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Moral Experience: Perception or Emotion?

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Forthcoming in *Ethics*

Abstract

One solution to the problem of moral knowledge is to claim that we can acquire it a posteriori through moral experience. But what is a moral experience? When we examine the most compelling putative cases, we find features which, I argue, are best explained by the hypothesis that moral experiences are emotions. To preempt an objection, I argue that putative cases of emotionless moral experience can be explained away. Finally, I allay the worry that emotions are an unsuitable basis for moral knowledge. I conclude that those who believe in moral experience should hold that it consists of emotion.

1. Introduction

How do we know right from wrong? According to the moral rationalist we must begin by working out a set of principles a priori. When we encounter a specific situation, we perceive its non-moral features and subsume them under the relevant principles, thus reaching a judgment about what ought to be done in this case. On occasion the contingencies of everyday life might jog us into recognizing a moral principle we hadn't previously thought of. But strictly speaking, experience is dispensable: it is epistemically irrelevant for moral knowledge, except insofar as it tells us about the arrangement of non-moral features in the actual world. Moral knowledge rests on reason alone, the rationalist maintains.

On the contrary, the moral empiricist holds that experience matters deeply for moral knowledge. Perhaps she is skeptical of reason's powers but unwilling to deny the possibility of moral knowledge,¹ or perhaps she thinks our judgments about cases sometimes go beyond what we can capture in abstract principles. Either way, she thinks our experiences of specific situations can reveal the moral landscape to us in a manner that is not reducible to rational intuition, inference, or conceptual competence. According to the moral empiricist, the foundation of moral knowledge is moral experience.

¹ Another option, which I set aside, is moral coherentism. See Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 'Coherentist Epistemology and Moral Theory', in *Moral Knowledge? New Readings in Moral Epistemology*, ed. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Mark Timmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 137–89. Moral coherentism seems vulnerable to the problem of coherent yet reprehensible moral outlooks. I'll also set aside any forms of antirealism or expressivism that are incompatible with talk of moral knowledge, though proponents of such views may be interested in the nature of moral experience for other reasons.

There was certainly a time when the notion of moral experience sounded fanciful to analytic philosophers.² (Perhaps it still does to some readers.) But now, moral experience is taken seriously as an account of how moral knowledge is possible. To make the account defensible though, more needs to be said about what a moral experience *is*. Let's make this requirement more precise by clarifying the term "moral experience". The moral empiricist claims there are cases in which agents form moral beliefs not through inference, nor on the basis of rational intuition, but on the basis of something else. "Moral experience" refers to whatever this *something else* is—this mental state upon which agents base their non-inferential, a posteriori moral beliefs. The moral empiricist needs to tell us what this *something else* is. She needs to identify the mental state which, in putative cases of moral experience, causes people to form new moral beliefs and which, when things go well, provides a sufficient basis for those beliefs to constitute knowledge. The aim of this article is to do just this, to settle on an account of what moral experience is. Specifically, I will adjudicate between the two leading ways of filling out moral empiricism. On the one hand, we have

Perceptual Intuitionism: Moral experiences consist of perceptual experiences with moral content.³

² For instance, Mackie dismisses it out of hand and writers at the beginning of the recent resurgence, such as Richard Werner, seem to expect an incredulous stare from their readers. John L Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin, 1977), 38–39; Richard Werner, 'Ethical Realism', *Ethics* 93, no. 4 (1983): 285, <https://doi.org/10.1086/292487>.

³ The notion of perception with moral content or, equivalently, perception of moral properties is defended by the following authors. David McNaughton, *Moral Vision* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); John Greco, *Putting Skeptics in Their Place* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 231–48; Michael Watkins and Kelly Dean Jolley, 'Pollyanna Realism: Moral Perception and Moral Properties', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 1 (2002): 75–85; Terence Cuneo, 'Reidian Moral Perception', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2003): 229–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2003.10716542>; Sarah McGrath, 'Moral Knowledge by Perception', *Philosophical Perspectives* 18, no. 1 (2004): 209–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2004.00026.x>; Peter Goldie, 'Seeing What Is the Kind Thing to Do: Perception and Emotion in Morality', *Dialectica* 61, no. 3 (2007): 347–61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1746-8361.2007.01107.x>; Jennifer Lyn Wright, 'The Role of Moral Perception in Mature Moral Agency', in *Moral Perception*, ed. J. Jeremy Wisniewski (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 1–24; Kevin DeLapp, 'Moral Perception and Moral Realism', in *Moral Perception*, ed. J. Jeremy Wisniewski (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 43–63; Timothy Chappell, 'Moral Perception', *Philosophy* 83, no. 326 (2008): 421–37, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819108000818>; Nigel Pleasants, 'Institutional Wrongdoing and Moral Perception', *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39, no. 1 (2008): 96–115, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2007.00413.x>; Justin P. McBrayer, 'A Limited Defense of Moral Perception', *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010): 305–20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/40783267>; Justin P. McBrayer, 'Moral Perception and the Causal Objection', *Ratio* 23, no. 3 (21 July 2010): 291–307, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9329.2010.00468.x>; Andrew Cullison, 'Moral Perception', *European Journal of Philosophy* 18, no. 2 (2010): 159–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0378.2009.00343.x>; Jonathan Dancy, 'Moral Perception', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes* 84 (2010): 99–117; Carla Bagnoli, 'Moral Perception and Knowledge by Principles', in *The New Intuitionism*, ed. Jill Hernandez (London: Continuum, 2011), 84–105; Robert Audi, *Moral Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Jennifer Church, *Possibilities of Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert Cowan, 'Cognitive Penetrability and Ethical Perception', *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 6, no. 4 (2015): 665–82, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-014-0185-4>; Robert Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 90, no. 1 (2015): 164–93, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phpr.12023>; J. Jeremy Wisniewski, 'The Case for Moral Perception', *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 14, no. 1 (2015): 129–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-013-9321-3>; Benjamin De Mesel, 'Seeing Color, Seeing Emotion, Seeing Moral Value',

On the other, we have

Emotional Intuitionism: Moral experiences consist of emotions.⁴

If we pursue the idea that there are such things as moral experiences, is it more plausible that they consist of perceptions or emotions?

I'll argue that moral experiences consist of emotions. In the most compelling putative cases, emotions are present. If we modify the case so the emotion is absent, the moral experience disappears. If we modify it so the emotion is present, but perceptual experiences of the subject matter are absent, the moral experience is present. These three observations are best explained by the hypothesis that moral experiences are emotions. In response, one might point to cases in which

Journal of Value Inquiry 50, no. 3 (2016): 539–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10790-015-9535-4>; Preston J. Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience', *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 13, no. 3 (2016): 294–317, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-4681063>; Preston J. Werner, 'A Posteriori Ethical Intuitionism and the Problem of Cognitive Penetrability', *European Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 4 (2017): 1791–1809, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ejop.12272>; Preston J. Werner, 'Moral Perception without (Prior) Moral Knowledge', *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2018): 164–81, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-46810075>; Preston J. Werner, 'Which Moral Properties Are Eligible for Perceptual Awareness?', *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 17 (2020): 290–319, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-20182801>.

⁴ See Mark Johnston, 'The Authority of Affect', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63, no. 1 (2001): 181–214, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2001.tb00097.x>; Daniel Jacobson, 'Seeing by Feeling: Virtues, Skills, and Moral Perception', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8, no. 4 (2005): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-005-8837-1>; Terence Cuneo, 'Signs of Value: Reid on the Evidential Role of Feelings in Moral Judgement', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2006): 69–91, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608780500449164>; Sabine Döring, 'Seeing What to Do: Affective Perception and Rational Motivation', *Dialectica* 61 (2007): 363–94; Sabine Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Antti Kauppinen, 'A Humean Theory of Moral Intuition', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 3 (2013): 360–81; Jonathan Dancy, 'Intuition and Emotion', *Ethics* 124, no. 4 (2014): 787–812, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675879>; Adam Pelsler, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification', in *Emotion and Value*, ed. Sabine Roeser and Cain Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107–23; Rafe McGregor, 'Making Sense of Moral Perception', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 4 (2015): 745–58, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-015-9601-9>; Wisniewski, 'The Case for Moral Perception'; Robert Cowan, 'Epistemic Perceptualism and Neo-Sentimentalist Objections', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 46, no. 1 (2016): 59–81; Robert Cowan, 'Epistemic Sentimentalism and Epistemic Reason-Responsiveness', in *Evaluative Perception*, ed. Anna Bergqvist and Robert Cowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 219–36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198786054.003.0012>; Christine Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Michael Milona, 'Taking the Perceptual Analogy Seriously', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 19, no. 4 (2016): 897–915, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-016-9716-7>; Michael Milona, 'Intellect versus Affect: Finding Leverage in an Old Debate', *Philosophical Studies* 174, no. 9 (2017): 2251–76, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-016-0797-x>; Jonathan Mitchell, 'The Epistemology of Emotional Experience', *Dialectica* 71, no. 1 (2017): 57–84; Michael Milona and Hichem Naar, 'Sentimental Perceptualism and the Challenge from Cognitive Bases', *Philosophical Studies* 177, no. 10 (2020): 3071–96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-019-01360-7>. As I'll understand the view, the Emotional Intuitionist needn't claim that all emotions constitute moral experiences, only that all moral experiences are constituted by emotions. Determining which types of emotion are involved in moral judgments is an instance of the thorny problem of demarcating morality from other areas of normativity and evaluation. I'll leave this open and will simply take it that a wide range of emotions relating to interpersonal relationships, the flourishing of living beings, etc. are sufficiently "ethical" to be good candidates for moral experiences. For relevant discussion, see Jesse Prinz, 'The Moral Emotions', in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 519–37, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199235018.003.0024>.

an agent feels no emotion and yet appears able to discern moral matters a posteriori. I'll argue that there are several viable routes for explaining away such cases. Finally, I'll deal with what I suspect is an important source of resistance to Emotional Intuitionism: the suspicion that emotions are an inadequate basis for moral beliefs, and hence that Emotional Intuitionism cannot vindicate moral knowledge. To allay this worry, I'll outline promising solutions to the main objections to emotion-based knowledge.

