the case. The grandmaster can see the right move to make in a particular chess position, while the novice cannot. To gain this ability, the novice, under guidance, works from situations in which the skill is called for – both past situations and hypothetical ones – thinking about what the options for action are and which option is best. The skill improves as 'each option can be more readily envisaged; each envisaged option can be more quickly evaluated for possible action; and the range of options that are 'live' options for evaluation will be narrowed down' (Goldie 2007, 353). In the end, only one course of action presents itself, with no conscious inference, to the learner turned expert, who can now be said to see what to do.

The virtue of kindness receives a similar account. To be kind, to know what is the kind thing to do in a range of situations, is to be able to recognise what each situation calls for and react quickly and with appropriate feeling. Goldie gives the example of Mary being upset in a situation of being teased, and argues that Jack, Mary's kind friend, can see that the kind thing to do is to change the conversation. For virtue, one's recognition and reaction should not, in many cases, be reached through laborious reflection, but be relatively automatic, which is a matter of one's emotional dispositions. One is enabled to see the kind thing to do through the training of one's emotions. As one considers the options for action, one has and refines one's emotional responses to these imagined cases. The process becomes automated, and one's emotional responses virtuous, such that, e.g. in recognising a situation as a voluntary gift by another that enhances one's well-being, one feels gratitude. We may now broaden this out, from talk of seeing what to do to talk of seeing the various reasons for this or that course of action, where certain features of a situation immediately strike us as providing a reason of some kind, even if further deliberation is necessary before a course of action is decided upon.

We may note that this normative sensitivity penetrates the skills of conceptualisation and recognition identified earlier as part of perceptual expertise. We commonly think kind people are likely to recognise, before less kind people do, that Mary is becoming upset, and that the teasing is responsible for this; and that this is so *because* they are kind, as such factual matters are more salient to them given their emotional dispositions. Furthermore, kind people will characterise – understand the structure and significance of – situations in terms relevant to kindness; the concepts deployed in perceiving the structure and significance of the situation may be inextricable from or even identical with those deployed in perceiving that it has certain evaluative properties. For example, is teasing just one category of social meaning? Compare 'friendly teasing' and 'cruel teasing': unless one is sensitive to the difference here, one is less likely to notice those features of the situation that determine which is taking place. Hence, at least where a story of the type above can be told, it makes sense to model our sensitivity to values on perceptual experience.

4. This is, I believe, the strongest model for thinking of emotions as perceptions (on the metaethical model). Its features are these:

a. It understands 'perception' in terms of *perceptual expertise*. It does not, therefore, need to posit a distinct perceptual organ, modality or faculty to talk of perception in ethics, anymore than we need to posit a distinct faculty in the case of chess.

b. The kind of perception involved is *epistemic*, rather than the perception of objects and their primary or secondary qualities. Thus, there is no perception *of* moral properties, but rather the perception *that* certain situations have certain moral properties. Again, the analogy is with the grandmaster seeing what to do next – it is no objection that 'what to do next' is not a property that any sensory modality can detect.

c. Moral perceptions are – like other perceptions – *non-inferential* (at least at the level of conscious processing) and

d. embodied in *emotions*,

e. being the product of an evaluative sensibility that is structured through the *development* of our emotional dispositions.

f. Finally, it is worth noting that these last three claims (concerning moral judgment, i.e. without committing one to moral perception) have considerable empirical support (for partial reviews, see Snow (2010) and Lacewing (2013).)

There are two claims that we may use the account to support. The weaker one is that there is a *sense* in which we may rightly say that some emotions are, at least on some occasions, perceptions that certain situations have certain values. This claim is, I think, true. Much of the interest it has, however, comes from situating it within a broader epistemological theory.[2] The stronger claim is that the account provides us with a *perceptual model* for moral epistemology. On this claim, that emotions perceive values (or reasons) as the operation of a form of acquired perceptual expertise is central to moral epistemology. Such emotional perceptions of value form the grounds of moral judgment as perception forms the grounds of perceptual judgment; an account of the deployment of an evaluative sensibility in forming moral judgments is best understood as the deployment of a form of perceptual expertise; and the development of an evaluative sensibility is best understood as the development of a form of perceptual expertise.

