

## MORAL PERCEPTION AND THE CAUSAL OBJECTION

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### *Abstract*

One of the primary motivations behind moral anti-realism is a deep-rooted scepticism about moral knowledge. Moral realists attempt counter this worry by sketching a plausible moral epistemology. One of the most radical proposals in the recent literature is that we know moral facts by perception – we can literally see that an action is wrong, etc. A serious objection to moral perception is the causal objection. It is widely conceded that perception requires a causal connection between the perceived and the perceiver. But, the objection continues, we are not in appropriate causal contact with moral properties. Therefore, we cannot perceive moral properties. This papers demonstrates that the causal objection is unsound whether moral properties turn out to be secondary, natural properties; non-secondary, natural properties; or non-natural properties.<sup>1</sup>

*“What plays, in moral reasoning, the role played in science by observation?”*

*I propose the answer: ‘Observation’.*

~ Richard Boyd, ‘How to Be a Moral Realist’

### **I. Moral Anti-Realism and Moral Epistemology**

One of the primary motivations behind moral anti-realism is a deep-rooted scepticism about moral knowledge (e.g. Mackie 1977). The metaphysical status of moral properties is impugned by the lack of a plausible story about how such facts could affect our cognitive faculties in the way necessary for knowledge. Moral

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realists attempt counter this criticism by sketching a plausible moral epistemology. One of the most radical proposals in the recent literature is that we know moral facts in much the same way as we know everyday facts about the external world: by perception (e.g. Greco 2000, Millar 2000, Cuneo 2003, Goldie 2007, Prinz 2007, Audi 2009). According to this proposal, we can come to know that an action is morally wrong by literally seeing it.

There are several potent objections to this view. One of the most plausible objections to moral perception might be termed the *causal objection*. It is widely conceded that perception requires a causal connection between the perceived and the perceiver (call this the 'causal constraint on perception'). But, the objection continues, we are not in appropriate causal contact with moral properties. Moral properties are epiphenomenal at best. Therefore, we cannot perceive moral properties. Here is the objection a little more formally:

- (1) For a subject *S* to perceive a property *F*, *S* must be in appropriate causal contact with *F* (the causal constraint on perception).<sup>2</sup>
- (2) Human subjects are never in appropriate causal contact with moral properties.
- (3) So, human subjects cannot perceive moral properties.

Despite its initial plausibility, there are reasons to be sceptical of the soundness of this argument. There are basically three views of the metaphysics of moral properties.<sup>3</sup> On the first, moral properties are secondary, natural properties. On the second, moral properties are non-secondary, natural properties. On the third, moral properties are non-natural properties. In this paper I argue that

<sup>2</sup> One might think that this condition should read "... appropriately caused by the fact that *X* is *F*." I leave this open at this point since it is plausible that some perceptual experiences as if *X* is *F* are not caused by the fact that *X* is *F*—e.g. perhaps my perceptual experience as if the table is brown is not caused by the fact that the table is brown (since brown-ness is a secondary quality) but by the physical constitution of the table itself.

<sup>3</sup> In conversation, Robert Audi suggested a fourth view: moral properties are functional properties (e.g. Jackson 1998). I know too little about such a view to argue that it does or doesn't imply that moral properties will meet the causal condition on perception. However, my initial suspicion is that it will. After all, it does seem that we can perceive the instantiation of other functional properties. For example, philosophers have suggested all of the following as examples of functional properties: being a carburetor, being a heart, being angry, etc. But surely it is possible to see that something is a carburetor, see that something is a heart, see that someone is angry, etc.

on the first and second views of moral properties, premise (2) is false. On the third view, I show that despite the plausibility of premise (2), there are serious worries about the truth of premise (1). In either case, the causal objection to moral perception fails.