One complication: some have tried to dissolve the dispute between Perceptual and Emotional Intuitionism by appealing to what's known as "strong perceptualism" in the philosophy of emotion, the view that emotions are themselves a kind of perception.⁵ Even if one adopts this theory, it remains an interesting question whether moral experiences consist of emotions or of non-emotional perceptions. In what follows, I'll speak as if emotions are not perceptions, but the reader can interpret this in a manner compatible with strong perceptualism if desired.⁶ More generally, I'll remain as neutral as possible on the question of what emotions are. Instead of appealing to a determinate theory of emotion, I'll draw on phenomena which everyone should be able to recognize.⁷

I proceed as follows. Section 2 considers the most compelling putative cases of moral experience and argues that Emotional Intuitionism provides a better explanation of the phenomena than Perceptual Intuitionism does. Section 3 argues against other possible forms of moral empiricism. Section 4 deals with the problem of putatively emotionless moral experiences. Section 5 responds to worries about the possibility of emotion-based knowledge. Section 6 summarizes the article's ramifications.

2. Three Observations about Moral Experience

How might one defend the claim that there is such a thing as moral experience? A natural maneuver is to point to cases in which an agent forms a non-inferential moral belief that doesn't seem to be founded on reason. In this section I'll argue that, when we attend properly to the most compelling putative cases of moral experience, it becomes highly plausible that these experiences consist of emotions. In Section 2.1, I make three observations about moral experience; in Section 2.2, I argue that these are best explained by Emotional Intuitionism.

⁵ See Wisniewski, 'The Case for Moral Perception'. Strong perceptualism is defended by Tappolet. Tappolet, *Emotions, Values, and Agency*.

⁶ For what it's worth, I think the marked differences between emotion and canonical forms of perception render strong perceptualism implausible. See, e.g., Julien A. Deonna and Fabrice Teroni, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2012), 67–71. But this doesn't matter for the present article.

⁷ The one exception to this neutrality is that I'll assume the falsity of 'judgmentalism', the view that emotions are beliefs, defended by Robert Solomon, *The Passions: Emotions and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993); Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The possibility of recalcitrant emotions renders it implausible that emotions involve beliefs. See Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson, 'The Significance of Recalcitrant Emotion (or, Anti-Quasijudgmentalism)', *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 52 (2003): 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1358246100007931>. Judgmentalists should be able to endorse an analogue of Emotional Intuitionism, according to which non-inferential a posteriori moral beliefs *are* emotions, but it would overcomplicate matters for me to set things up in a way that makes room for this.

2.1 Three Observations

Let's begin with a case offered by Richard Werner, which played a key role in the revival⁸ of moral empiricism in recent decades:

Suppose that Fred has carefully read and considered the utilitarian literature and finds that utilitarianism conforms completely with his moral sensibilities and psychological set. He has thought about some of the problems the recent literature has indicated [...], such as [utilitarianism's] apparent support of slavery in some contexts, but has decided that such problems can be adequately solved. [...] Fred thinks that in most actual social contexts slavery cannot be justified. In the few cases where it can be justified, [...] slavery is justified because of the evils avoided and the goods achieved. Achieving those goods or avoiding those evils would be done at considerable cost, but Fred believes that the result would make the cost worth bearing. [...] However, [...] while watching "Roots" on his TV, Fred decides to give up utilitarianism. He proclaims, "The fact that slavery is obviously morally wrong and that it follows from my version of utilitarianism, shows that my version of utilitarianism is disconfirmed as a legitimate moral theory."⁹

An advantage of this case is that it seems true to life. As Werner puts it, "anyone [...] who has taught introductory ethics" will have "observed such experiences in others" and experienced them first-hand.¹⁰ Hence, it would be a significant theoretical cost if one had to deny that cases like Fred's are possible or claim that such individuals cannot have been sincerely committed to utilitarianism to begin with.

Crucially, this case is difficult for moral rationalists to accommodate. It's implausible that Fred's change of outlook results from inference; he isn't figuring out the implications of his existing beliefs but changing his mind.¹¹ It's also unlikely that Fred's new belief is based on rational intuition.

⁸ Historical precedents for moral empiricism arguably include Aristotle, the British Moral Sense theorists, and several of the Phenomenologists. See Jessica Moss, *Aristotle on the Apparent Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Lilli Alanen, 'Emotions in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century', in *Sourcebook for the History of the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Simo Knuuttila and Juha Sihvola (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 499–533; Michelle Montague, 'A Contemporary View of Brentano's Theory of Emotion', *The Monist* 100, no. 1 (2017): 64–87; Peter Poellner, 'Phenomenology and the Perceptual Model of Emotion', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 141, no. 3 (2016): 261–88; David Weberman, 'Heidegger and the Disclosive Character of the Emotions', *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 34, no. 3 (1996): 379–410, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2041-6962.1996.tb00798.x>. Forerunners within analytic philosophy include Murdoch, Wiggins and McDowell. Iris Murdoch, 'Vision and Choice in Morality', *Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society, Supplementary Volumes* 30 (1956): 32–58; Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); David Wiggins, 'Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1977): 331–78; John McDowell, 'Aesthetic Value, Objectivity, and the Fabric of the World', in *Pleasure, Preference, and Value*, ed. Eva Schaper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1–16.

⁹ Werner, 'Ethical Realism', 657–59.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 659.

¹¹ Admittedly, an inference can lead you to reject your initial premises if you reason through a *reductio ad absurdum*. But Fred had already worked out a coherent stance on slavery and was familiar with his principles' implications, so it isn't plausible that this is happening here. Clinging to the idea that "moral observation" is always a matter of inference, Nicholas Sturgeon defends the claim that Fred must have unconsciously endorsed anti-utilitarian principles while consciously endorsing utilitarian ones, and that his change of view is really the working out of this contradiction. See Nicholas Sturgeon, 'Ethical Intuitionism and Ethical Naturalism', in *Ethical Intuitionism: Re-Evaluations*, ed. Philip Stratton-

He had already thought carefully about the moral structure of slavery and its relation to a range of possible moral principles, so it's psychologically implausible that watching "Roots" simply jogs him into recognizing an abstract principle that escaped him before. Instead, there's reason to think that something happens inside Fred which couldn't have happened without this vivid, concrete (though fictional)¹² encounter with the institution of slavery. There is strong pressure to think that Fred's encounter with "Roots" gives him something he couldn't have gotten independently of this lived experience—to think that his new beliefs depend on moral experience rather than reason.

Let's therefore accept the tempting suggestion that Fred undergoes a moral experience. What kind of mental state does this experience consist of? I'll argue that (1) a typical agent in Fred's position would experience a range of emotions; (2) if we modify the case so the agent doesn't feel these emotions, the moral experience disappears; and (3) if we modify it so the emotions are present, but perceptual experiences of slavery are absent, the moral experience is nonetheless present. (Later, I'll argue that Emotional Intuitionism offers the best explanation of these observations.)

(1) Firstly, we're bound to imagine Fred feeling a range of emotions. "Roots" (a 1977 TV series) attracted huge audiences due to its dramatic, moving portrayal of slavery. It was full of racial and sexual violence, with "coarse, wicked [W]hites inflict[ing] cruelty, from rape to maiming, upon peaceable, vulnerable, sensitive [B]lacks".¹³ Fred must have been squirming in his seat, looking on in horror and anguish, perhaps shedding tears. Beyond shock value, contemporary reviews praised "Roots" for offering an emotionally complex viewing experience. The show

made it possible for most [W]hite and [B]lack Americans to sit down as a people and hear the story of slavery with something more than guilt, on the one hand, or shame and anger, on the other.

