*Evaluative Perception*. By ANNA BERGQVIST AND ROBERT COWAN (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. v + 333. Price £60.00.)

This is an ambitious collection, which brings together fifteen engaging and detailed accounts of evaluative perception. The contributions consider a variety of topics, from aesthetics to ethics, to epistemology and metaphysics. Some are critical of the very possibility of evaluative perception, while others develop elaborate accounts of what high level perceptions are, how we get to know them and how they relate to value assessments. Approaches differ from the meticulously detailed analysis of narrow claims, to broad sweeps across multiple philosophical ideas.

The introduction offers a very useful overview of the topic and categorises the positions developed in the papers from a variety of perspectives. Constructing such a conceptual map of the arguments is an impressive feat and helps order the positions of the different authors, although readers unfamiliar with the topic may find the introduction a bit challenging. Unconventionally, such readers may find it best to read the contributions first, gain a more in-depth understanding of the claims being made, and then return to the introduction for a wider perspective of the shape of this field of enquiry and of the inter-relations between the different positions discussed by the contributors.

It is difficult to choose between the contributions, especially given their differing styles and approaches, but due to space constraints I have focused on the papers I have an, entirely personal, preference for. I would recommend the reader to ignore my choices and direct their attention to the entire volume, in order to select their personal favourites.

Paul Noordhof offers a non-sensory account of perceptual experience as an intrinsic response-dependent representation. This is an account that undermines the claim that the basis on which we discriminate is not always open to phenomenal consciousness. He uses the example of pain to show that there isn’t an experience of pain and a further evaluative perception of its badness, and that therefore, similarly, to perceive a moral property is to have our affective responses represent it as worthy of a moral response. This account has the advantages of being simple as well as uniting particular cases of moral properties under one theory, while at the same time showing how subjects are in control of what is represented in their evaluative perceptions.

Pekka Väyrynen’s contribution, on the other hand, challenges the phenomenological motivation for moral perception on the grounds that perceptual representations of moral properties do not add anything to our understanding. In its place he presents an account based on implicit transitions in thought, which has the advantage of being simpler and more unified. Väyrynen argues against a perceptual account of moral properties by considering cases of phenomenal contrast and developing a different account of this contrast. The best explanation of the contrast is a transition in thought: non-perceptual input triggers an emotional disposition which itself has been shaped by cognitive factors. This is not only a simpler account of what is happening but is also similar to how some non-moral properties (like fineness in wine) are more plausibly located outside perception. Finally, he points to a wider range of moral experiences, such as viewing photographs, using one’s imagination or through description, that are based on non-perceptual inputs and yet yield moral properties without appeal to perception.

Väyrynen’s last recommendation that we ought to consider non-perceptual inputs that yield moral properties, is also taken up by Michael Milona when he considers evaluative perception based on imaginative scenaria. Michael Milona argues against high level theories of value perception using the example of Audi’s account – the volume also offer a very useful summary by Audi of his theory of perception, as well as clarifications on how some aspects of it have been misunderstood. Audi’s account posits a connection between the wrong-making properties and the property of being wrong, such that ordinary perception leads to the phenomenal sensing of an evaluative property and constitutes value perception. Milona’s objection to this position takes the form of the observation that if perception of high level properties is dependent on seeing low level properties, no such seeing takes place when we imagine scenaria involving values and yet we can reflect on these values without seeing them. An affective model may be epistemologically more plausible in explaining the way in which emotions lead us to recognize perceptual experiences of value, similarly to how visual experiences lead us to recognize colours.

Another intriguing question, how we see things that are not there, like negative space in a photograph, is answered by Mikael Pettersson. He argues that being aware of empty space is being imaginatively aware of it as a potential space for objects, an imaginative awareness that permeates or colors the experience of seeing. Anya Farennikova similarly deals with experiences of absence by arguing that they are intrinsically evaluative, aside from any cultural values they take on. We perceive absences through a mismatch between what was expected and what is absent, based on beliefs, desires and expectations that determine what we were looking for in the first place. Perception of absences is evaluative then because it involves a judgement or appraisal that forms the basis of the perceptual inference of the mismatch.

Graham Oddie develops one of the most intriguing arguments in the collection. He starts off by proposing the value appearance thesis, the idea that desires are appearances of goodness and betterness, and that well-functioning perceivers can make more or less accurate evaluations which are also intrinsically motivational. This kind of view faces the isomorphism problem: there are situations in which different, competent valuers have conflicting desires and preferences, as in, for example, the case of disvaluing the pain of a family member more than that of a stranger. How is this possible given that they are perceiving the same values? For Oddie isomorphism is not a problem. He draws an analogy between the way in which two viewers view objects and the way two viewers perceive values. Objects appear differently to different observers depending on, for example, their relative distance to the object. In the same, unproblematic way, value appearances depend not only on the perceiver-independent evaluative properties of states but also on how the perceivers stand in relation to those states. There is a perspectival element to value perception in the same way that there is a perspectival element to visual perception. Distance, orientation and shape matter in value perception and can differ from perceiver to perceiver. At the heart of this argument is an account of bearers of value as states of being not states of affairs. We are the kinds of beings who have connections to others, who form attachments, who have a finite capacity to care, and all this shapes how we perceive value. When we talk about an individual value perspective, we talk about a way of being in the world, one which perceives value from a built-in point of view. This clever and compelling argument sees perception as an in-built feature of evaluation.

Finally, James Lenman’s contribution is a beautifully written, broad strokes defence of expressivism, the claim that judgements of value express stable high order desires and/or ground floor desires “ratified at the court of stable reflection” (285). We are, naturally, the kinds of creatures that have chaotic, messy desires which are in conflict with each other and which persist post reflective judgement. Normativity is conferred by me, the creature whose desires these are, and who turns desires into reasons by perceiving their importance from within. There is room for objectivity in this account even though judgements of value express desires, because it is not simple desires that determine values, rather values are determined by coherent, reflectively endorsed, desires. Lenman views with suspicion the possibility of sensory perception of values as well as mystical accounts of moral intuitionism. The passions do respond to values we encounter in the world, but equally often they fail to respond, or they respond the wrong way. Furthermore, many desires are not responses to the perception of their objects in the first place, e.g. desire for a future walk. To develop evaluative sensibilities from these passions is not a perceptual process but an internal one, a process of self-interpretation. This contribution is worth reading, if nothing else, because of Lenman’s exquisite style of writing. You may not be an expressivist and you may not necessarily become one after reading this contribution, but you will most certainly enjoy reading it.

As you will enjoy the volume as a whole, with its diverse, expertly argued-for and challenging contributions. This is a collection dense with argument and detail. Every paper requires careful consideration to reveal its innovative ideas, and there are debates on multiple levels of complexity between the positions defended and critiqued by different authors. In the end, the reader is left with nuanced insights into diverse perspectives on evaluative perception.

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