I shall argue that, as we reflect further on these matters, the perceptual model loses its force. It is not that one cannot continue to insist on the claim, but that as the disanalogies emerge, as the form of 'perceptual expertise' involved has fewer and weaker parallels with uncontentious examples of perceptual expertise, the perceptual model fails to illuminate central aspects of moral epistemology. Two closely related disanalogies between moral epistemology and perceptual expertise make the case. First, unlike standard forms of perceptual expertise, the development of evaluative sensibilities is the development of the psychological self. Second, the assessment of whether an emotion is 'fitting' involves an assessment of the dispositions and structures of the self, which contrasts with evaluating the truth of a perceptual judgment.

Because my focus is moral epistemology, my concern is with those emotions that contribute importantly to what we think of as ethical issues. Most of these will be concerned, in the first instance, with interpersonal matters – as in the example of kindness, cases of being able to 'read' social situations are central to the argument for the perceptual model. In what follows, then, talk of 'emotion' should be understood as restricted to those emotions central to our evaluations of interpersonal situations. What follows may not apply to all cases of emotion.[3]

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[2] Williams (1985, 150) makes a similar point in a different context: 'In the ethical case, we have an analogy to the perceptual just to this extent, that there is local convergence under these concepts: the judgments of those who use them are… world-guided… But if it is to mean anything for a wider objectivity, everything depends on what is to be said *next*.'

[3] Thanks to Michael Brady for clarifying this point.

5. We begin by considering the supposed analogy between the development of an evaluative sensibility and the development of a perceptual skill. The development of those emotional dispositions centrally involved in moral epistemology – the virtues in our skill model of virtue – is the development of the psychological self. How so? Developmental psychologist Darcia Narvaez provides an account (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2004; Narvaez, 2005; Narvaez & Bock, 2014). She starts from Mischel & Shoda's CAPS (Cognitive-Affective Processing System) model of personality traits as 'social-cognitive units', integrated structures of beliefs, desires, emotions, goals, expectations, values, and plans.[4] These structures are sensitive to situational features and to other psychological states and events. Their integration means that the activation of one element leads to the activation of others. For instance, compassion involves being moved to sadness (emotion) by the misfortune of others (belief/experience), being motivated to help (desire), and evaluating such help positively (value). Underpinning social-cognitive units and their operation are 'schemas', 'organized knowledge structures that channel and filter social perceptions and memories', which in the case of social-cognitive schemas, 'guide our appraisal of social situations, our memory for events, and our affective reactions' (Lapsley & Narvaez 2004, 195). Thus, via the activation of representations of social situations, oneself, others, prospective events, goals and so on, social-cognitive units influence perception, interpretation, and response in social situations.

Personality traits are grounded in 'chronically accessible' schemas, i.e. the information structured in the schema is permanently available for (conscious or unconscious) cognitive processing. Such schemas explain the well-established connection between character and the interpretation of social situations, e.g. aggressive people are more likely to automatically notice and recall hostile cues (Zelli, Huesmann, & Cervone, 1995), authoritarian people are more likely to automatically infer others are authoritarian from prompts that are ambiguous, such as enjoying military parades (Uleman et al., 1986), and how one understands a moral narrative is strongly influenced by one's chronically available moral schemas (Narvaez, 1998; see also Narvaez et al., 2006).