By coaxing White and Black viewers alike to identify with the Black protagonists, the show evoked something like a sense of "triumph" at the "slavery-and-freedom" story, "some collective measure of release and even pride in the way that [W]hites and [B]lacks are finally dealing with [...] 'our greatest national disgrace.'" In short, what made "Roots" remarkable was the emotional engagement with slavery it provoked. Because we're told that Fred has thought about the consequences of slavery before, we naturally imagine that "Roots" made a difference for him because it engaged his emotions. Arguably, this already strongly suggests that Fred's emotional reaction *is* the experience moral empiricists are looking for. For the moment, let's simply observe that his moral experience coincides with an emotional reaction.

Lake (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 205–6. But it seems needlessly uncharitable to accuse Fred—and anyone else who ever abandons one ethical view for another—of having initially held contradictory beliefs. As we'll see, other interpretations are available.

¹² If the reader thinks it makes a difference that what Fred sees is televisual or fictional, they are welcome to consider Fred as an 18th century Benthamite who witnesses slavery first-hand instead.

¹³ All quotations in this paragraph are from reviews in *The Washington Post* from when "Roots" was first broadcast, reprinted in an article by Bethonie Butler. Bethonie Butler, 'Everyone Was Talking about "Roots" in 1977 -- Including Ronald Reagan', *The Washington Post*, 30 May 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2016/05/30/everyone-was-talking-about-roots-in-1977-including-ronald-reagan/>. I've slightly bowdlerized the racial terminology to fit current usage.

(2) Let's modify the case by imagining an agent who watches the same show but feels no emotion.¹⁴ This will lead to a second observation which I will argue is grist to the Emotional Intuitionist's mill. To find a plausible scenario in which someone could watch these scenes of mutilation and rape without experiencing emotion, we need to imagine a person who lacks the emotional capacities of typical agents.¹⁵ For this purpose, let's imagine Barney, who shares Fred's initial moral beliefs, but who is an emotionally empathic dysfunctional individual (EEDI).¹⁶ This means that Barney lacks emotional empathy, i.e. the normal ability to feel "an emotional response to another individual that is congruent with the other's emotional reaction", but has a "fully functioning theory of mind".¹⁷ So let's imagine that Barney sits through "Roots", perceiving all of the events and understanding the motivations and experiences of the characters, but that he feels nothing.

When we modify the case in this way, we lose any motivation for thinking that a moral experience occurs. Our initial motivation for thinking this was that Fred formed a new moral belief that wasn't founded on reason. From what we know about EEDIs, it's highly unlikely that Barney would form a similar belief in reaction to "Roots". Empirical evidence indicates that people with this deficit "struggle with forming authority independent moral judgments unless they have rules to apply."¹⁸ Typically, people like Barney make moral judgments by applying explicit rules they have learned and by using enlightened self-interest (e.g., to avoid penalties and maintain the esteem of others). But there is no reason to think an agent like Barney would form new beliefs conflicting with his initial principles. This removes the motivation for thinking that Barney undergoes a moral experience. Of course, watching "Roots" might give Barney new insight into the non-moral facts of slavery, particularly the inner lives of enslaved people. Coupled with his existing moral principles, this might even lead him to draw some new moral conclusions, e.g., regarding the ethics of

¹⁴ Similar modifications are used for different purposes by Preston Werner (not to be confused with Richard Werner, who proposed the initial Fred case) and Pekka Väyrynen. Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience'; Pekka Väyrynen, 'Doubts about Moral Perception', in *Evaluative Perception*, ed. Anna Bergqvist and Robert Cowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 109–28, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198786054.003.0006>.

¹⁵ Am I right to consider the "extreme" case of an agent who has no emotional response to "Roots", rather than an agent who simply has a different emotional response (e.g., a White supremacist who approves of what he is seeing)? This depends on nuanced issues about the semantics of counterfactuals. But compare the counterfactual, "If a rock hadn't hit the window, it wouldn't have broken." Intuitively, the right way to evaluate this is to consider what happens if *nothing* hits the window, rather than if *something else* (e.g., a boot) hits it. (Compare David Lewis, 'Causation as Influence', *The Journal of Philosophy* 97, no. 4 (2000): 190, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2678389>; Karen Bennett, 'Why the Exclusion Problem Seems Intractable, and How, Just Maybe, to Tract It', *Noûs* 3 (2003): 482.) The former seems analogous to considering an EEDI's lack of emotional reaction; the latter seems analogous to considering a White supremacist's different reaction.

¹⁶ I borrow this term from Preston Werner, who coins it to sidestep theoretical controversies surrounding the term "psychopath". Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience', 301–2.

¹⁷ Werner, 301; compare Robert Blair, 'Empathic Dysfunction in Psychopathic Individuals', in *Empathy in Mental Illness*, ed. Tom Farrow and Peter Woodruff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511543753.002>.

¹⁸ Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience', 303; see also Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: Putnam, 1994), 34–51; Robert Blair, Derek Mitchell, and Karina Blair, *The Psychopath: Emotion and the Brain* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 47–80.

reparations. But none of this suggests a *moral* experience, as opposed to a run-of-the-mill non-moral experience. So, here is our second observation: if we modify the case so that emotions are absent, the moral experience disappears.

(3) To make our third observation, let's imagine one more variation, this time with the emotion present but with all relevant perceptual states removed. Consider Wilma, who starts with the same initial beliefs as Fred and has a typical range of emotional capacities. Instead of watching the "Roots" miniseries, Wilma reads *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*, the novel on which the TV show was based.¹⁹ Let's imagine that the novel has as profound an impact on Wilma as the series did on Fred and that she too forms the belief that slavery is wrong in all circumstances.

To my mind, Wilma seems no less realistic than Fred.²⁰ Since the cases are parallel, there's just as much reason to ascribe a moral experience to Wilma as there was with Fred. Likewise, we naturally imagine Wilma experiencing a range of emotions like those experienced by Fred: horror, anguish, sorrow at the brutality; triumph and hope at the redemptive ending. The interesting thing for our purposes is that Wilma doesn't see, hear, or otherwise perceive the phenomena her moral experience is about. Regarding Fred, the Perceptual Intuitionist will want to say that he had sense-perceptions *of slavery* while watching "Roots". One might object to this on the grounds that Fred is perceiving a TV show rather than slavery itself; but, as noted above, we could easily make Fred an 18th century Benthamite who witnesses slavery first-hand. Let's therefore grant that Fred can see and hear the manifestations of slavery that were the objects of his moral experience. The same cannot be said for Wilma. What Wilma sees are words on the page. She doesn't see or hear the novel's events but imagines them. Therefore, even if we're open to the idea that sense-perception sometimes has moral contents, we should observe that Wilma has a moral experience despite lacking any sense-perceptions of the relevant subject-matter. This is our third observation: if we modify the case so that emotion is present, but perceptual experiences of the subject matter are absent, the moral experience is present.

Before considering how best to explain these three observations, let me show that they aren't incidental to Fred's case, but hold in other paradigmatic cases of moral experience. First,

Suppose Pius is convinced of the wrongness of extra-marital sexual relations. As a result he condemns all cases of two people who are not married to each other living together. Now suppose that a couple come to live next door to him whom he gets to know and greatly admire. After he has known them for some time it transpires that they are not married because one of them cannot obtain a divorce from a previous unhappy marriage. It may be that Pius finds himself unable to view their relationship as morally unacceptable and so rejects his previous blanket censoriousness about extra-marital relationships.²¹

¹⁹ Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976).

²⁰ Compare, for instance, Will Kaufman's account of the reception of literary slave narratives in 19th c. America. Will Kaufman, *The Civil War in American Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 16–20.

²¹ McNaughton, *Moral Vision*, 102; echoed by McGrath, 'Moral Knowledge by Perception', 224–25.

The reasons for crediting Pius with moral experience are much the same as they were in the previous case: his new moral judgments conflict with his former principles, so they seem unlikely to be produced by reason.

Now for our observations. (1) It's highly plausible that emotion is present. We're told that Pius feels "great admiration" for the couple, and we naturally imagine the warmth of friendship, the delight of pleasant company and feelings of mutual respect. Because of these bonds, it's hard to imagine that Pius is unmoved when the conflict between his principles and his friendship emerges. (2) If we modify the case so that these emotions are absent, it ceases to be plausible that a moral experience occurs. Imagine Benedict, who shares Pius's initial condemnation of extra-marital sex. Imagine that a couple come to live next door to Benedict, but that, although they seem OK to him, no emotional bond develops. Now imagine Benedict hears that the couple aren't married. I see no psychological reason for thinking that Benedict would "find himself unable to view their relationship as morally unacceptable". Instead, it seems plausible that his initial moral views would stay firm and that he would judge the couple to be living in sin. This removes any reason for thinking that Benedict has undergone a moral experience. (3) Let's modify the initial case so that our agent experiences emotion without directly perceiving the situation. Imagine that Pius's neighbors are shut-ins whom he never meets face-to-face. But imagine they begin exchanging letters, and that a bond of friendship develops through written means that is just as strong as in the initial case. I submit that, so long as we imagine Pius experiencing the same emotions towards the couple, the lack of sense-perceptions of their relationship makes no difference. If he has the relevant emotions despite lacking any sense-perceptions of their relationship, the moral experience is present.

