Seeing Color, Seeing Emotion, Seeing Moral Value

It is often thought that we can perceive moral value at least in some cases, that we can see, for example, the needfulness of someone's situation, the goodness in a person, the rudeness of a gesture and the injustice of a deed. Although nobody denies that we *say* that we perceive these things, some have argued that moral perception is not really a form of perception, because there are too many significant differences between moral perception (say, seeing wrongness) and other, uncontroversial kinds of perception (say, seeing a certain shape). Defenders of moral perception are asked to provide examples of non-moral perception that are relevantly analogous to cases of moral perception in order to justify talk of perception in the moral case.[1]

Wiggins and McDowell have famously argued that seeing value is relevantly similar to seeing color.[2] The analogy between color-seeing and moral value-seeing is frequently invoked by those who seek to defend the possibility of moral perception. Some critics think, however, that the analogy between color-seeing and value-seeing breaks down in several crucial respects.[3] Defenders of moral perception, these critics say, have still not succeeded in providing examples of non-moral perception that are relevantly analogous to cases of moral perception. In short, the very idea of moral perception has been criticized by criticizing the analogy between color perception and moral perception. If that analogy breaks down, then moral perception is thought to be in danger.

I will argue that, although the analogy between color perception and moral perception may indeed break down in several crucial respects, that conclusion does not weaken the case of defenders of moral perception, because *better analogies are available*. Good candidates for an analogue of moral perception can be found in Wittgenstein's discussions of aspect perception.[4] These discussions are multifaceted and complex, and Wittgenstein offers many (sometimes

greatly varied) examples of aspect perception. I will focus on one group of examples: seeing emotion. We can see joy, grief, fear, or sadness.[5] Cases of seeing emotion, I will argue, provide better analogues of cases of seeing moral value than do cases of seeing color.

I will proceed as follows. First, I briefly explain the motivation behind the color analogy. Why has color been thought to be an illuminating analogue of moral value? What are the relevant similarities between seeing color and seeing moral value? I show that, with respect to these similarities, seeing emotion does at least the same work as seeing color. It captures the initial motivation behind the color analogy equally well. Secondly, I focus on dissimilarities between seeing color and seeing moral value. In which crucial respects does the analogy break down? I show that, in contrast to seeing color, seeing emotion is in all these respects relevantly similar to seeing moral value. I conclude that cases of seeing emotion provide a better model for moral perception than do cases of seeing color. If defenders of moral perception seek to draw support from an analogy, then seeing emotion will better protect them against criticisms than will seeing color.

1. Seeing Color, Seeing Emotion, Seeing Moral Value: Similarities

What is the motivation behind the color analogy? How is seeing moral value similar to seeing color? Three similarities are particularly important. (1) According to McDowell, colors are "not adequately conceivable except in terms of certain subjective states," that is, they essentially involve subjective responses.[6] Herein lies the difference between secondary qualities such as color and primary qualities such as shape: the latter are thought *not* to essentially involve subjective responses. Just like seeing color but unlike seeing shape, seeing value cannot be adequately conceived except in terms of certain subjective states. Both colors and values are essentially *dependent on human subjectivity*.[7]

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(2) Although, according to Wiggins and McDowell, colors essentially involve subjective responses, they are also in an important sense *independent and objective.* We do not project colors onto the world, they are there. McDowell writes:

> An object's being such as to look red is independent of its actually looking red to anyone on any particular occasion; so, notwithstanding the conceptual connection between being red and being experienced as red, an experience of something as red can count as a case of being presented with a property that is there anyway – there independently of the experience itself.[8]

In contrast to the experience of being in pain, for example, someone may experience something to be red without it actually being red or experience something to be red while believing or knowing that it is not red. There is room for ignorance and error about colors but not about one's own pain. Similarly, there is something independent and objective about values. It is not because something *appears* to be good, that it *is* thereby good, and we can be mistaken and ignorant about values. Wiggins claims that "there resides in the combined objectivity and anthropocentricity of color a striking analogy to illuminate […] the externality that human beings attribute to the properties by which they evaluate things, people, and actions."[9]

(3) In contrast to judgment and interpretation, perception suggests *directness and immediacy.* When we perceive something red, we do not infer on the basis of evidence that it is red, rather we spontaneously and non-inferentially see that it is so. Similarly, we immediately see that what the children are doing with the cat is wrong; we do not infer it on the basis of evidence.[10] Just like we do not infer what color something is by comparing the actual color to a color sample, in some situations we do not infer what we have to do by applying a moral rule to a situation.