## II. Moral Perception and the Causal Constraint on Perception

I begin with a brief explanation of moral perception and a brief defense of the causal constraint on perception. First, a word about the term ‘moral perception’.<sup>4</sup> Relying on Dretske’s (1969) distinction between seeing and seeing as, we can say that all cases of perception are either cases of perception *simpliciter* or *perception-as*.<sup>5</sup> ‘Perception as’ requires identification.<sup>6</sup> For example, upon seeing the university president for the first time, I perceived *simpliciter* the university president but failed to perceive him as the university president. Perceptual belief (and hence perceptual knowledge) requires *perception-as*. If some form of moral realism is true, it is obvious that we have moral perception *simpliciter*. We see actions that are, in fact, morally wrong. The contentious claim is that we might also have moral *perception-as*, e.g. that we might be able to see *that* the action was wrong, etc. I shall use ‘moral perception’ to mean perception as if some moral property or other is instantiated. What would an instance of moral perception look like? Gilbert Harman (1977) provides the following vignette:

If you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it, you do not need to *conclude* that what they are doing is wrong; you do not need to figure anything out; you can *see* that it is wrong. (p. 4, emphasis his)

Second, virtually all contemporary accounts of perception agree that there must be some sort of causal connection between

<sup>4</sup> ‘Moral perception’ is used in two different ways in the contemporary literature. Some, for example Blum 1991, use the term ‘moral perception’ in a metaphorical sense to refer to a moral agent’s awareness of morally relevant features of a situation. In this sense one does not literally perceive moral wrongness, etc. I shall use ‘moral perception’ to indicate the non-metaphorical perception of moral facts. In this sense, moral perception is the same as chair perception – the perception that something or other is a chair is akin to the perception that something or other bears a moral property.

<sup>5</sup> A similar distinction was drawn by Grice (1961, p. 147) between what he termed ‘seeing’ and ‘observing’.

<sup>6</sup> I leave open the contentious claim that all perception is really *perception-as* something or other.

the object of perception and the subject's perceptual experience (e.g. Ryle 1949, Grice 1961, Strawson 1974, Goldman 1977, Huemer 2001).<sup>7</sup> The need for such a constraint is illustrated in Grice's familiar pillar case:

It might be that it looked to me as if there were a certain sort of pillar in a certain direction at a certain distance, and there might actually be such a pillar in that place; but if, unknown to me, there were a mirror interposed between myself and the pillar, which reflected a numerically different though similar pillar, it would certainly be incorrect to say that I saw the first pillar, and correct to say that I saw the second; and it is extremely tempting to explain this linguistic fact by saying that the first pillar was, and the second was not, causally irrelevant to the way things looked to me. (1961, p. 142)

Why doesn't Grice perceive the first pillar in this case? An inference to the best explanation suggests that what is lacking is a causal connection between the subject and object.

So it seems that perception requires an appropriate causal connection between the perceiver and the perceived. What, more exactly, constitutes an *appropriate* cause? Alston (1991) thinks that the possibilities of determining a precise account of this necessary condition are bleak:

The causal contribution a seen object makes to the production of visual experience . . . is different from the causal contribution a felt object makes to the tactile experience, different from the causal contribution a heard object makes to the aural experience, and so on. And how do we tell what the crucial causal contribution is for each modality? We have no a priori insight into this. We cannot abstract from everything we have learned from perception and still ascertain how an object must be causally related to a visual experience in order to be what is seen in that experience. (pp. 64–5)

Additionally, paradigm accounts of perception focus on perception *simpliciter* as opposed to *perception-as*. These accounts require a

<sup>7</sup> Note, however, that there are some who deny the causal requirement; for example, see Snowdon 1981 and Hyman 1992. If it turns out that perception does not have a causal requirement, then the causal objection to moral perception is a non-starter.

causal connection (or causal dependency) between the perceiver's mental state and the object of perception. However, it is not clear how the causal condition must be tailored to meet cases of *perception-as*. What is the nature of the causal connection between the subject and the cat for the subject to perceive the animal as a cat? Perhaps we only need to insist that there is a causal connection between some portion of the cat and the perceptual experience of the subject. But this requirement is much too weak to rule out moral perception since there is nothing unique about the objects of perception in a putative case of moral perception. All of the following can bear moral properties: persons, actions, events, states of affairs, etc., and each of these can be an object of perception.<sup>8</sup> For example, I can hear my mother (a person), see the batter hit the ball (an action), see the homerun (an event), or hear the ocean waves lapping the shore (a state of affairs). So on this reading of the causal constraint, putative cases of moral perception can meet the causal condition easily.