Finally, let's consider the most prominent example in discussions of moral experience, Gilbert Harman's case in which "you round a corner and see a group of young hoodlums pour gasoline on a cat and ignite it."²² In a flash, the judgment that *this is wrong* pops into your head. This case doesn't pose problems for the rationalist in the same way as the previous two, as nothing about it rules out rational intuition or speedy inference from existing principles. Still, one viable explanation is that your belief results from a moral experience (rather than a non-moral experience plus the application of a moral principle). Let's pursue the suggestion that this is a case of moral experience and explore how it relates to emotion and perception.

(1) It's obvious that a typical agent witnessing the cat-burning will have an emotional reaction, probably some mixture of disgust, revulsion, horror, dismay, etc. (2) If we take away these emotions, it becomes implausible that a moral experience occurs. As with Barney, there's reason to think that an EEDI's judgments about the cat-burning would be exhausted by reasoning from existing principles, thus removing any motivation for thinking they undergo a moral experience. This borne out by the fact that some EEDIs appear able to inflict pain on animals without being struck by the intuitive judgment that what they are doing is wrong.²³ We find a phenomenologically rich illustration of this in a passage from Iain Banks's *The Wasp Factory*, in which the protagonist sets fire

²² Gilbert Harman, *The Nature of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 4.

²³ See Blair, Mitchell, and Blair, *The Psychopath*, 1–3. It bears emphasizing that EEDIs can know that harming animals is wrong by other means, e.g., reasoning, testimony; not all EEDIs fit the cultural stereotype of the "psychopath."

to a family of rabbits.²⁴ Frank, the protagonist, seems to be an EEDI, and the rabbit-burning passage is particularly horrifying because the first-person narration is so detailed and yet so devoid of emotion. Correlatively, Frank certainly doesn't experience what he is doing as wrong. Heading out to the "Rabbit Grounds" is just another of the rituals with which he fills his time. Therefore, Banks's portrayal—which rings true psychologically and fits the empirical evidence—supports the claim that in the absence of emotion the moral experience is absent too.²⁵ (3) What if, instead of seeing the cat-burning, you read a description of it which is vivid enough to elicit a similar range of emotions as those present in the initial cat-burning case? (The reader could experiment by reading the passage from *The Wasp Factory* just mentioned.) In this variation, you can't see or hear (or smell) the event, yet the reasons for positing a moral experience seem as strong as they were in the initial case. So again, when we modify the case so that sense-perceptions of the event are absent and emotions are present, the moral experience still seems to be present.

Let's take stock. In all three examples,²⁶ we've observed the same three facts:

- (1) The moral experience coincides with an emotional reaction.
- (2) If we modify the case so that the emotions are absent, the moral experience disappears.
- (3) If we modify the case so that emotions are present, but perceptions of the subject matter are absent, the moral experience is nonetheless present.

Intuitively, my sense is that these three facts speak in favor of Emotional Intuitionism. But to be thorough, let's compare the respective explanations of (1)–(3) that Emotional Intuitionists and Perceptual Intuitionists can offer. (I'll argue that the former really do have the upper hand.)

2.2 Explaining the Observations

According to Emotional Intuitionism moral experiences consist of emotions. This neatly explains why the moral experience is present in just those variations in which emotions are present. In doing so, it straightforwardly accounts for (1)–(3).

Might it be possible to give an alternative explanation of (1)–(3) that's compatible with Perceptual Intuitionism? Here is my best attempt. The Perceptual Intuitionist should hypothesize that moral perceptions depend causally on emotion.²⁷ In this way, they can explain the first two observations as follows. In the initial version of each case, the scene produces non-moral perceptions, which cause an emotional response, which in turn causes a perception with moral

²⁴ Iain Banks, *The Wasp Factory* (London: Macmillan, 1984), chap. 2.

²⁵ Preston Werner offers a different argument for this claim. Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience'.

²⁶ Several more rich examples of experiences which lead agents to change their moral outlooks are to be found in Michael DePaul, *Balance and Refinement: Beyond Coherence Methods of Moral Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 1993). DePaul declines to give a characterization of the mental states involved in these "formative experiences" and expresses some doubt that they all involve emotion (*ibid.*, pp. 144–7). However, though I lack space to discuss each of his cases here, I'm confident that Emotional Intuitionism can account for all of them.

²⁷ See Cowan, 'Cognitive Penetrability and Ethical Perception'; Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism'; Werner, 'Moral Perception and the Contents of Experience'.

content, thus explaining (1) the co-occurrence of emotion and moral experience. In the second variation of each case, the scene produces non-moral perceptions, but these fail to cause an emotional response and therefore no moral perceptions result. This explains (2) the lack of moral experience in the absence of emotion. The third variation could be explained as follows: the text produces non-moral comprehension and imagination of the situation, which causes an emotional response, which causes a moral perception of the situation. As we'll discuss in a moment, this suggestion is troublesome for various reasons, but if it can be made workable then the Perceptual Intuitionist has an explanation of (3) why a moral experience occurs when emotion is present, and sense-perception of the subject matter is absent.

Which explanation is superior? The Emotional Intuitionist has the upper hand on three counts: simplicity, redundancy, and plausibility.

Simplicity. The Emotional Intuitionist evidently offers the simpler explanation. Both explanations appeal to emotions, but the Perceptual Intuitionist appeals to an additional causal mechanism through which the emotion produces a moral perception. All else equal, we should prefer the simpler explanation.

Redundancy. Not only is the Perceptual Intuitionist forced to posit an extra causal mechanism; they seem to be positing a redundant one. An emotion is already a non-doxastic state which represents its object as exhibiting a certain evaluative property.²⁸ There is good evidence that we frequently form evaluative beliefs by consulting our emotions.²⁹ Hence, there doesn't seem to be any explanatory work left for a moral perception to do once an emotion is present. The Perceptual Intuitionist falls foul of Occam's razor, positing a plurality of mental states when only one is necessary.

Plausibility. We ought to prefer the explanation that coheres best with what we already know. We already know that morally significant scenes elicit emotional responses, both when we perceive them and when we read about them. We already have robust evidence that emotions can influence how we form moral beliefs. In contrast, we don't have any evidence that emotions can produce

²⁸ Philosophers of emotion generally treat it as axiomatic that emotions have evaluative contents. E.g., Jesse Prinz, *Gut Reactions: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), chap. 1; Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), chap. 2. This is complicated somewhat by the 'attitudinal' theory of emotion, which locates the evaluative element in the "mode" rather than the "content." See Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 76–90. But proponents of the attitudinal view still accept that, representationally speaking, emotions are evaluations of their objects.

²⁹ See Gerald L. Clore and Karen Gasper, 'Feeling Is Believing: Some Affective Influences on Belief', in *Emotions and Beliefs: How Feelings Influence Thoughts*, ed. Nico H. Frijda, A. S. R. Manstead, and S. Bemet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 10–44; Jonathan Haidt, 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment', *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814–34, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.108.4.814>; Joshua D. Greene et al., 'An fMRI Investigation of Emotional Engagement in Moral Judgment', *Science* 293, no. 5537 (2001): 2105–8, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1062872>; Paul Slovic et al., 'The Affect Heuristic', *European Journal of Operational Research* 177, no. 3 (2007): 1333–52, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejor.2005.04.006>. For criticism, see Bryce Huebner, Susan Dwyer, and Marc Hauser, 'The Role of Emotion in Moral Psychology', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2009): 1–6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2008.09.006>.

perceptions with moral contents.³⁰ So, in addition to being complicated and redundant, the Perceptual Intuitionist's explanation is at best highly speculative. However, the disparity in plausibility comes out most strongly with respect to observation (3). In the third variation of each case, the agent has no sense-perceptions of the subject matter, so it's unclear what it means to claim that he or she is literally having a moral perception of it. The Perceptual Intuitionist owes us an account of how this works and why it still counts as perception in the relevant sense. Worse still, theories of "high-level" perception often claim that there must be a framework of "low-level" properties like shape and color, to which "high-level" properties are added.³¹ It doesn't seem plausible that one could perceive something as a pine tree without seeing its shape, color, etc. Similarly, it doesn't seem plausible that one could perceive an action as wrong without seeing or hearing what the agent is doing, at least in any non-metaphorical sense of "perceive".

In response, the Perceptual Intuitionist might propose that moral perception happens "in the mind's eye" in these cases.³² Perhaps the agent perceptually imagines the low-level properties, which leads her to perceptually imagine the moral properties? I'll discuss this rejoinder in some depth and argue that it faces its own problems of plausibility.

As an initial cost, it seems highly speculative to claim that we have a capacity for imaginings with moral contents. I'm unaware of anyone who has explicitly defended the existence of such a capacity. However, let me fill this gap by sketching what I think is the most plausible account available to the Perceptual Intuitionist. Jennifer Church holds that moral perception itself involves imagining non-actual scenarios, so her account provides a promising starting point for defending the idea of imaginings with moral contents.³³ According to Church, agents perceive moral properties by imagining different ways of proceeding from the current situation, under constraints provided by the moral principles they believe. If an agent finds that all "morally possible" ways of proceeding involve a certain action-type, this amounts to perceiving the action-type as obligatory.³⁴ To make room for moral imaginings, we simply need to allow the initial scenario to be imagined rather than perceived. This yields an account of how imaginings could present actions as right or wrong.