Although I largely agree with McDowell and his supporters on these points, I will not here defend the claims that their color theory is right, that values are indeed objective while essentially involving subjective responses, or that ordinary color perception is non-inferential. However, I do claim that *if* the color analogy succeeds in showing at least partly what moral perception is like, *then* these three similarities are at the heart of its success. In aiming to show that Wittgensteinian aspect perception, and more specifically seeing emotion, will make for a better analogy, or at least for a viable alternative, it first needs to be ensured that these crucial similarities will not be lost. Can seeing emotion do the same work that seeing color does? That will depend on the plausibility of the following claims:

(1*)   Seeing emotion essentially involves subjective responses.

(2*)   Emotions are independent and objective in the relevant sense.

(3*)   There are cases in which we see emotion directly, non-inferentially.

I have not defended (1), (2), and (3) about seeing color, and I will not defend (1*), (2*), and (3*) about seeing emotion. What is important for my purposes is that (1*), (2*), and (3*) are relevantly analogous to what McDowell, Wiggins and their supporters say about value and color, that they are *defensible* from a McDowellian/Wigginsian point of view. That is, *if* one accepts what they say about color and value, *then* one will be inclined to accept (1*), that seeing emotion essentially involves subjective responses (it would be strange to hold that seeing color involves subjective responses while seeing emotion does not), and (3*), that there are cases in which we see emotion non-inferentially (it would be strange to hold that we sometimes see non-inferentially that something is wrong, but that we never see non-inferentially that someone is sad). (2*) may seem more controversial. Are emotions not paradigm examples of the subjective, like pains? Is it not the case that I am sad whenever I feel sad, that I cannot feel sad while believing or knowing that I am not, that I cannot be mistaken or ignorant about my being sad?

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We can grant all that, because the analogy defended here is not an analogy between colors, emotions and values, but an analogy between *seeing* colors, *seeing* emotions and *seeing* values. I cannot see my own pains or emotions, I *have* them. It makes no sense to talk about similarities between seeing colors, seeing values and seeing my own emotions, because there is no such thing as seeing my own emotions. Thus, the considerations above are irrelevant to the analogy. Independence and objectivity in the relevant sense here mean that, when we see another person's sadness or pain, we do not project pain or sadness onto the person or produce it in her. We see what is there to see in persons, actions, or situations. To paraphrase McDowell: a person's being sad is independent of her or him actually looking sad to anyone on any particular occasion. Someone may see another person as sad without her actually being sad or see her as sad while believing or knowing that she is not sad. There is room for ignorance and error about sadness. It is not because a person *appears* to be sad, or because we believe her to be sad, that she *is* thereby sad. One could say, paraphrasing Wiggins, that there resides in the combined objectivity and anthropocentricity of others' emotions a striking analogy to illuminate the externality that human beings attribute to evaluative properties.

So, if the color analogy does any work with respect to seeing value, the emotion analogy can do the same work. Those who support the color analogy can support the emotion analogy too. Whether they do will depend on their theories of color and emotion. Given a suitable theory of emotion, the emotion analogy will capture the crucial elements of the color analogy equally well. It is interesting, in this respect, to note that McDowell is not only a realist about color and value, but also a realist about other minds: "We should not jib at, or interpret away, the commonsense thought that […] one can literally perceive, in another person's facial expression or his behaviour, that he is in pain, and not just infer that he is in pain from what one perceives."[11]

Now that I have made plausible that three crucial similarities between colors and values, on which the color analogy hinges, can be captured by the emotion analogy as well, I will discuss what I take to be some important dissimilarities between seeing color and seeing value and show that, in these respects, seeing emotion is closer to seeing moral value than is seeing color. Two points have to be noted in advance. First, it is conspicuous that Wittgenstein himself repeatedly and explicitly refers to color-seeing in his discussions of aspect-seeing, mostly attempting to point out that there are important differences between them and that the latter cannot be understood on the model of the former. Most of the dissimilarities I will discuss can be found in Wittgenstein's work.