But it might be objected that *perception-as* requires something a bit more than the paradigm accounts of perception mention. If a subject is to perceive that *X* is *F*, perhaps it is not enough for the subject to merely be in causal contact with *X*; perhaps he must also be in contact with the *F*-ness of *X*. For example, in order to perceive that the table is heavy, it's not enough for the table to cause a certain kind of perceptual experience in me. It must be the *heaviness* of the table that causes the experience if the case is to count as *perception-as* if the table were heavy. In this case, the live issue for present purposes is whether or not a perceived *property* must be causally efficacious and whether or not moral properties ever meet this burden.

Setting aside a precise formulation of the causal condition, the putative problem, according to the causal objection, is that our moral beliefs have very different causal origins than our perceptual beliefs. This point is made by Griffin (1996):

With perceptual beliefs, we have reason to think that we are to some extent passive recipients of an independent reality. . . . The causal story of our ethical beliefs is generally much

<sup>8</sup> Peter Markie has objected that it is plausible that only objects (and not states of affairs, etc.) can serve as the objects of perception *simpliciter*. It's not clear to me that this affects anything that I say here since what is really at issue in putative cases of moral perception is the possibility of *perception-as*.

more tangled, much less easily established, than the story of our perceptual beliefs (p. 14)

The conclusion is that moral perception is impossible because moral properties are not in the proper causal relation to our perceptual faculties.

### III. Moral Properties as Secondary, Natural Properties

This paper aims to show that the causal objection doesn't pose a problem for moral properties *qua* moral properties.<sup>9</sup> In this section, I assume that moral properties are secondary, natural properties of the sort defended by McDowell (1998a, 1998b).<sup>10</sup> McDowell defines a secondary quality as follows:

A secondary quality is a property the ascription of which to an object is not adequately understood except as true, if it is true, in virtue of the object's disposition to present a certain sort of perceptual experience: specifically, an appearance characterizable by using a word for the property itself to say how the object perceptually appears. (p. 133, 1998b)

A secondary property, then, is a species of a subjective property that has an essential connection to perception. Colour is the paradigm example of a secondary property. For an object to be red, for example, is for it to be such that it would be described as red if observed by a certain type of being under a certain set of circumstances.

Consider the following instance of perception: I see that the table is brown. In this case, it seems obvious enough that the table

<sup>9</sup> I grant that there are at least some substantive normative views on which moral perception is impossible because the causal constraint is not met. Divine command ethics comes to mind as an easy example. If it turns out that moral facts are constituted by divine facts, it is difficult to see how the causal constraint on perception could be met. However, my goal in this paper is to show that there is no *principled* reason to think that moral facts, *per se*, run afoul of the causal constraint. If an objector wants to dismiss the possibility of moral perception, she will have to say something substantive about normative ethics to do so.

<sup>10</sup> Gilbert Harman suggests an analogy between colors and values as well, though he ultimately rejects the analogy. See Harman 1977, p. 13 and p. 22. David Wiggins also defends a variety of subjectivism that he calls sensible subjectivism in Wiggins 1998.

causes my perceptual experience, but, as a secondary, natural property, the *colour* of the table is causally impotent. So it seems that I can perceive that the table is brown despite the fact that the brownness, *per se*, makes no causal contribution to my perceptual experience. It seems that the brownness is appropriately causally related to my eyes since my seeing that the table is brown is a paradigm case of perception that results in knowledge.

What, then, if moral properties were like colour properties? If moral properties were secondary, natural properties, then this would pave the way for showing that moral perception is possible despite the fact that moral properties make no causal contribution to the perceptual process. Colours, *per se*, are causally inert. It is the primary qualities that “stand under” the secondary properties that are causally efficacious. And yet it’s obvious that we can perceive colours (more carefully, we can perceive *that* something is of a certain colour). Likewise, if moral properties are secondary properties, then it is the primary properties that “stand under” the values that are causally efficacious while the values themselves are causally inert. However, just as we can perceive colours, we can also perceive values.