However, the Perceptual Intuitionist runs into trouble even if she posits a capacity along these lines. On Church's account, the space of what imagination can reveal as morally right or wrong is fixed by one's existing moral beliefs. As such, the account can't accommodate cases where the agent changes her moral outlook. Consider again Wilma, our utilitarian who reads *Roots*. Her

³⁰ Firestone and Scholl offer a damning assessment of the empirical evidence for moral perception. They rightly point out that, so far, experiments have failed to distinguish between (i) attentional effects versus differences in perceptual content and (ii) perception of morally significant objects versus perception of objects as morally significant. Chaz Firestone and Brian J. Scholl, "Moral Perception" Reflects Neither Morality Nor Perception', *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 2 (2016): 75–76, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.10.006>.

³¹ See, e.g., Christopher Peacocke, 'Précis of *A Study of Concepts*', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 56, no. 2 (1996): 407–11. Cowan argues on phenomenological grounds that moral perception would require moral contents to be added to a framework of low-level properties. Cowan, 'Perceptual Intuitionism', 168–75; see also David Faraci, 'A Hard Look at Moral Perception', *Philosophical Studies* 172, no. 8 (2015): 2055–72, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-014-0397-6>.

³² Thanks to a reviewer for suggesting this.

³³ Church, *Possibilities of Perception*.

³⁴ It might be fruitful to compare this with the phenomenon of "imaginative resistance." See Richard Moran, 'The Expression of Feeling in Imagination', *The Philosophical Review* 103, no. 1 (1994): 75, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2185873>.

antecedent moral beliefs leave room for certain ways of proceeding that don't involve abolishing slavery. For instance, she can imagine a (to her mind) "morally possible" world in which slaves are given drugs that neutralize their physical and emotional pain, while their labor is used to bring about significant societal benefits. Since Wilma's imagination would present scenarios like this as viable ways of proceeding, it wouldn't present slavery as inherently wrong. The account I've outlined still can't explain the characteristics of Wilma's moral experience.

This reveals a more general problem. To show that the rejoinder is viable, the Perceptual Intuitionist needs to explain how the moral contents of imaginings take shape. The foregoing shows that they can't do so by appealing to the agent's existing moral beliefs. Another route might be to appeal to past experience. Maybe the agent just needs to have perceived similar cases as wrong in the past in order to imagine this case as wrong? However, this would entail that *Roots* can only have its effect on Wilma if she's previously witnessed similar deeds and perceived them as wrong, which isn't plausible. Surely, part of fiction's power to transform our moral outlooks lies in its ability to present us with scenarios we haven't perceived in real life. But then, the Perceptual Intuitionist can't appeal to past experience to explain the (alleged) moral contents of Wilma's imaginings. I can't see any other promising way to proceed; I therefore submit that the rejoinder has turned out to be a dead end. Pending an account of moral imagining that can explain changes in outlook, the Perceptual Intuitionist's best attempt to explain observation (3) looks implausible. Meanwhile, the Emotional Intuitionist simply appeals to the manifest fact that we respond emotionally to texts.

Let's take stock. To explain observations (1) and (2), Perceptual Intuitionists must hypothesize that moral perception is causally mediated by emotion, but the resulting account looks complicated and redundant in comparison with Emotional Intuitionism, as well as more speculative. Regarding observation (3), the Perceptual Intuitionist must either posit genuine moral perception in the absence of sense-perception or posit imaginings with moral contents which conflict with the agent's prior views. On examination, both options seem implausible, and certainly far less plausible than the familiar facts on which Emotional Intuitionism draws. I conclude that Emotional Intuitionism gives by far the better explanation of observations (1)–(3). Unless there are strong countervailing reasons, those who believe in moral experience should prefer Emotional Intuitionism to Perceptual Intuitionism.

3. Other Forms of Moral Empiricism?

Emotional Intuitionism is superior to Perceptual Intuitionism, but is it the most promising form of moral empiricism? For all I've said so far, there might be other forms of moral empiricism that are superior.³⁵ In this section, I'll consider two directions in which one might take the thought that moral experience is something other than emotion or moral perception. One option is that there exists a distinctive kind of intuition on which moral beliefs are based, which can't be assimilated to either emotion or sense-perception. Another option is that moral experience involves the formation of a moral belief on the basis of non-moral perception. I'll take each in turn.

³⁵ Thanks to both reviewers for urging this worry.

3.1 *Sui Generis Moral Intuitions*

The first proposal is that we possess *sui generis* moral intuitions, and that these are non-doxastic states on which moral beliefs are based. To assess this proposal, we first need to know what kind of mental state it claims these *sui generis* intuitions are. It turns out that this preliminary question already creates problems. The literature on *sui generis* intuitions is heavily dominated by rationalist accounts. Several writers claim that there are non-doxastic moral intuitions, but that these are intellectual states in which one grasps a self-evident proposition or an abstract relation among universals.³⁶ My aim in this article is to find the most promising form of moral empiricism; on pain of giving up moral empiricism altogether, the proponent of *sui generis* moral intuitions obviously can't make use of these rationalist accounts. It's beyond the scope of this article to evaluate comprehensively the strengths and weaknesses of moral rationalism, but let me quickly note two motivations for sticking with empiricism:

1. As discussed, the cases of Fred and Pius pose problems for rationalism, because the abstract principles they find plausible don't align with their experiential moral judgments.
2. To explain observations (1) and (2), the rationalist seems forced to say that rational intuition is mediated by emotion, but then he faces costs in terms of simplicity and redundancy (not to mention, we might think, an uphill battle for plausibility).

What else might moral intuition be if not rational intuition? To my knowledge, the only camp endorsing non-doxastic intuitions but rejecting the rationalist orthodoxy is the small faction of metaethicists who argue that moral intuitions are emotions.³⁷ This, however, is obviously no alternative to Emotional Intuitionism. It therefore looks like no existing account will serve the purposes of the proposal under consideration. Pending a novel account of what *sui generis* intuitions are, it's unclear that there is a third way for moral empiricists here.

Additionally, even if this hurdle can be cleared, the proposal will incur serious costs in explaining our three observations. The proponent of *sui generis* moral intuitions needs to explain (1) the co-occurrence of moral experience and emotion and (2) the disappearance of moral experience in the absence of emotion. As with Perceptual Intuitionism, the best available option is to suggest

³⁶ Within metaethics, see Russ Shafer-Landau, *Moral Realism: A Defence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199259755.001.0001>; Robert Audi, *The Good in the Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Michael Huemer, *Ethical Intuitionism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Elijah Chudnoff, 'Moral Perception: High-Level Perception or Low-Level Intuition?', in *Phenomenology of Thinking*, ed. Thiemo Breyer and Christopher Gutland (London: Routledge, 2015), 207–19. Further afield, see Michael Huemer, *Skepticism and the Veil of Perception* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001); George Bealer, 'Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance', in *Conceivability and Possibility*, ed. Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 71–126; Joel Pust, 'On Explaining Knowledge of Necessity', *Dialectica* 58, no. 1 (2004): 71–87; Elijah Chudnoff, *Intuition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); John Bengson, 'The Intellectual Given', *Mind* 124, no. 495 (2015): 707–60, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzv029>.

³⁷ See Roeser, *Moral Emotions and Intuitions*; Kauppinen, 'A Humean Theory of Moral Intuition'; Peter Railton, 'The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement', *Ethics* 124, no. 4 (2014): 813–59, <https://doi.org/10.1086/675876>; Dancy, 'Intuition and Emotion'.

that *sui generis* intuitions are causally mediated by emotions; but, once again, this looks complicated and redundant in comparison to Emotional Intuitionism. The *sui generis* view will also inevitably fall down on plausibility: Emotional Intuitionism appeals to a mental state that obviously exists; the *sui generis* view asks us to believe in a novel kind of mental state (different even from the intuitions we have in math and metaphysics if such things exist). All told, moral empiricists have little reason to consider the proposal of *sui generis* intuitions a serious rival to Emotional Intuitionism.

3.2 *Beliefs Based on Non-Moral Perception*

The remaining proposal is that, in putative cases of moral experience, the agent forms a belief on the basis of a perception which doesn't have any moral content. Some writers use the term "moral perception" to refer to this³⁸ or the patterns of non-moral seeing and attending that facilitate it.³⁹ This conception of moral experience doesn't posit perception with moral contents; nor does it claim that moral beliefs are based on emotion. So, it seems like a genuine alternative. One worry with the proposal (let's call it *the doxastic view* or *DV*) is that it fails to provide a satisfying account of how a posteriori moral beliefs could be justified. In general, we aren't entitled to form moral beliefs on the basis of non-moral evidence alone. So why think that perceptions without moral contents can provide an epistemic basis for moral beliefs?⁴⁰ This strikes me as a serious worry, but rather than pursuing it, let me press a line of objection more closely related to the foregoing.