Secondly, most of the dissimilarities I will discuss have not gone unnoticed in discussions about moral perception. Blackburn, for instance, goes so far as to call the color analogy an "evidently lame analogy."[12] Not only critics of moral perception, but also its defenders have pointed out dissimilarities. That there are dissimilarities does not as such harm their account. After all, they put forward an analogy and not an identity statement. It could be remarked that, if defenders of moral perception only want to bring out the three similarities I have mentioned, then criticisms directed at other points do not discredit the analogy, so critics trying to undermine the analogy by pointing at dissimilarities between seeing color and seeing value have misunderstood what its defenders are saying. They put too much weight on the analogy or put the weight where it should not be put.[13] One could respond that some analogies easily break down when put under some weight and some do not, and that, although the dissimilarities may not have been denied by defenders of moral perception, there is a point in trying to prevent misunderstandings as well as unsound criticism. I will not pronounce on these matters here. My discussion of dissimilarities between seeing color and seeing value is not meant to undermine the color analogy. The dissimilarities are relevant in order to show that

better analogies to seeing value are available. A better analogy, in this context, is one that (1) can do the same work as the original and (2) is similar to the object of comparison (in this case, seeing values) in important respects where the original analogue is dissimilar.

2. The Active Element

A frequent complaint about the color analogy is that it provides a very passive model of moral perception. The analogy "suggests a model of […] evaluative experience as passive receptivity to the impingement of values."[14] But this is not how defenders of moral perception want to think of moral perception. Kirchin emphasizes that color sensation is a type of causal or mechanical process in which there is no room for freedom and control; "color responses just happen to us." However, the same cannot be said in the case of ethics which requires an account that "allows for the fact that human beings often develop their (immediate) responses consciously."[15] Fisher and Kirchin formulate the problem as follows:

> There is some difference between value responses and color responses. No matter what I think, I cannot help but see a red patch (in certain lighting conditions) as having a certain color. I cannot decide to change what I think and, in the future, consciously try to respond differently. Value responses are different. Even if we initially respond to an action as being cruel, we can reflect on that response afterwards and try to justify it to ourselves and others as cruel. If no good justification is forthcoming, then we can change our judgment about that particular action and, over time, often change our natural, initial reaction to similar actions in the future.[16]

In short, the difference between colors and values is that colors determine or fix our responses in a way that values do not.

Suppose that an object is placed before me and I am asked what color it is. In normal circumstances, I can be mistaken about the color, but I cannot be *wholly* mistaken. Confusion between red and pink is possible, but not between white and black. I cannot try (or decide to try) to change my perception of white into a perception of black, and there are no good reasons for trying to do so. The imperative "Now try to see it as black" makes no sense. I cannot fail or succeed in seeing something white as black. Compare all this with the perception of moral value. I can be mistaken about the value I purport to see, and I would not be abnormal if I were wholly mistaken, if, for example, a good act appeared bad to me. I can try (or decide to try) to change my perception of moral value. Someone may urge me to try to see something as good which I had previously seen as bad, and I may succeed or fail.

The elements of freedom, control, conscious development, creativity, decision, and change can be grouped under what I will call the active element of value perception. While color perception is dissimilar to value perception in this respect, aspect perception is not.[17] Wittgenstein stresses that aspect perception is subject to the will.[18] To say that something is subject to the will is, for Wittgenstein, to say that it is voluntary.[19] To say that it is voluntary is not to say that we decide, in each and every case, to see an aspect or not to see it (as if we could not be struck by an aspect), but that it *makes sense* to order someone to try to see an aspect. Wittgenstein compares seeing an aspect to imagining in this respect: it makes sense to ask someone to try to imagine a tree, so imagining is voluntary or subject to the will, but still the image of a tree can occur automatically. We can try to form an image of a tree and fail to do so, we can have images of trees and fail to get rid of them.[20]

If indeed, as Wittgenstein claims, aspect perception is subject to the will, it seems well-placed to mirror the active element of moral perception. Let us do the test with our leading example, seeing emotion. I can be mistaken about the emotion I purport to see, and it would not

be abnormal if a happy face would appear sad to me (if, for example, I would see tears of happiness as tears of sadness). I can try (or decide to try) to change my perception of emotions. Someone may urge me to try to see the happy face covered with tears as a happy face, while I had previously seen it as a sad one, and in doing so I may succeed or fail.[21]

I conclude that aspect perception is active enough to capture the active elements of moral perception. At the same time, it is not too active. The passive element of color perception and moral perception, shared by aspect perception, lies in the fact that I cannot choose or decide what I perceive. I cannot choose or decide to see a white table where there is a black one, to see a good act where there is a bad one or to see a happy face where there is a sad one. If the face is happy and I say that I see a sad face, I have made a mistake.