The origin and development of social-cognitive schemas thus underpins our evaluative sensibilities. But the origin and development of social-cognitive schemas and units is also the origin and development of the psychological self. Schemas and their accessibility are generally thought to emerge from frequent and consistent experience in the developmental history of the individual (Bargh, Lombardi & Higgins, 1988). Repeated events, such as family routines and rituals, give rise early on to abstracted or generalised representations of social interactions (Thompson, 1988), which develop further into 'working models' of social experience, including one's role and what to expect. These can be thought of as a child's first schemas. They are equally the beginnings of its sense of self, who it is in relation to others. Further interaction and dialogue with caregivers contributes to the construction of autobiographical memories and personal narratives, integrating schemas into the child's sense of itself. As the child becomes older, schemas develop in response to wider social settings with peers, teachers, and so on. This model of the self and its development has been independently arrived at by theorists drawing on distinct bodies of evidence (e.g. Stern, 1985; Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Andersen & Chen, 2002;

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[4] See Mischel, 1968; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Cervone & Shoda, 1999. The model has become widely accepted in the wake of the situationism-character debate. That debate considered evidence that people's behaviour is so malleable by situational influences that the existence of traits of character is called into question. Social-cognitive models have been a popular solution, holding that behaviour is the result of a dynamic interaction between genuine features of the person and the situation. Once situations are categorised by how the subject interprets them, then there is strong evidence of stable and predictable individual behavioural responses across diverse situations with similar meaning. For an account of the debate and detailed defence and elaboration of the model, see Snow, 2010.

Andersen & Thorpe, 2009). One's emotional dispositions (concerned with interpersonal relations), then, are part of the social-cognitive units that constitute one's character and psychological self. The exercise of such dispositions in forming moral judgments is an exercise and response of the self.

This leads to our first disanalogy between the operation of our emotional evaluative sensibilities and perceptual expertise. The cognitive schemas involved in the recognition and discernment of wine or again in knowing what move to make next in chess are not schemas that underpin the 'social-cognitive units' that form character traits and the structure of the self. Instead of constituting the self, forms of perceptual expertise – like other cognitive skills – are better described as possessed by the self. Of course, someone may identify themselves as a wine connoisseur or chess grandmaster, such that these identities have importance to their sense of who they are. Such emotional identifications with these abilities, and thus the abilities themselves, may be understood as specific expressions of, but cannot themselves constitute, the self and its character traits. Furthermore, such identifications may be independent from the acquisition of the expertise itself. By contrast, from the outset, one's evaluative sensibilities partially constitute who one is as a person, as the development of the former is the development of the latter.

The defender of the perceptual model may respond that this does not by itself show that the perceptual model is wrong. Just because the development of an evaluative sensibility is the development of the self, this does not establish that the exercise of such a sensibility cannot be a matter of perceptual expertise. All it shows is that the perceptual expertise involved in moral perception lies in the very structure of the self.

But the objection is that the perceptual model's understanding the self and its role in our attaining moral knowledge is unilluminating in moral epistemology. The model is established by arguments from analogy, and we have encountered a significant disanalogy. The difficulty is not that expertise cannot be grounded in the self: the skill model of virtue and other forms of performative expertise require just this. And we can allow that one effect of changes to who one is may be changes in what one perceives. The difficulty comes with thinking that, as far as moral epistemology is concerned, the change to the self is to be understood as a change in one's perceptual capabilities. This fails to draw our attention to matters of considerable importance, e.g. the investment of who one is in one's understanding of social situations, or again by 'flattening' the rich dynamics of social cognitive units that integrate a wide variety of conative and affective dispositions to a matter of perceptual cognition. Once we have the developmental account, there is little to be gained – and something at risk of being lost – by arguing that what has developed is an unusual form of perceptual expertise.

6. We can gain a deeper appreciation of this by considering the broader picture. A moral epistemology needs to account not only for how we gain moral knowledge, but also how we fail to gain it, what it is that constitutes 'getting it right', and the epistemological processes involved in establishing on any occasion whether we have it right or not. I will argue that there is a significant disanalogy between assessing perceptual judgments and assessing the products of our emotional evaluative sensibilities.