#### IV. Moral Properties as Non-Secondary, Natural Properties

It’s no surprise that the causal objection to moral perception fails if we stipulate that moral properties are secondary properties. After all, that was part of the motivation for sketching the account in the first place. But since a number of philosophers have offered serious objections to the view that moral properties are secondary properties (e.g. Sorell 1985, McGinn 1983, Milgram 1999) it is important to evaluate the soundness of the causal objection on other metaethical views. In this section I assume that moral properties are non-secondary, natural properties.

Consider the following cases of perception: I see that the box is empty, and I hear that the speaker is a woman. Both of these cases involve the perception of a non-secondary, natural property. A natural property is, roughly, the kind of property that can be studied in the hard sciences *or* any other property that is either identical with or reducible to a property that can be studied in the hard sciences. So, for example, being a cat is a property that is reducible to certain physical facts. The same goes for being empty and being a woman. What is the causal connection between the

box and my perceptual apparatus or between the speaker and my perceptual apparatus? First consider the box. It's plausible that the emptiness of the box does no causal work in the explanation of my perceptual experience since it's plausible that absences are not causes. Similarly, in the case of hearing that the speaker is a woman, it's not the property being instantiated (e.g. being a woman) that figures in the causal story of my perceptual experience (unless this property is *identical* to some collection of lower-level properties). In each case, the underlying physical aspects of the object causally impact my eyes and ears in such a way that they produce the relevant perceptual experience in me. Thus it is not the properties themselves (again, unless identical or reducible to some collection of lower-level properties) that stand in the causal chain.

Suppose, then, that moral naturalism is true (i.e. moral properties are non-secondary, natural properties). If moral properties are either identical with or reducible to some sub-set of properties that can be studied in the hard sciences, then, since we think that these latter kinds of properties can enter into causal relations with human agents, there is no longer a principled reason for thinking that the causal constraint cannot be met in putative cases of moral perception. Just as my perceptual experience as if the box is empty can be appropriately caused by some sub-set of the lower-level physical properties to which being empty is reducible, so too, my perceptual experience as if the action is wrong can be appropriately caused by some sub-set of the lower-level physical properties to which being wrong is reducible.

Michael Huemer (2005) objects to this strategy for defending moral perception. He argues that a defense of moral perception by appeal to moral naturalism must go as follows:

- 1) I can perceive that  $X$  is  $N$  (where ' $N$ ' indicates some natural property).
- 2) Good =  $N$ .
- 3) So, I can perceive that  $X$  is good. (p. 86)

This argument, as Huemer is quick to point out, is unsound. The inference from (1) and (2) to (3) is invalid because substitutions of identicals are not truth preserving within an intentional context. I may believe that George Orwell wrote *1984*, but it doesn't follow from this that I believe that Eric Blair wrote *1984* even though Orwell and Blair are identical.



However, Huemer's position is a straw man. One might allow, with Huemer, that substitution of identicals is truth preserving only in cases of perception *simpliciter* and not perception *as*. If I perceive Orwell and Orwell is identical to Blair, then I perceive Blair. Perceiving *that* a man is drinking tea is insufficient for perceiving *that* the university president is drinking tea even if the man is, in fact, the university president.

So the moral naturalist need not insist that if one can perceive that  $X$  is  $F$  and the property of being  $F$  is identical (or reducible to) the property of being  $G$ , then one can perceive that  $X$  is  $G$ . Instead, all that is required to respond to the causal objection is that if one can perceive that  $X$  is  $F$  and the property of being  $F$  is identical (or reducible to) the property of being  $G$ , then the property of being  $G$  is just as causally responsible for the relevant perceptual experience as is the property of being  $F$ . Thus *if* moral properties are natural ones, *then* there is no principled reason for saying that putative cases of moral perception fail to meet the causal condition. Of course moral perception requires much more than meeting the causal condition, but the present point is merely to demonstrate that putative cases of moral perception meet this latter condition.