3. Education and Concept-Mastery

The active element in moral perception is closely linked to another aspect of it which is often emphasized by defenders of moral perception: adequate moral perception requires moral education, training and upbringing.[22] This Aristotelian idea is connected to what I said about trying to develop one's moral and emotional perceptions. One can try to do so by developing one's moral and emotional sensibilities. Of course, one can decide to develop one's color sensibility too, and it is not unlikely that training and education will help one to discriminate colors better, to see nuances where other people do not, and so on. The development of moral and emotional perception on one hand and color perception on the other may be similar in many respects.

The similarities notwithstanding, there are important differences between color education on the one hand and emotional and moral education on the other. In contrast to color sensibilities, we *expect everyone* to develop their moral and emotional sensibilities and we

accept that this development takes time and is never finished. It is true that we expect most people to be able to discriminate colors, but this process goes much faster, and there is no need or expectation that people will keep working on their color sensibilities throughout their lives. People who have developed their moral and emotional sensibilities to an exceptionally high degree are said not only to see more, but also to understand more, to be wiser and more mature than others. These terms are not used for persons with well-developed color sensibilities.[23]

Wittgenstein emphasizes the role of education and upbringing in aspect-seeing.[24] He further characterizes aspect perception as "half visual experience, half thought," "both seeing and thinking," or "a fusion of the two" and "the echo of a thought in sight."[25] In order to be able to see certain aspects, such as emotions in a face, one needs to have mastered certain concepts, to have reached a certain level of intellectual sophistication.[26] According to Schroeder, aspect-seeing is "particularly concept-laden, typically more so than seeing shapes and colors."[27] Similar points are often made in discussions of moral perception, both by defenders and critics. Audi notes that "moral perception is possible for virtually every normal person with an elementary mastery of moral concepts."[28] Starkey calls moral perception "cognitively 'thick' perception" and contrasts it to "the 'thin' characterization of perception as uncategorized seeing, hearing, smelling and so on."[29] Wright explicitly refers to Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit. He claims that aspect perception, like moral perception, is possible only to a subject who has certain conceptual resources. This, according to Wright, makes color perception a bad model, because such perception is "up to a point at least, *raw.*" Wright concludes: "So the suggestion is that there is no basis for describing an affective response as moral unless the subject gives evidence of the conceptual resources which would suffice to explain it as such."[30]

Watkins and Jolley describe moral perception as "an intellectualized perceptual ability." They add:

> We can say that these acquired skills [of moral perception], when they rely heavily on perception or are purely perceptual, are perceptual skills augmented by intellect. But to say this is not to say that the intellect adds something to what is seen, or somehow reshapes what is seen. Instead, it is to say that exercising the skill reveals something that is not revealed by unskilled, unfit, perceptions. Someone who exercises one of the skills correctly sees what a person without the skill does not see – but what is, nonetheless, there to be seen. Acquired perceptual skills provide information that unskilled perception cannot provide; but not because the skill adds something to what is seen. Correct exercises of the skill are revelatory, not creative. The mechanic who can tell what is wrong with a car by listening to it as it runs can hear something the non-mechanic does not hear. However, the mechanic's acquired perceptual skill does not create the mechanical trouble.[31]

Two things are remarkable here. First, what Watkins and Jolley say about moral perception, namely that the acquired skills of moral perception are perceptual skills augmented by intellect, but that this is not to say that the intellect *adds* something to what is seen, is almost exactly echoed by what Wittgenstein says about aspect perception: "Is being struck [by an aspect] looking + thinking? No. Many of our concepts *cross* here."[32] Thinking is not just *added* to seeing, but in aspect perception seeing and thinking are *inextricably interwoven*. Secondly, the fact that moral perception requires thought and concept-mastery does not make the term perception any less appropriate. We see what is there to be seen, and we do not create the object of sight in thinking or imagination. Moral perception is "revelatory, not creative."

I conclude that, with respect to the need for education and concept-mastery, seeing color and seeing value are in many respects different. In these respects, seeing emotion is closer to seeing value than is seeing color.