Emotions, we have said, have evaluative intentional content, presenting certain 'salient' features of a situation as providing reasons for a particular response. Two questions therefore arise in any evaluation of an emotion. Mistakes of either kind lead one to mistake the reasons one has in the situation faced. First, does the intentional object exist and have the features the emotion presents it as having? For example, my anger is inappropriate if the offence that angers me never occurred. Second, are the features of the object adequate reasons to warrant the emotional response? For example, my sadness is inappropriate if what I have lost is without value. This is often expressed as a matter of 'fit' between the emotion and its 'formal object'. Each emotion type is said to have a 'formal object' that is distinctive of that type, e.g. the formal

object of anger is offence, that of sadness is valuable loss, and so on. We can thus say that an emotion is appropriate 'if and only if there is an actual fit between the particular object of emotion and its formal object, and the emotion's propositional content is semantically satisfied or the target of the emotion exists' (Salmela 2014, 122). I am unconvinced that all emotions fall into types that have precisely specifiable formal objects, and so shall continue to talk of evaluative properties instead.

It may be helpful to be more precise in talking of 'appropriateness'. D'Arms & Jacobson (2000, 2006) distinguish an 'all-in' sense of 'appropriateness' from a narrower concept of 'fittingness'. The first relates to the question, 'everything considered, what should one feel?', while the second relates specifically to whether the intentional object of the emotion may be said to have the evaluative property an emotion presents it as having. The two are said to come apart in certain situations. If an evil demon threatens to kill thousands of people if I don't admire it, I now have a reason to admire the demon, but the demon is not admirable. Or again, perhaps I should not be amused by an offensive joke for moral reasons, but it is nonetheless funny. In the first example, reasons related to whether admiration is fitting differ from reasons related to whether it is beneficial to feel admiration (more generally, reasons of fit differ from strategic and instrumental reasons). In the second example, reasons from one domain (morality) appear to conflict with reasons from another (humour). D'Arms and Jacobson (2006) argue that reasons of fittingness are specific to the domain of concern of the emotion; hence the joke is funny, so amusement is fitting, even if amusement wouldn't be appropriate (all-in). I do not mean to endorse this conception of the relation between fittingness and appropriateness, and will pick up the issue again below. But in the analogy with perceptual expertise, it is clear that it is the narrow sense of fittingness that is at stake, so I will use this term for now.

The perceptual model indicates that 'fitting' emotions should be analysed along the lines of veridical perception in the exercise of a perceptual skill, and their status as such established the same way, both in general and from case to case. The lack of fitting emotion should likewise be understood as analogous to a lack or lapse of perceptual skill. In defence of such claims, De Sousa (2002, 256) suggests that we establish both the fittingness of emotion and the veridicality of perception 'by appealing to corroborating evidence'.

In settling whether a wine tasted blind is a pinot noir or a cabernet sauvignon, we can appeal to facts that are accessible by some means other than the taste, smell and look of the wine. In settling whether this or that particular move is the thing to do in a certain chess position, we can appeal to an agreed common standard, viz. whether it is part of a winning strategy, and whether something *is* a winning strategy can be demonstrated and understood in terms that don't essentially refer back to expertise in chess. As a result, we can establish someone's expertise by the truth of their judgments, there is little dispute over whether a form of perceptual expertise *is* expertise or not, and there are rarely extended arguments over the structure and correct functioning of the expertise in question.

The analogous case in moral epistemology works to some extent when we have an assumed standard that we apply to particular instances of emotion, i.e. where it is agreed that certain features of intentional objects supply sufficient reasons to warrant a particular emotional response. In such cases, there may be a sense in which one can be said to 'see', through one's emotional response, that the act is unkind or courageous or… But as noted in §4, the force of this all depends on what we say next. Ethical enquiry concerns not just the application of agreed standards, but equally disagreement over, reflection upon and a deepening understanding of those standards themselves. And in this, reflection upon the self and our emotional evaluative sensibilities plays a central role.