A second worry about this strategy might go as follows.<sup>11</sup> If moral properties are reducible to natural properties in the way suggested here, then the naturalistic base will be global in scope and well beyond my perceptual ken. Suppose, for example, one person wrongly steals the wallet of another, and a subject witnesses this action. In this case, the wrongness of the action is reducible to a wide net of naturalistic facts: e.g. the fact that it will later cause pain and distress to the former owner, the fact that there is a law prohibiting such behavior, the fact that some child will now be sad since his father cannot purchase him a birthday gift, etc. The naturalistic facts to which the subject in question has perceptual access are merely a sliver of the total relevant natural facts. Thus even if moral properties are reducible to sets of natural facts, we never stand in the right relation to those much larger sets of facts.

In response to this objection, note that at best the causal condition requires that in order to perceive that  $X$  is  $F$  I be in causal

<sup>11</sup> Thanks to participants in the audience at the 2009 Pacific Conference of the APA for raising this objection.

contact with some *portion* of *X* or the *F*-ness of *X*. For example, I meet the causal condition when I look at my computer despite the fact that I am not in causal contact with the underside of it. When I perceive that the animal is a cat, I meet the causal condition in virtue of being in causal contact with certain features of the animal in virtue of which it is a cat (e.g. its shape).

Similarly, if moral properties were non-secondary, natural properties, and if I can be in causal contact with at least some of the properties that are tightly connected to or constitutive of the moral properties, then this is sufficient for being in causal contact with the moral properties themselves. So at the very least the causal objection needs to be refined in order to show that the causal condition cannot be met if moral properties turn out to be non-secondary, natural properties. Since I think that it's plausible that the causal condition is met in cases in which we're in causal contact with a subset of constitutive properties, *and* I can't imagine a plausible moral ontology on which moral properties are not closely connected by the kinds of properties that we can come into causal contact with (e.g. pain), I conclude that the causal objection to moral perception fails if moral properties are non-secondary, natural properties.

#### IV. Moral Properties as Non-Natural Properties

Following G.E. Moore (1903), many philosophers have been unhappy with the view that moral properties are natural properties. Is the causal objection sound if moral facts turn out to be non-natural facts? I think that the answer to this question is no, though I grant that the case for the perception of non-natural properties is more difficult to make out. In this instance, it seems obvious that premise (2) of the causal objection is true: non-natural properties are not causally efficacious. However, a worry can be raised about the truth of premise (1). Why should we accept the causal constraint on perception? In this final section I argue that understanding the motivation behind the causal constraint on perception sheds light on how it might be altered in a way that (a) more accurately captures the intuition behind the condition and (b) allows for the perception of a property that is not causally efficacious.

Why is a causal connection between the observer and the property required in the first place? Recall that the causal condition

was adopted in order to solve puzzling cases like Grice's pillar case. Here is another case from D.F. Pears (1976):

*P* is a traveller [sic] in a desert, and he hallucinates an oasis with his eyes closed, so there can be no doubt that [his visual experience] is not caused by anything beyond his eyelids. However, there is a real oasis, *O* in front of him and [his visual experience] matches *O* perfectly feature by feature. But *P* cannot be seeing *O* because, though the match is perfect, it is entirely coincidental. (p. 25)

Why, according to Pears, is this not a case of perception? Because it is simply a coincidence that *P*'s perceptual experience matches the external world. Pears severs the causal link between the two in order to get a case of coincidence. Similarly, Strawson (1974) explicitly defends the causal condition by appeal to matters of coincidence:

The concept of perception is too closely linked to that of knowledge for us to tolerate the idea of someone's being in this way merely flukishly right in taking his [visual experience as if *M*] to be the [perception of *M*] that it seems to be. Only those [visual experiences as if *M*] which are in a certain sense dependable are to count as the [perceptions of *M*] they seem to be; and dependability in this sense entails dependence, causal or non-logical dependence on appropriate *M*-facts. (p. 71)

Here again, Strawson notes that what really motivates the causal constraint is the fact that the concept of perception is non-accidental in the same sort of way that the concept of knowledge is non-accidental. Just as you cannot know that *P* accidentally or by a fluke, you cannot perceive that *P* if your perceptual experience is produced accidentally or by a fluke.