Let's begin by thinking about how DV can make sense of our observations, specifically (1) the co-occurrence of moral experience and emotion and (2) the disappearance of moral experience in the absence of emotion. Again, the best option seems to be to suggest causal mediation by emotion. DV ought to be modified to say that moral experience happens when a non-moral perception (or perceptual imagining) gives rise to an emotion, which in turn gives rise to a moral belief.

This modification seems unavoidable, but it threatens to render DV indistinguishable from Emotional Intuitionism. With the modification in place, both views agree on the mental states that underlie moral experience: each posits a three-step sequence of non-moral perception, emotion, and moral judgment. Unless something more can be said to distinguish DV from Emotional Intuitionism, it doesn't look like an alternative at all.

I see just one way for DV to distinguish itself: by claiming that the belief is based on the perception, despite being causally mediated by the emotion. DV is only an alternative if it stipulates that the agent's reason for forming the moral belief is something about the (non-moral) content of the perception, with the emotion merely helping the agent to recognize this content. To make this stipulation plausible, the proponent of DV could appeal to the fact that emotions draw our attention

³⁸ Cullison, 'Moral Perception', 169. Compare Richard Boyd, 'How to Be a Moral Realist', in *Essays on Moral Realism*, ed. G. Sayre-McCord (Cornell University Press, 1988), 206–8.

³⁹ Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.30-6111>; Lawrence Blum, *Moral Perception and Particularity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Rebecca Kukla, 'Attention and Blindness: Objectivity and Contingency in Moral Perception', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 32:sup1 (2002): 319–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00455091.2002.10717592>.

⁴⁰ Compare McGrath, 'Moral Knowledge by Perception', 215–18.

to potentially significant non-moral facts. For example, when you feel anxious, your attention is involuntarily drawn to potential threats.⁴¹ The proponent could claim that, although all the relevant contents are present in the non-moral perception, emotion plays a crucial role by making the morally relevant factors salient. Spelled out in this way, DV offers a coherent account of how emotions could play a significant causal role in moral experience even though the resulting belief is based on perception.

I'll grant that this picture is coherent. But on further consideration it looks inferior to Emotional Intuitionism. DV can readily explain cases where experience changes agents minds by revealing or making salient non-moral factors they've previously ignored. For instance, it can explain how witnessing a flood or wildfire changes the moral outlook of an agent who has hitherto overlooked the suffering caused by climate breakdown. However, this is not the shape our most compelling cases have. Consider again Fred, who has thought carefully about slavery and its relation to various principles. Fred is fully aware that slavery causes profound human suffering, but he holds that this cost can be outweighed by sufficiently good consequences. Therefore, it isn't plausible that "Roots" changes his mind by revealing some unnoticed non-moral property. Due to his background beliefs, attending to all the relevant non-moral features will leave his views just where they are. This is precisely why we face pressure to appeal to a state with moral content—an emotion or moral perception—to explain his change in outlook. In short, DV seems unable to explain cases where a moral experience leads a fully informed agent to change his or her outlook. But this is precisely the feature that makes cases like Fred's such compelling examples of moral experience. Accordingly, this constitutes a serious weakness, which renders DV inferior to Emotional Intuitionism.

4. Objection: Putatively Emotionless Moral Experiences

I've now argued that Emotional Intuitionism is the most promising form of moral empiricism: it is the form that's best able to explain the characteristics of central cases of moral experience. A natural response is to look for other cases that fit less well with Emotional Intuitionism. If there are cases of moral experience in which the agent lacks any relevant emotional response, this would show that Emotional Intuitionism is incorrect (or at least incomplete). This section argues that there are in fact several viable routes for accommodating putative cases of emotionless moral experience.

I haven't come across any compelling putative cases of emotionless moral experience in the literature.⁴² Most authors focus on the kinds of case discussed above, especially Harman's cat-burning example. This means that the Emotional Intuitionist could potentially make the bold move of denying that there are emotionless moral experiences, without saying anything more. The burden

⁴¹ See Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 7–8; Michael S. Brady, *Emotional Insight: The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20–23.

⁴² NB it's no problem for Emotional Intuitionists that there are cases where emotionless experiences lead agents to revise their moral beliefs by revealing previously overlooked non-moral facts. "Roots" probably helped many White viewers to put themselves in the shoes of enslaved Africans and Black Americans, and thereby to recognize previously overlooked facts about the psychological impact of slavery. This probably led many viewers to draw new moral conclusions from their existing moral principles. Arguably, the relevant experiences would have this effect even if they were devoid of emotion. However, because the new moral beliefs in these cases are reached inferentially, the experiences in question don't count as moral experiences and pose no threat to Emotional Intuitionism.

of proof would be on the critic to produce a problem-case. However, a more dialectically secure route is to grant that there are putative cases of emotionless moral experience and try to explain them away. So, let's consider the following case:

Imagine a teacher, Mr. Jaded, who frequently encounters rudeness in the classroom. Mr. Jaded can always tell when a pupil is being rude—you can't get anything past him. However, Mr. Jaded can't articulate principles that cover the various forms of rudeness he recognizes. If pressed to explain his judgments, he says he "knows rudeness when he sees it". Moreover, Mr. Jaded doesn't report feeling any emotion towards instances of rudeness. In the past he might have got worked up, feeling dislike toward insolent students and sometimes getting angry, but after years in the classroom rudeness doesn't faze him anymore. He sends rude pupils to the headteacher without batting an eyelid.

Agents like Mr. Jaded (assuming for argument's sake they exist) pose a problem for Emotional Intuitionism. Mr. Jaded frequently forms new moral beliefs, e.g., that *Sam and Jonny are behaving rudely*.⁴³ There are grounds for thinking these beliefs are formed a posteriori. He can't articulate any principles that would capture his rudeness-judgments, which suggests that his rudeness-beliefs don't result from inference, because he seemingly lacks premises from which to infer them. It also suggests that his insights don't consist of recognizing new abstract principles, thus telling against the hypothesis that he is exercising rational intuition. In short, this looks like a moral experience. But it seems doubtful that this moral experience consists of emotion. Mr. Jaded doesn't express any emotion in response to rudeness, nor does he report feeling any. *Prima facie*, this looks like a case of emotionless moral experience.

I'll argue that there are at least two attractive ways of upholding Emotional Intuitionism in the face of cases like this. The first is to deny that the experience is emotionless, by claiming that Mr. Jaded undergoes emotions which are not introspectively accessible (Section 4.1). The second is to deny that it is a genuinely moral experience, by claiming that his judgments result from inference (Section 4.2).

4.1 *Inaccessible Emotions*

One reply is to claim that cases like Mr. Jaded's experiences do involve emotion, despite his inability to recognize this introspectively. Many theorists think that emotions sometimes occur in the absence of introspective recognition. David Hume argued that

[T]here are certain calm desires and tendencies, which, 'tho they be real passions, produce little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation.⁴⁴

Hume posits these "calm passions" to account for cases in which an agent exhibits emotion-reminiscent patterns of motivation while denying that she is undergoing an emotion.⁴⁵ In Mr. Jaded's

⁴³ I'm assuming that rudeness is a moral property. The reader is welcome to substitute some other moral property if desired.

⁴⁴ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (1739; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 417.

case, we might think the best explanation of his motivation to punish rude students—and, indeed, his tendency to make non-inferential moral judgments about them—is that he is experiencing subtle emotions, while failing to recognize them introspectively. Similar ideas have been defended in recent philosophy of emotion, e.g., Patricia Greenspan’s notion of “tamped-down” emotional feelings which elude self-ascription and Peter Goldie’s argument that agents can have emotions while lacking “reflective consciousness” of them.⁴⁶ So, this reply to Mr. Jaded’s case doesn’t look like an *ad hoc* defense, but a respectable move with good theoretical pedigree.

Perhaps most compellingly, emotion scientists have been led to similar conclusions by what they’ve observed in the lab. It’s possible to present images to agents in a way that doesn’t reach conscious awareness, e.g., by showing the image for ~25 milliseconds (followed by a neutral “masking” image). It turns out that showing an emotionally evocative image in this way can produce behavior, bodily responses and brain activity matching the emotion which would normally be evoked by that image. For example, subliminally showing a spider might produce frowning, increased heart-rate and perspiration, and activity in the amygdala.⁴⁷ What matters most for our purposes is that these agents often do not report experiencing any emotional feelings, despite the fact that their bodily states and behavior strongly suggest the presence of emotion.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, these inaccessible emotions influence the agents’ judgments of value, e.g. their estimation of how much a certain drink is worth.⁴⁹ Compare Mr. Jaded. He encounters a situation which, under different circumstances (e.g., earlier in his career), would have evoked a full-blown, introspectively recognizable emotion. He responds to this situation with actions and judgments that are congruent with the emotion he would previously have felt. In the light of this laboratory evidence, one promising hypothesis is that Mr. Jaded’s actions and judgments are facilitated by subtle emotions

⁴⁵ This move is defended by Hsueh Qu, ‘Hume’s (Ad Hoc?) Appeal to the Calm Passions’, *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 100, no. 4 (2018): 444–69, <https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2018-4003>. Of course, Hume is claiming that *all* motivation stems from the passions.