Thus, the Stoics advise that no material loss is worth becoming sad over, as the only thing that truly has value is virtue. Should we disagree, and defend the fittingness of sadness at, say, losing one's wedding ring, or grief at the death of a parent, we may appeal to arguments supporting the value of the goods involved, and we may seek to give an account of the role of

sadness in human life and why we would be impoverished without it in such situations. We account for why the object of sadness qualifies as a genuine good and why its loss impacts on the well-being of the subject, and so is appropriately registered. What the fitting emotion is, what response is warranted by a situation, cannot be 'read off' from the nature of situations as it is not a feature of the situation alone. It is, instead, a matter of the relation between the self and the object. Unlike typical forms of perceptual expertise, in ethics at least, emotional dispositions are not merely an epistemic *means* to the end of gaining knowledge. An account of the fittingness of an emotion requires an account of the nature and structure of the self that is disposed to have fitting emotions. What would be the structure of a self that is unmoved to sadness except by the prospect of losing its own virtue? Anticipating the discussion of §7, is such a self open to others in relationship, or is its sense of what is valuable defensive, a prophylactic against emotional disturbance?

When we dispute whether an emotion is fitting or not beyond the question of whether a local standard has been adequately met, we draw on a diverse range of considerations and explanations, brought together in a form of reflective equilibrium, extended from Rawls' original conception to include experience (De Paul, 1993), emotions (Scanlon 1998, Ch. 1, §12), self-understanding, both individual and collective (Wiggins, 1987; Scanlon, 1992; Blackburn 1998, Ch. 9; Lenman, 2007; Lacewing, 2014), and quite possibly more general theories of human nature (Daniels, 1979). At least where questions of ethical value are concerned, our reflections on emotional fittingness are guided by, and in turn inform and refine, our conception of virtue and a human life worth living, because such fittingness is answerable to considerations that relate to the role and effect of dispositions to such emotional responses within the psychological life of the agent as a whole and the good life more generally. Hence, an account of the fittingness of a response is not something that can be completed without direct reference to and evaluation of the emotional dispositions themselves and their place in the structure of the self.

In broadening what is relevant to an assessment of fittingness, I am siding with Salmela (2014, Ch. 7) against D'Arms and Jacobson. While there is a contrast to be drawn between reasons of fittingness and strategic/instrumental reasons, we should not completely isolate the domains of concern of different emotions from one another in considerations of fittingness. For instance, while considerations of humour should be *dominant* in assessing whether a joke is funny, moral considerations need not be completely silent, as D'Arms and Jacobson argue, and may in some extreme cases, outweigh considerations of humour. A very immoral joke is not funny, but simply sickening. There is no specific type of reason related to the fittingness of any emotion; any properties that warrant the ascription of the formal object to the particular object may be relevant reasons. Whether they are depends upon the outcome of the process of reflective equilibrium described above. Or, as noted at the end of §4, at least the case can be made regarding those emotions of most interest to moral epistemology.

This account generates further disanalogies with the epistemology of perceptual expertise. First, we find a disanalogy between the centrality of the self and its dispositions in the evaluations of emotions and the evaluation of perceptual judgments. Second, very rarely do we seek to establish the veridicality of a perceptual judgment in terms of the (claim to) expertise. We establish that someone is an expert by appeal to their judgments, the truth of which we establish independent of the question of expertise. By contrast, the fittingness of emotion and the expertise of the virtuous self are not independent in the same way. Instead, we seek to establish the fittingness of the emotion and the nature of the expertise or skill of virtue through the coherence of each with the other. Third, the perceptual model fails to account adequately for either immoral attitudes or ethical criticism. Williams (1987) makes the point:

> if the ethical life that we have is to be effectively criticized and changed, then it can be so only in ways that can be understood as appropriately modifying the dispositions that we have. Indeed, only a disposition view, it seems to me, can give a socially and psychologically

realistic account of ethical criticism and its effects, an account that gives enough weight to
the fact that we can actually explain and understand the occurrence of ethical attitudes that
we find variously prejudiced, limited, confused, barbarous and so on. (1987, 75)

Immoral attitudes are neither properly understood nor confronted as failures of moral
perception (even if we continue to want to say that they lead to such failures). Ethical criticism
does not gain its traction on our lives by drawing attention to perceptual mistakes, but to
structures of the self.