4. Blindness

Seeing is conceptually connected to blindness: those who cannot see are blind. Are moral blindness and color blindness relevantly analogous? And what about aspect blindness and emotion blindness?

If one is color blind, one cannot see or discriminate between certain colors. Total color blindness exists, but is rare. In most cases, what is wrong with the color blind person is that her eyes are not functioning properly. The color blind person cannot, for example, discriminate between red and green or cannot see red. In this sense, color blindness is specific, that is, tied to certain specific colors. In another sense, color blindness is general. *Whatever* the object of sight is, if it is red, one cannot see that it is red. Although it is possible that, in certain circumstances, one will be able to see that something is red, these circumstances will often be specifiable in general terms before the seeing occurs: when the lighting is such-and-such, when the object is made of such-and-such materials, and so on, you will be able to see red. A color-blind person knows that she cannot see certain colors, and when somebody says "But can't you see that this is red?" a typical answer will be "No, I can't. I'm color-blind. I cannot see red."

Does total moral blindness exist? We can admit that it does, for example in psychopaths, and that it is, just like total color blindness, rare. But a morally blind person is not someone whose eyes do not function properly. Although one cannot see the wrongness of an act if one's eyes are not functioning, this condition may not prevent one from hearing the wrongness, that is, from perceiving value in other ways. Perceiving moral value is not necessarily *seeing* moral value. According to Blackburn, the problem of the morally blind person is more aptly described as a defect of *character*. Moreover,

> […] if our secondary-property-detecting mechanisms fail we know that immediately: it presents itself as a loss of immediately felt phenomenal quality, just as it does when the light fails or we stick cotton wool in our ears. There is no such loss when we become, say, corrupt. We cannot become corrupt overnight, and usually we cannot tell when we have done so. Indeed, it would be a hallmark of many kinds of moral blindness that this is so. The really coarse man thinks that he is perfectly in order, but that other people are too fastidious (recognizing that you have become really coarse is in this way self-refuting: the realization itself shows some residual delicacy).[33]

What is general and specific in moral blindness is different from what is general and specific in color blindness. First, moral blindness is often tied to particular situations. Although I can see that many things are wrong, I cannot see that *this* is wrong. The blindness occurs in a particular situation, with a specific object of sight. Using a distinction made by Pleasants, one could say that the morally blind person is often someone who is *unable* to see something, but not in any general way *disabled*, while the color blind person is unable to see something *because* he has a certain disability. While a disability prevents people from even trying to do what they are unable to do, an inability does not.[34] So while it makes no sense to urge the color blind person to try to see the red, it does make sense, as we have seen, to urge the morally blind person to try to see things differently. The impossibility to see, the "cannot," is of a different kind.

Although the situations in which a certain person will tend to show signs of moral blindness can sometimes be described in general terms ("She has a moral blind spot when it comes to the treatment of animals," or "He is a narcissist, insensitive to the demands of others"), the information we need to be able to do so is not information about the lighting conditions and the functioning of his or her eyes. A morally blind person usually does not know that she cannot

see certain moral properties, she will just deny that they are there to be seen. When somebody says "But can't you see that this is good?" a typical answer by a morally blind person will be "But it *isn't* good," without any reference to any general condition. This leads us, secondly, to what is general in moral blindness. For the most part, moral blindness is not tied to specific moral properties or values (this person cannot see goodness, this person cannot discriminate justice from injustice, etc.), although some persons can be said to see courage, for example, in general better than they can see injustice. Sometimes we cannot see that something is good; at other times we cannot see that something is courageous or unjust, and so on. For the most part, there are no specific moral properties that we cannot, in general, see.