⁴⁶ Patricia Greenspan, *Emotions and Reasons: An Inquiry into Emotional Justification* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 21–53; Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62–72. As Greenspan and Goldie exemplify, you can countenance emotions which elude introspection even if you hold that emotions are essentially conscious feelings. To make room for this, you simply need to draw a distinction between a state’s making a difference to a subject’s overall phenomenology and its being an object of reflective awareness, a distinction which can plausibly be drawn in various ways.

⁴⁷ See Joseph E LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), chaps 3–7.

⁴⁸ See Kent C. Berridge and Piotr Winkielman, ‘What Is an Unconscious Emotion? (The Case for Unconscious “Liking”)', *Cognition and Emotion* 17, no. 2 (2003): 181–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/026999303022289>; Piotr Winkielman, Kent C. Berridge, and Julia L. Wilbarger, ‘Unconscious Affective Reactions to Masked Happy versus Angry Faces Influence Consumption Behavior and Judgments of Value’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 31, no. 1 (2005): 121–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271309>; and some participants in Silke Anders et al., ‘Parietal Somatosensory Association Cortex Mediates Affective Blindsight’, *Nature Neuroscience* 7, no. 4 (2004): 339–40, <https://doi.org/10.1038/nn1213>.

⁴⁹ Berridge and Winkielman, ‘What Is an Unconscious Emotion?’, Winkielman, Berridge, and Wilbarger, ‘Unconscious Affective Reactions’. Other psychologists propose that “unconscious” (i.e. introspectively inaccessible) emotions can influence the whole gamut of value-estimations, including moral judgments. See Slovic et al., ‘The Affect Heuristic’; Lisa Feldman Barrett and Moshe Bar, ‘See It with Feeling: Affective Predictions during Object Perception’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 364, no. 1521 (2009): 1325–34, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2008.0312>.

which elude introspection. If a real-life Mr. Jaded were available, we'd even be able to test this hypothesis—we could measure whether he exhibits bodily reactions and brain-activity congruent with anger and dislike. If this hypothesis is correct, then cases like Mr. Jaded's are not really emotionless moral experiences.

In sum, the hypothesis of inaccessible emotions provides an independently plausible, philosophically respectable, and empirically supported way to defend Emotional Intuitionism against the problem of putatively emotionless moral experiences.

4.2 Unarticulated Inference

I'll now outline an alternative reply to the objection. We've said that Mr. Jaded can't articulate principles that cover the various forms of rudeness he recognizes. This is *prima facie* evidence that his judgments of rudeness do not result from inference. Nevertheless, let me offer two hypotheses consistent with the case according to which Mr. Jaded's beliefs do stem from inference.

Hypothesis 1: Inference from Tacit Beliefs. One possibility is that Mr. Jaded *is* reasoning from principles, despite being unable to articulate them. When we articulate abstract normative principles, we are drawing on a non-trivial range of skills. Plausibly, one of the functions of education in philosophy (and certain other disciplines) is to equip people with the ability to put forward abstract normative principles in an explicit form. (Remember learning how to frame *prima facie* principles?) When someone who hasn't learnt this skill declines to articulate abstract principles, we shouldn't assume they don't have general views about all sorts of normative matters. So, in the face of Mr. Jaded's claim that he just "knows rudeness when he sees it," we might suspect that Mr. Jaded knows more than he can tell—that he believes certain principles about rudeness but lacks the ability or habitus to state them explicitly. If so, his new beliefs could be inferred from this prior, unarticulated knowledge. It therefore seems open for us to claim that Mr. Jaded is relying on a stock of principles derived from previous emotional experiences and subsuming new instances under these principles.⁵⁰

Hypothesis 2: Analogical Inference. Another possibility is that Mr. Jaded is reasoning in a fashion that doesn't involve subsuming instances under principles. One possibility, which doesn't seem too farfetched, is that he is engaging in analogical inference. Analogical inferences have the form

$$\begin{array}{l} x \text{ is } P. \\ \underline{x \text{ and } y \text{ are similar in respects relevant to } P.} \\ \therefore y \text{ is } P.^{51} \end{array}$$

Therefore, in order to claim that Mr. Jaded's beliefs are founded on analogical inference, one must claim that for every new instance of rudeness he recognizes, he can point to a previously judged instance of rudeness which he believes to be similar in relevant respects. Nothing in the description of the case rules this out and, given Mr. Jaded's long experience, I submit that it is plausible he

⁵⁰ The same can't be said for the putative cases of moral experience discussed in Section 2. E.g., Fred is well able to articulate the principles he believes and these principles don't support his new beliefs.

⁵¹ See Paul Bartha, 'Analogy and Analogical Reasoning', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2019, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/reasoning-analogy/>.

would be able to do so.⁵² It therefore seems open for the Emotional Intuitionist to claim that Mr. Jaded is relying on a background of old emotion-based beliefs about instances of rudeness, coupled with an ability to draw analogies (perhaps unconsciously) between new instances and those old instances.⁵³

We now have two hypotheses, neither of which seems implausible, according to which Mr. Jaded is inferring rather than having a moral experience. Together with the hypothesis of inaccessible emotions, this means there are several viable routes for Emotional Intuitionists to accommodate cases like Mr. Jaded's at little or no theoretical cost, and thereby insist that all instances of moral experience involve emotion.

5. Objection: Emotions Can't Ground Moral Knowledge

I'll now deal briefly with what I suspect is an important source of resistance to Emotional Intuitionism: the worry that emotions would be an inadequate basis for moral beliefs and hence that Emotional Intuitionism cannot vindicate moral knowledge. It isn't feasible here to develop a positive account of how emotions ground moral knowledge, so my approach will be defensive. I'll identify the main reasons for doubting that emotions can warrant moral beliefs and sketch promising lines of response to these doubts.

So, why might theorists worry that emotions are an inadequate epistemic basis for moral beliefs? One probable cause is the folk-epistemological preconception that beliefs based on emotion are to be contrasted with beliefs formed through "rationality." If your schooling was anything like mine, you were taught that emotion-based judgments are subjective opinions, and that these are antithetical to "facts."⁵⁴ In this milieu, it's unsurprising if many philosophers seeking to vindicate moral knowledge are reluctant to accept that our judgments are based on emotion; doing so seems like an invitation to skepticism or subjectivism. However, this negative preconception about emotion-based beliefs doesn't provide a good reason for rejecting Emotional Intuitionism. Contemporary emotion-theory undermines any simple dichotomy between emotion and rationality,⁵⁵

⁵² The supposition that Mr. Jaded has a stock of past rudeness-judgments based on emotion is further supported by the suggestion that rudeness is a "historically affective concept", i.e. one that can only be acquired on the basis of emotion. (See Glen Pettigrove and Koji Tanaka, 'Anger and Moral Judgment', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 92, no. 2 [2014]: 269–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2013.795990>; Linda Zagzebski, 'Emotion and Moral Judgment', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 66, no. 1 [2003]: 104–24. Thanks to a reviewer for suggesting this.) However, I don't want to rely on this suggestion too heavily since there might be other examples that parallel Mr. Jaded without involving historically affective concepts.

⁵³ It's far less plausible that the putative cases of moral experience discussed in Section 2 can be explained away in the same fashion. E.g., Pius has judged previous instances of extramarital sex to be wrong, so analogical reasoning would lead him to the same conclusion about the new case.

⁵⁴ Alison Jaggar argues that this preconception serves an ideological function, undermining the credibility of women and other marginalized groups. Alison M Jaggar, 'Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology', *Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151–76; see also Margaret Olivia Little, 'Seeing and Caring: The Role of Affect in Feminist Moral Epistemology', *Hypatia* 10, no. 3 (1995): 117–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1995.tb00740.x>.

⁵⁵ see, e.g., Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Robert H. Frank, *Passions Within Reason: The Strategic Role of Emotions* (New York: Norton, 1988); Richard S Lazarus, *Emotion and Adaptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

and many theorists have defended the claim that emotions play a positive epistemic role. We should therefore resist any knee-jerk reaction against the notion of emotion-based knowledge.

Let's turn to more sophisticated objections. Remember that my overall goal is to show that Emotional Intuitionism is the most promising form of moral empiricism, not to establish it conclusively. Hence, my aim here is merely to show that there are promising responses to each objection, such that the objections shouldn't dissuade us from pursuing Emotional Intuitionism.

5.1 *The Common Source Objection*

The Common Source Objection claims that emotions are always grounded in preceding representations ("cognitive bases") and that they can't warrant belief in any proposition that isn't already warranted by those cognitive bases.⁵⁶ If this is right, then emotions are incapable of making moral knowledge possible. Any belief based on emotion must either already be warranted by the emotion's cognitive bases or not be warranted at all.