A final point of disanalogy is this. Accounts of perceptual expertise typically assume the
objectivity of the subject matter. The account of moral epistemology above leaves it open
whether objectivism in ethics is possible. The answer will turn on whether we are able to make
the case for a particular structure of dispositions being 'best' or 'most fitting'. As argued above,
such a case will have to rest on many diverse considerations, including, as suggested by §5, those
furnished by theories of character development and, as I argue next, theories of psychological
defence.

7. It is worth considering an example of the role of the structure of the self in generating fitting
or unfitting emotions, and how reflection on such structures can contribute to establishing
whether an emotion is fitting or not. What follows is just *one* way of pursuing these ideas.[5] My
focus on the self and self-understanding, while central to the development of our evaluative
sensibilities, should not be thought to substitute for other qualities and activities that have rightly
been identified as contributing to moral knowledge, such as increased concern for others, the
development of skills of imagination and thoughtfulness that improve our moral discrimination
and foresight, and communal moral enquiry.

I assume for the purposes of this example that, putting aside legal considerations, euthanasia
is sometimes, but not always, permissible or even good. We are then faced with the question of
knowing when. Let us suppose two individuals, a son and father, are faced with the father's
terminal illness as it approaches a painful stage in its development. Let us assume that they each
decide that the father should request and receive euthanasia and this occurs. Both their joint
decision and the resulting action can exhibit virtues, such as love and courage, but they can also,
depending on the case, be callous, light-minded, selfish, disloyal, or cowardly (I adapt this list of
vices from Hursthouse 1991, 235). Let us suppose, in this example, that the son's decision is
callous and the father's is cowardly – the son desires the father's death and the father prefers
death to the disapproval or contempt of his son. But they hide their feelings from themselves
and each other (we may take this to be a matter of self-deception or that these emotions are
more deeply unconscious). Instead, the prospect of pain is taken by them, perhaps without much
consideration, as sufficient reason for the request, which they both agree is 'courageous'. They
both feel relief at the prospect of the father's death understood as release from pain, but do not
recognize their relief at not having to confront a very different sort of pain about the truth of
their relationship.

On the assumed framework of §1 and the model of the self in §5, the motivations and
emotions that would make the decision vicious in these various ways will influence both men's
understanding of both the situation and possible courses of action. In particular, they are
mistaken about their reasons for feeling or acting in certain ways. If they are unaware of the
motivations that would make their action vicious, they fail to understand their decision for what
it is. The considerations of pain and thoughts of courage are not playing the role that the father
and son think they are in their decision.

Unfortunately, there is ample reason to think that a lack of understanding of our emotions is
widespread. Our emotions may be distorted, and rendered unfitting, by the natural desire to

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[5] See Lacewing (2014) for a more detailed discussion of the themes of this section.

avoid psychological pain, such as anxiety, fear, guilt, shame and envy, particularly in relation to questions of self-esteem. When such distortion occurs unconsciously and unintentionally, psychologists talk of 'defence mechanisms', the operation of mental processes that function both to protect us from excessive anxiety and to protect the integration of the self by changing how we understand and experience ourselves, our passions and thoughts, others, and the social world (see Vaillant, 1993, 2000; Cramer, 2006). Defences are entirely necessary in psychological development and can be age-appropriate, e.g. the use of denial at age 3, the use of passive aggression in adolescence. Thus everyone has used them, and certain defences are very likely to survive into adulthood, so the general view of researchers is that the great majority of people use defences that distort their understanding of themselves and the world to a greater or lesser degree.[6]

The use of defences increases in conditions of stress and especially when one's self-esteem is at issue – both of which commonly apply in morally challenging situations. The distortions they engender in one's self-understanding occur unintentionally and unconsciously. Thus, one misapprehends what one feels and why and the nature of the situation one is facing. As a result, both the reasons for what one feels and chooses to do and the reasons the situation furnishes to feel and act differently, are misunderstood. So, for instance, attitudes towards human life, death, dependency, and pain may all influence attitudes toward euthanasia, and the emotions surrounding such fundamental issues of human life are ambivalent and painful, to say the least. They can be further exacerbated, in cases like the one here, by attitudes and emotions about parenthood, filial duty and generational succession. It is not improbable, therefore, that attitudes toward and deliberation on a particular case of euthanasia or euthanasia more generally will be fed by many and various passions about other matters, including ambition, loyalty, fear, frustration, love, rivalry, fairness, and others, not all of which will be conscious or understood well by the subject.