So the defense of the causal condition is an appeal to non-accidentality. The connection between the facts in the world and the experiences in our heads can't be accidental in a case of genuine perception. Perception needs to be reliable. Strawson goes on to claim that "dependability in this sense" entails causal dependence. But this is too fast. Requiring a causal connection between the fact and the perceptual experience is one way to eliminate accidentality, but it is not the only way. In other words a

causal connection is *sufficient* to ensure non-accidentality, but it is not *necessary*. Another option – one that is just as dependable – is to require a causal connection between a fact on which another property supervenes and the perceptual experience.

One property supervenes on another if and only if no two states of affairs can differ with respect to the first without also differing with respect to the second. In other words, change in the first property entails a change in the second property. Now suppose that A-properties supervene on B-properties, and B-properties can cause visual experiences. This allows for the kind of non-accidental perceptual experiences that Grice, Pears, and Strawson require. It is no accident that I have a perceptual experience as if an A-property is instantiated when I am in causal contact with B-properties since anytime the B-properties are instantiated, the A-properties are likewise instantiated.

David Lewis (1980) makes a related suggestion in his seminal piece on prosthetic vision. He attempts to sort a variety of bizarre scenarios into cases of genuine and specious perception and notes that the causal condition is an unhelpful way of making the distinction. Instead, he thinks that whether or not someone with, say, a prosthetic eye, can perceive depends on a counterfactual condition:

This is my proposal: if the scene before the eyes causes matching visual experience as part of a suitable pattern of counterfactual dependence, then the subject sees; if the scene before the eyes causes matching visual experience without a suitable pattern of counterfactual dependence, then the subject does not see. (p. 142)

Lewis' suggestion is that the rationale behind the requirement of counterfactual dependence is the elimination of accidentality. When the counterfactual dependence requirement is met, it is no coincidence that the visual experience matches the external facts.

The non-accidentality can be seen in another way. Note that the reliance on *supervenience* in the case of non-natural properties is isomorphic to the reliance on *reducibility* in the case of higher-order, natural properties. In the one case it is supervenience that “connects” the causally efficacious property with the supervening property, and in the other case it is reducibility that

“connects” the causally efficacious property with the higher-order property.<sup>12</sup>

The present suggestion is that the causal condition be understood in a way that allows for the perception of properties that supervene on natural ones. This emendation is not *ad hoc* since the point of the causal condition is to eliminate accidentality, and the emended condition meets this requirement as well. Furthermore this understanding of the causal condition is consistent with the ordinary way in which we conceive of perception. Strawson (1979) points out that ‘we think of perception as a way . . . of informing ourselves about the world of independently existing things . . .’ (p. 51), and the emended causal condition allows for that. Indeed Dummett (1979) thinks that perception is possible even if an occasionalist metaphysics turns out to be true:

. . . if someone believes, with Malebranche, that the presence of the object and my perception of it are joint effects of some further cause, his belief does not violate the concept of perception, so long as he allows that my perception supplies a reason for taking the object to be there. (pp. 35–6)

Even on an occasionalist metaphysics there can be a regularity between perceptual experiences and the appropriate facts as a result of a causal connection between one’s perceptual faculties and external world properties, and this is what is required by our concept of perception. Whether my experience as if *P* is caused by the fact that *P* or by the fact that *Q* on which the fact that *P* supervenes, in either case perception is a reliable source of information about the world.

On this re-constructed account of the causal condition on perception, it is easy to see how moral perception might be possible even on moral non-naturalism. Even if moral properties turn out to be non-natural properties, it is widely conceded that the non-natural moral properties supervene on natural

<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that supervenience and reducibility are alike in all respects; after all, a supervenience relation between two entities simply indicates a modal correlation between the two whereas a reducibility relation indicates a stronger relation such as identity. However, in both cases there is a reliable connection between the facts (higher-order or non-natural) and the perceptual experiences, and it is the similarity in reliability that is crucial for my analogy.

properties.<sup>13</sup> In other words, there can be no two worlds that are identical with regard to natural facts but differ with regard to their respective moral facts. And if (A) we can be in causal contact with (at least some of) the base-level natural facts and (B) supervenience of moral facts on these base-level facts is sufficient to meet the causal condition on perception, then putative cases of moral perception can meet the causal condition on perception.