Could there be a totally aspect-blind person? It is not entirely clear whether Wittgenstein thought there could be, but what is clear is that either there cannot be or that total aspect blindness is rare.[35] Like the morally blind person, the aspect blind person is not someone whose eyes are not functioning properly. Although one cannot see sadness if one's eyes are not functioning, this condition will not prevent one from hearing the sadness, that is, from perceiving the emotion in other ways. Perceiving emotion is not necessarily *seeing* emotion, while perceiving color is necessarily *seeing* color. Wittgenstein remarks: "Think of this too: I can only see, not hear, red and green – but to the extent to which I can see sadness, I can also hear it."[36]

There is no loss of immediately felt phenomenal quality when we fail to see that a face is sad. We do not lose the ability to see emotion overnight, and usually we cannot tell when we have done so. What is general and specific in aspect blindness resembles moral blindness. Aspect blindness is usually tied to particular situations.[37] Although I can see the sadness in many persons, I cannot see that *this* person is sad. The blindness occurs in a particular situation, with a specific object of sight. It makes sense to ask someone to try to see aspects differently

and to criticize her for failing to do so. Although the situations in which a certain person will tend to show signs of aspect blindness can sometimes be described in general terms ("He has a blind spot when it comes to seeing grief"), the information we need to be able to do so is not information about the lighting conditions and the functioning of his or her eyes. An aspect blind person usually does not know that she cannot see certain aspects, she will just deny that they are there to be seen. When somebody says "But can't you see that this face is sad?" a typical answer by a morally blind person will be "But it *isn't* sad," without any reference to any general condition. This leads us to what is general in moral blindness. For the most part, aspect blindness is not tied to specific aspects: this person cannot see sadness in a face, this person cannot discriminate joy from boredom, and so on, although some persons can be said to see grief, for example, in general better than boredom. Sometimes we cannot see that a face is sad, at other times we cannot see grief, boredom, and so on. For the most part, there are no specific aspects that we cannot, in general, see.

5. Appropriate Perceivers and Normal Observation Conditions

It is often thought that for something to be red is for it to appear red to appropriate perceivers under normal observation conditions, or that something is red if and only if it appears red to appropriate perceivers under normal conditions. The analogy of seeing color to seeing moral value would then suggest that for something to be good is for it to appear good to appropriate perceivers under normal observation conditions, or that something is good if and only if it appears good to appropriate perceivers under normal conditions. There are several problems with this proposal. The main question is: what is meant by "appropriate perceivers" and "normal observation conditions"?

Critics of the analogy between seeing color and seeing moral value contend that we can give a statistical interpretation of appropriate perceivers in the case of color perception. The appropriate perceiver is the normal perceiver, a person with normal perceptual function, and this can be spelled out, according to Wright, as "perceptual function of a kind which is actually typical of human beings."[38] What appears red to a supermajority of people under normal observation conditions, *is* red. If we compare the color case to the moral case, they turn out to be different. We do not want the appropriate perceiver in the moral case to be the statistically typical or average person, because we want to leave room for the thought that a majority of people or the average person can be mistaken about certain moral matters (meat-eating, for example). According to Blackburn,

> […] if we were to change so that everything in the world which has appeared blue came to appear red to us, this is what it is for the world to cease to contain blue things, and come to contain only red things. The analogue with moral qualities fails dramatically: if everyone comes to think of it as permissible to maltreat animals, this does nothing at all to make it permissible: it just means that everybody has deteriorated.[39]

What appears good to a majority of people under normal observation conditions, is sometimes *not* good. Remember, for example, how people used to think about slavery. So the statistical interpretation is not an option. While the appropriate color perceiver is the normal, typical or usual perceiver, the notions of the typical or usual perceiver on the one hand and the one who appropriately perceives on the other hand seem to come apart in the moral case. If we do not want the appropriate moral perceiver to be the statistically average person, the only possible specification left seems to be that the appropriate moral perceiver is the one who sees things as they *ought* to be seen. What is good is what appears good to those who see things as they ought to be seen.

It should be remarked here that philosophers do not agree about the purported disanalogy between appropriate color perceivers and appropriate perceivers of moral value. While critics of the analogy between seeing color and seeing moral value, such as Wright and Blackburn, see a disanalogy on this point, others do not. Shoemaker, for instance, argues that changing human physiology in such a way as to make blue things look red to (then) normal humans would *not* change their color.[40] Maybe the appropriate color perceiver is not the statistically average perceiver, or maybe there is no such thing as a typical or normal color perceiver.[41] Whatever side one takes, I believe that it remains an open question whether, on this point, seeing emotion makes for a better analogue of moral perception than seeing color does. Moreover, it is not clear to me what we should say about the appropriate emotion perceiver. Would it be possible for the majority of people to be mistaken and see a sad face as a happy one, and do we want to leave room for that possibility? In short, the question about appropriate perceivers does not have to be a problem for the color analogy, and if it is, it is not obvious that seeing emotion does better or worse. Things seem different, however, with respect to normal or ideal observation conditions.