Engaging with the question of whether an emotion is fitting or not, on any given occasion or in general, requires us to consider whether it is implicated in, or the product of, psychological defence. This is not to say that emotions that are not defensive are fitting, as they may fail to be so for other reasons. Nor is it to say that emotions that are defensive are always unfitting. Like the men's relief, the type of emotion may be fitting, but unwarranted as the reasons for which they are held are not those that make them fitting. But on the whole, the question of their defensiveness is always relevant to the question of their fittingness, just as questions of warrant help guide our investigations into what is true.

The issue of defence arises not only in relation to the emotions of those in the situation under consideration (e.g. the father and son) but also in relation to the emotions of those deliberating about it. The claim of §2 that our emotions reveal what is salient is not restricted to 'first-order' responses to the world. It supports the claim that our emotions play an equally central role in our reflections on what response is warranted. Our deliberations on this question are just as informed by our emotions as our deliberations on a particular situation at hand. The process is informed by our emotional responses arising as our reflection proceeds (Lacewing 2005). Whenever we engage our evaluative sensibilities in seeking moral knowledge about some case – whether or not we are personally involved in the case – whether the emotions that arise as

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[6] Vaillant provides evidence that of those in the top 20% on a scale of psychosocial adjustment at 65 years old, 50% still use less than mature defences, and the percentage for those lower on the scale is considerably higher (Vaillant 1993, 132, Table 4). And Cramer remarks (2006, 224) that 'within any normal, nonclinical group we might expect to find individuals who possess more or fewer of the characteristics that define a psychological disorder'. These may be individual symptoms, e.g. depressive tendencies, phobias, or pathological aggression, or personality disorders, e.g. antisocial traits or narcissism. The evidence is that these are all associated with the use of defences (235).

we deliberate are defensive is relevant to our deliberations. If they are, then just like the father and son, we may fail to understand the role that the considerations we entertain are playing in contributing towards our judgment. Hence, seeking to establish the fittingness of emotions is an exercise in self-understanding, both in the sense of understanding more about the virtuous self and in the sense of understanding more about oneself.

One element of self-understanding and its development, then, concerns uncovering and deconstructing one's defences. Central to so doing is the development of a greater openness to moments of anxiety and other uncomfortable mental states, so that one detects hints of them when they occur. Because defences are protections against such states, such states are 'in the offing' when defences are activated. With difficulty, practice, and the courage to face oneself squarely, for some of one's defences at least, one can, *on occasion*, 'catch oneself' (Lacewing 2005). This openness involves a letting go of attempts to control or direct one's immediate emotional responses in favour of allowing them to 'surface', a refusal to dismiss feelings that seem unfitting or irrational in favour of an approach of understanding. Such openness normally needs supplementation by close relationship and dialogue with others. If others are not themselves defensive at moments when we are, then they may see our defences for what they are, and so help us to recognise them (if they are themselves defensive over such issues, their thoughts and feelings are no less distorted than our own).