Two complementary lines of response seem viable here. First, it isn't clear that emotions *are* always mediated by cognitive bases. One kind of counterexample is presented by metaemotions, e.g., one's feeling of disapproval towards one's own jealousy. Scott Howard argues that "I can simply hate my jealousy" without need for "a separate cognitive representation of the latter."⁵⁷ Proponents of the doctrine of cognitive bases are forced to posit an intervening belief or act of introspection, but, Howard argues, this is undermotivated and isn't phenomenologically plausible for all cases. Another potential kind of counterexample is suggested by the neuroscience of emotion. There's evidence of "sub-cortical pathways" that enable us to have emotions that are mediated only by very early stages of perceptual processing.⁵⁸ But ordinary cases of perception are mediated by the very same early-stage perceptual processing. So, if we want to uphold the idea that perception is immediate (in the relevant sense) then we must deny that the informational states of these early processes constitute cognitive bases. But then it follows that the aforementioned emotions are not mediated by cognitive bases either.⁵⁹ If either kind of counterexample is genuine, then the Common Source Objection relies on a false assumption about how emotions operate.

The other line of response questions the objection's epistemological presuppositions. Arguably, even if emotions are mediated by cognitive bases, they might still make an ineliminable contribution to a person's justification. Robert Cowan argues that emotions are "generative sources of justification" despite being "epistemically dependent" on their cognitive bases.⁶⁰ On this view, the justification an emotion provides for evaluative beliefs is *conditional* on the accuracy of its non-evaluative cognitive bases but isn't *reducible* to the justification those cognitive bases could provide

⁵⁶ See Christopher Peacocke, *The Realm of Reasons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 258–69; Deonna and Teroni, *The Emotions*, 121; Pelsler, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification', 116–21. I adopt Pelsler's terminology.

⁵⁷ Scott Alexander Howard, 'Metaemotional Intentionality', *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (2017): 411, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papq.12093>.

⁵⁸ See LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*; Prinz, *Gut Reactions*, 33–41.

⁵⁹ Of course, one might try to rebut the latter class of counterexample in various ways. A fuller exploration must remain a task for future research. But while the jury is out, we oughtn't consider the Common Source Objection fatal.

⁶⁰ Cowan, 'Epistemic Sentimentalism and Epistemic Reason-Responsiveness'.

on their own. In effect, an emotion involves some evaluative proposition “seeming to be true [...] in light of the presumed truth” of some non-evaluative information.⁶¹ This response seems plausible and meshes well with broader views in epistemology. For evidentialists, there’s nothing objectionable in the idea that emotions provide novel evidence about what evaluative propositions follow from our non-evaluative evidence. Meanwhile, reliabilists can read Cowan as suggesting that emotions provide a conditionally reliable way to track the evaluative properties that correlate with one’s non-moral information. If Cowan’s picture is right, then the Common Source Objection relies on false epistemological assumptions.⁶²

5.2 The Explanatory Objection

The Explanatory Objection questions whether emotions could track moral properties, at least if the latter are construed as mind-independent and causally inert.⁶³ In response, we can point to the fact that the moral properties of an object are determined by its non-moral properties. Plausibly, there are patterns of determination, such that certain clusters of non-moral properties predict the presence of certain moral properties with a high degree of accuracy.⁶⁴ If an agent’s emotional disposition mirrors these patterns of determination, e.g. by consistently responding to wrong-making properties with wrongness-representing emotions, then her emotions will track the moral properties of their objects.⁶⁵ This is only a sketch and it remains a task for further research to spell the response out fully. However, I submit that this response looks sufficiently promising for us to be undeterred by the Explanatory Objection.

⁶¹ Ibid., 230.

⁶² Further lines of response to the Common Source Objection are provided by Mitchell, ‘The Epistemology of Emotional Experience’; Milona and Naar, ‘Sentimental Perceptualism and the Challenge from Cognitive Bases’. A reviewer notes that the objection arises in another form if emotions must always be preceded by cognitive bases with evaluative content. (See Kevin Mulligan, ‘On Being Struck by Value’, in *Leben Mit Gefühlen: Emotionen, Werte Und Ihre Kritik*, ed. Barbara Merker [Paderborn: Mentis, 2009], 141–61; Kevin Mulligan, ‘Emotions and Values’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Emotion*, ed. Peter Goldie [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010], 475–500; Jérôme Dokic and Stéphane Lemaire, ‘Are Emotions Perceptions of Value?’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 43, no. 2 [2013]: 227–27; Jean Moritz Müller, ‘How (Not) to Think of Emotions as Evaluative Attitudes’, *Dialectica* 71, no. 2 [2017]: 281–308, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1746-8361.12192>.) But that view is convincingly refuted by Jonathan Mitchell, ‘Pre-Emotional Awareness and the Content-Priority View’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 69, no. 277 (2019): 771–94, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pq/pqz018>.

⁶³ See Simon Blackburn, ‘Errors and the Phenomenology of Value’, in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 16–18. Proponents of moral perception face a parallel challenge. See Daniel Crow, ‘The Mystery of Moral Perception’, *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (2016): 187–210, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455243-4681053>.

⁶⁴ For full discussion, see Sean McKeever and Michael Ridge, *Principled Ethics: Generalism as a Regulative Ideal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1093/0199290652.001.0001>. NB I’m remaining neutral on whether there are exceptionless generalizations linking non-moral and moral.

⁶⁵ Compare MacBrayer’s and Preston Werner’s responses on behalf of moral perception. MacBrayer, ‘Moral Perception and the Causal Objection’; Werner, ‘Moral Perception without (Prior) Moral Knowledge’.

5.3 The Unreliability Objection

Even if we accept the basic idea that emotions can track moral properties, the Unreliability Objection questions whether they do so reliably. Morally irrelevant factors (e.g., mood, phobias) frequently influence our emotions, leading to mismatches between emotion and moral property. This threatens to render our emotion-based judgments too unreliable to constitute knowledge.⁶⁶

In response, I suspect that a competent judge will need to cultivate an implicit sense of when her emotions can be trusted and when they cannot. If she withholds judgment when conditions are unfavorable, then her emotion-based beliefs can be reliable even if her emotions are erratic.⁶⁷

Another response, offered by Terence Cuneo and Adam Pelser, is to concede that emotions only provide a route to moral knowledge for exceptionally virtuous agents who aren't prone to these kinds of unreliability.⁶⁸ A third response, offered by Catherine Elgin, sees emotions not as yielding knowledge straightaway, but as providing defeasible starting points for a process of reflective equilibrium, which can achieve knowledge in the long-run by ironing out inconsistencies.⁶⁹ In short, there are a range of promising responses to the Unreliability Objection.

I conclude that philosophers seeking to vindicate moral knowledge should not shy away from pursuing Emotional Intuitionism. More work is needed to build a positive case for emotion-based moral knowledge and to deal fully with these objections, but the prospects of Emotional Intuitionism look good in the face of them.⁷⁰

6. Conclusion

A key step in defending moral empiricism is to develop a clear account of what moral experience is. I've argued that moral empiricists ought to do so by adopting Emotional Intuitionism, the view that moral experiences consist of emotions. Emotional Intuitionism provides the best explanation of the features we observe in the most compelling putative cases of moral experience. There are several viable ways to accommodate putative cases of emotionless moral experience. Moreover, Emotional Intuitionism has good prospects for vindicating moral knowledge, because the main objections to emotion-based knowledge seem answerable. Still, I haven't provided a full defense of Emotional

⁶⁶ See Mikko Salmela, 'Can Emotion Be Modelled on Perception?', *Dialectica* 65, no. 1 (2011): 1–29; András Szigeti, 'No Need to Get Emotional? Emotions and Heuristics', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16, no. 4 (2013): 845–62, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10677-012-9386-z>; Brady, *Emotional Insight*, 98–101; Pelser, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification'. I adopt Pelser's terminology.

⁶⁷ I pursue this idea in further work. Compare Peter Goldie, 'Emotion, Reason, and Virtue', in *Emotion, Evolution, and Rationality*, ed. Dylan Evans and Pierre Cruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 249–66, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof>; Dancy, 'Intuition and Emotion', 803.

⁶⁸ Cuneo, 'Signs of Value'; Pelser, 'Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification'.

⁶⁹ Catherine Z. Elgin, 'Emotion and Understanding', in *Epistemology and Emotions*, ed. Georg Brun, Ulvi Doğuoğlu, and Dominique Kuenzle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 33–59.

⁷⁰ One objection I haven't discussed, which we might dub the *Necessity Objection*, is that it's unclear how Emotional Intuitionism (or any other form of moral empiricism) can account for knowledge of the necessity of moral truths. See, e.g., Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (1785; repr., Hamburg: Meiner, 2016), 4:389 and passim. The Emotional Intuitionist's best response is probably to draw a comparison with our a posteriori knowledge of nomological necessities in science. Compare Milona, 'Intellect versus Affect', 2270–73.

Intuitionism here. It remains a task for future research to deal fully with the objections and, ultimately, to make a positive case that we can acquire knowledge by basing our moral judgments on emotion.

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