According to Wright, "normal observation conditions" can be spelled out in the color case, although a statistical interpretation is not plausible. Normal observation conditions are rather to be thought of as ideal or optimal observation conditions, and these can be specified:

> The conditions which actually usually prevail during winter in Spitzbergen, for instance, or in a normal photographic dark-room, are not suited for color appraisal. A good description of conditions which are, optimally, so suited would be: conditions of illumination like those which actually typically obtain at noon on a cloudy summer's day out of doors and out of shadow.[42]

What Wright shows here is that, in order to see that something is red, certain conditions have to be met "whose satisfaction does not directly depend on what the extension of color predicates is."[43] That is, one does not have to know which things are red in order to know whether the conditions are met. The conditions do not refer to color or to red.

D'Arms and Jacobson remark that, while the challenge to identify observation conditions "under which we are prepared to foreclose the possibility of ignorance and error […] might be met satisfactorily in the case of color, […] it seems hopeless in the case of value."

> Whatever standard conditions are chosen, we should not be inclined to grant that people under those conditions cannot be mistaken about values – unless the observers and circumstances are described simply as ideal, of course, in which case the characterization becomes trivial.[44]

While normal and ideal conditions for color perception can be specified without referring to color predicates, moral perception is "a matter of meeting conditions the satisfaction of some of which is, irreducibly, a moral question."[45] That is, ideal conditions for moral perception are those in which an appropriate perceiver sees things as they *ought* to be seen. What is good is what appears good to those who see things as they ought to be seen in appropriate circumstances. However, this seems uninformative, and it shows why some have seen the threat of an infinite regress or vicious circularity in the account of moral perception given by McDowell and his supporters.[46]

What about aspect perception? With regard to normal observation conditions, there can be no doubt that these are very much like the normal observation conditions for moral perception. Normal observation conditions for seeing a face as sad, for example, seem to be those in which appropriate observers see the face as sad. We cannot but refer back to where we started. Those who think that the "appropriate observers under normal conditions" account turns

out to be circular in the case of moral perception (as opposed to color perception), are likely to think the same when it comes to emotion perception. Thus, in this respect, moral perception and the perception of emotion are different from color perception.

6. Conclusion

The analogy between moral perception and color perception breaks down in several crucial respects. In many of these, the perception of emotion is relevantly similar to moral perception. At the same time, seeing emotion keeps the similarities to seeing moral value that made seeing color initially seem a useful analogue. Therefore, seeing emotion is on the whole a *better* analogue of seeing moral value than is seeing color, although the latter has been a philosophers' favorite for decades.

What makes one analogy better than another is a disputed matter. Maybe the number of similarities does not matter all that much. I agree, but what obviously (even trivially) matters is the relevance of the similarities, and one could hardly deny that things like development and education are crucially relevant to morality. If, nevertheless, one does not accept the conclusion that the aspect analogy is better than the color analogy, it should at the very least be recognized that it offers a good alternative to it. The fact that there are such alternatives may prevent us from, as Wittgenstein calls it, being held captive by a picture, that is, by the idea that, if there is such a thing as moral perception, it has to be understood on the model of color perception.[47] If one holds this, one will think, as Blackburn and Wright do, that one can weaken the case of defenders of moral perception by attacking the color analogy. The emotion analogy can show everything that the color analogy was supposed to show, but is at the same time less vulnerable to these attacks. Therefore, the task of critics of moral perception may be more difficult than some of these critics have thought.

There are many things I have *not* done, and not tried to do, in this article. While I have been focusing on differences between color perception on one hand and moral and emotion perception on the other, I have not denied that there are interesting similarities between color perception and moral perception or emotion perception, or between colors, emotions and moral values.[48] I have not tried to show (and how could I?) that seeing emotion is the best possible analogue of moral perception, nor that the emotion analogy never breaks down.[49] Wittgenstein insisted that philosophy should produce "that kind of understanding which consists in 'seeing connections'. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate links*."[50] I believe that seeing emotion is an intermediate link between seeing color and seeing moral value, but there may be others. For reasons of space, I have not been able to discuss *all* the interesting similarities between seeing emotion and seeing moral value, and I suspect that the analogy is much richer than I have been able to bring out here.[51] I have not defended the claim that moral perception is genuine perception, nor have I supported any form of moral cognitivism or realism or objectivism or sentimentalism or their opposites. What I have shown is that (1) discussions about the perception of emotion, especially in the context of Wittgensteinian aspect perception, run strikingly parallel to discussions about moral perception and (2) that defenders of moral perception will be able to counter certain recurrent criticisms if they use seeing emotion instead of seeing color as an analogue for seeing moral value.