These forms of self-understanding can be transformative, and thus this account of deepening self-knowledge adds to our account of the development of virtue. Gaining self-knowledge can change the object of knowledge (Moran 2001). In self-knowledge, one organizes and interprets facts about oneself into a self-conception. This is partly a constructive work, as one labels one's emotions and inevitably endorses or rejects attitudes. The processes by which we may develop a better awareness of our emotions are themselves developments in our emotional dispositions and evaluative sensibilities. As one acquires new self-knowledge, one reaches new understandings of oneself, and this changes the emotions and attitudes one has. Alternatively, transformations in one's emotions can engender new understandings of oneself. A simple example: when, in or after an abusive relationship, someone recognises their emotional resilience and gains a sense of self-worth, they lose some of their fear and finds previous ways of being treated no longer tolerable. When the knowledge gained relates to mental states that have been defended against, then gaining knowledge of these states and their meanings involves changing as a person, for what was defended against – unrecognised in oneself – is assimilated and transformed in an expanded understanding of who one is. Having recognised oneself, and how certain understandings of the moral situation one was deliberating about were being distorted by attempts to avoid pain or anxiety, not only may one re-evaluate the fittingness of one's emotions, what the situation warrants, and what one has reason to think and do, with greater perspicuity, it is also not uncommonly the case that the emotional responses one had have themselves changed, and present the situation in a new and richer light. We may imagine what difference it would make to our father and son and their deliberation about euthanasia if they were able to face and then resolve the emotions they remain unaware of.

This discussion is intended as an example of one way in which assessing the fittingness of emotions involves engaging with the structures of the self. It once again shows up the limitations of the perceptual model in moral epistemology. The forms of self-enquiry and self-development described here very rarely, if ever, have a role to play in developing and exercising typical cases of perceptual expertise.

8. It may be objected that it is one thing to argue that when considering whether an emotion is fitting, we should consider its relation to psychological defence; it is quite another to argue that in so doing, we should seek to deconstruct our defences. This assumes that our evaluation of the fittingness of an emotion is itself something that may be distorted by emotions of which we are unconscious. On an alternative model of moral epistemology, we are able to stand back from our

emotions to evaluate their fittingness from some emotionally-neutral intellectual space (e.g. Moran, 2001; Korsgaard 2009, Ch. 6; Brady, 2010, 2011). To claim that such evaluation is always an emotional affair is unjustified both phenomenologically and in its limitations on reason.

But this position is not, I think, available within the framework developed in this paper. First, if we grant the assumptions of §1, then as argued above, our emotions are themselves caught up in our evaluation of whether our emotions are fitting. On the phenomenological point, the claim here is not that we will always consciously feel emotions in such deliberations, though it is highly probable that we will, given how emotional dispositions structure our evaluative sensibilities. What is necessary is that we must be open and sensitive to any emotional responses that do arise, including those feelings of anxiety etc. that may indicate the presence of defensive thinking. On the limitation on reason, while we can reflect upon, refine, and even transform our emotions, we have no way, independent of our emotional life as a whole, to establish whether they are fitting or not. Our emotional evaluative sensibilities provide our access to values and reasons; we cannot stand back from them entirely – to achieve some vaunted perspective of 'objective' reason – to compare our responses with what is 'really' valuable.

Second, the idea of an emotionally-neutral intellectual space from which the fittingness of emotions can be evaluated assumes a kind of transparency of self-understanding – a full understanding of why our emotional responses are as they are – that is not always available to us (Cottingham 1998; Goldie 2008; Lacewing 2014). For instance, the prevalence of psychological defence calls such transparency into question. To evaluate the fittingness of our emotions without drawing on emotion, we need to have not only theoretical but personal grounds for confidence that the 'unemotional' view is the clearer, more accurate one. But it may not be so, not least because we can be unaware of the influence of our emotions on our supposedly emotionally-neutral deliberations. Hence the need both to allow emotions to surface if they will, and to engage with others who may understand us better.

9. I have argued that the availability of moral knowledge, and the failure to know, is grounded, in part at least, in the emotional dispositions of the self. As the skill model of virtue has it, the mature development of these, e.g. their accuracy, openness to experience, rich detail, and context-sensitivity, substantially determines the subject's ability to gain moral knowledge, and by contrast, their inaccuracy, defensiveness, superficiality, and rigidity, contributes towards explaining a lack of moral knowledge. Thus, our understanding of the formation of the self and the processes by which it is formed is central both to justifying claims about the fittingness of emotions and to explaining ethical attitudes that we find prejudiced, confused, and so on. By contrast, the perceptual model of moral epistemology fails to provide a suitable account of the development and testing of moral knowledge, and as such, fails to illuminate the nature of moral knowledge and the means by which we achieve it.·

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