One objection to this strategy is as follows.<sup>14</sup> There will be some cases in which the counterfactual connection between the natural facts present to an observer and the moral facts is not as tight as the emended causal condition seems to require. Imagine a case in which an action is morally wrong for one particular reason that the subject is acquainted with but were the facts different so that this reason would not hold, the act would be still be wrong for some other reason to which the subject is not responsive. In this case, the moral facts do not seem to be suitably sensitive to the natural facts of which the subject is aware. Three things may be said by way of response. First, one might employ an “interventionist” account of counterfactuals to deny that the kinds of insensitive cases are genuine. On this account, we have to either hold certain features constant or “remove” certain interventions from a relation between A and B in order to determine counterfactual or causal connections between A and B (e.g. Pearl 2000). Second, one might simply grant that in such cases where the presence of the moral property is not sensitive to the natural facts in the way required that one cannot have moral perception. But note that this is NOT enough to show that moral perception is never possible, and it is this stronger claim that the causal objection to

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to a referee for pointing out that this claim seems to assume a non-particularist approach to moral facts. However, as the referee also pointed out, even particularists are committed to the claim that moral properties are *resultant*:

Resultance is a relation between a property of an object and the features that ‘give’ it that property. . . . everyone agrees that moral properties are resultant . . . As we might say, nothing is just wrong; a wrong action is wrong because of some other features that it has. . . . The ‘resultance base’ for the wrongness of a particular action consists in those features that make it wrong, the wrong-making features. There is, however [according to moral particularists] no such thing as the resultance base for a property (wrongness, say) *in general*. (Dancy 2004, pp. 85–89)

So while there may not be a global supervenience between moral facts and natural facts, as long as the moral facts *result from* natural facts (which surely they do), this will be enough connection between the natural facts and the moral facts to make the move I suggest in §IV.

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Jonathan Dancy for raising this objection.

moral perception purports to show. Third, one can insist that just as sensitivity is not a necessary condition for knowledge, sensitivity is not a necessary condition for perception. Thus subjects can have moral perception even in cases in which the moral properties are not sensitive to the natural properties that cause the perceptual experience.

Suppose one finds the alteration of the causal constraint implausible. It's not just accidentality that is at stake, but the causal connection *per se*. If it turns out that the causal constraint in its initial form is correct, then moral perception is impossible on the assumption that moral properties are non-natural properties. However, an important question remains: suppose moral properties are non-natural properties that supervene on natural properties that cause perceptual experiences in us. This state of affairs falls short of perception. But is it good enough? When defending his account of personal identity against competing views, Derek Parfit (1984) closes with an analogy:

Some people go blind because of damage to their eyes. Scientists are now developing artificial eyes. These involve a glass or plastic lens, and a micro-computer which sends through the optic nerve electrical patterns like those that are sent through the nerve by a natural eye. . . . Would this person be *seeing* these objects? If we insist that seeing must involve the normal cause, we would answer No. But even if this person cannot see, what he has is *just as good as seeing*, both as a way of knowing what is within sight, and as a source of visual pleasure (208–9).

I think that Parfit is right about this. Even if an objector digs in her heels and insists that this isn't perception, it seems that what the person has in this case is *good enough* for what we really care about: becoming informed of one's surroundings in a way that – in at least some cases – generates knowledge. A parallel move can be made in the final case in which moral properties are non-natural properties that supervene on natural properties. Even if correlation between the subject and the perceived in a putative case of moral perception is not a genuine instance of perception (since the causal constraint is not met), it is still good enough for what we care about: the generation of moral knowledge. Of course the subject would have to meet all of the other necessary conditions of perception (being able to identify the scenario as a moral one, being able to represent moral properties in one's perceptual

experience, etc.) in order to generate perceptual knowledge. But at the very least the causal connection would be sufficiently strong to avoid the causal objection to moral perception. Thus we should conclude that regardless of whether moral properties turn out to be secondary, natural properties; non-secondary natural properties; or non-natural properties, there are plausible ways of responding to the causal objection to moral perception.

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