It could be remarked here that seeing emotion may itself be a kind of moral perception.[52] If it is, then it cannot provide what critics of moral perception have asked for, namely, examples of non-moral perception that are relevantly analogous to moral "perception." Wisnewski claims that there are *moral* emotions, such as sympathy and love, and that perception of these emotions is therefore both moral perception and emotion perception.[53] Thus, in some cases moral perception may be perception of emotion and *vice versa.* But the fact that moral perception and

emotion perception may sometimes overlap does not mean (and Wisnewski recognizes this) that the two kinds of perception coincide, or that seeing emotion is a kind of seeing moral value or the other way round, and I am not aware of any convincing arguments to this effect. Not all moral perception is emotion perception (take, for example, seeing the injustice of a deed) and not all perception of emotion is moral perception (take, for example, certain cases in which we see joy or sadness in someone's face). In this article, I have focused on cases of seeing emotion that I do not take to be cases of seeing moral value (and the other way round), cases of non-moral perception that are relevantly analogous to cases of moral perception. These cases of seeing emotion, I claim, do provide (or at least do better than cases of seeing color in providing) what critics of moral perception have asked for.

At this point, one could remark that, however similar or dissimilar seeing emotion might be to seeing moral value, it does not show what the latter is like, because we hardly know what seeing emotion is like. The *explanans* does not explain. That could be true. But even if it does not explain, it helps, first, to emphasize or remind us of certain features of moral perception that are not captured by the color analogy, so that we are less prone to be misled by that analogy. Secondly, it does something else that I find worth doing in philosophy. I agree with Wittgenstein when he says that "Philosophy often solves a problem merely by saying: '*Here* is no more difficulty than *there*'."[54] He writes that "the particular peace of mind that occurs when we can place other similar cases next to a case that we thought was unique, occurs again and again in our investigations."[55] According to Schroeder, the case "then loses its disquieting uniqueness, its appearance of anomaly, and begins to look once more as common as it is."[56] Moral perception will all too easily appear unique and anomalous if one compares it to color perception. Comparing it to emotion perception, by contrast, may make it look less disquieting

and anomalous. And that, I presume, is something that defenders of moral perception will welcome.[57]

Notes

[1] Moral perception can come in a variety of forms. For an overview, see Jeremy J. Wisnewski, "The Case for Moral Perception," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 14 (2015): 129-148 (p. 134). Wisnewski points at the "difference between acknowledging that a situation raises a moral issue and seeing how one ought to act within a situation where such an issue is raised," and adds that "some might regard the sort of moral perception picked out by the first use (perceiving moral relevance) as common and plausible, but regard the second sense of moral perception (perceiving what one ought to do) as problematic" (p. 137). Peter Goldie distinguishes between perception of thick evaluative facts (such as seeing what is the kind thing to do) and perception of thin evaluative facts (such as seeing what is the right thing to do), and argues that moral perception is more plausible in the first case than in the second ("Seeing What is the Kind Thing to Do. Perception and Emotion in Morality," *Dialectica* 61 (2007): 347-361). In this article, I try to provide an answer to critics of the color analogy who ask for examples of non-moral perception that are relevantly analogous to cases of moral perception. Thus, it suffices to point out that at least *some* cases of seeing moral value (not necessarily all of them) are relevantly analogous to at least *some* cases of seeing emotion, and I have chosen my examples with this goal in mind. One could, of course, try to defend an analogy between cases of *all* the varieties of moral perception and cases of emotion perception, but that project is different from mine, and I doubt whether it can be carried out within the limits of a single article.

[2] See David Wiggins, "Truth, Invention, and the Meaning of Life," in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 87-137; Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" in *Needs,*

Values, Truth, pp. 185-214; John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," in his *Mind, Value, and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 131-150. Strictly speaking, McDowell compares the perception of values to the perception of secondary qualities. But, as Peter Railton rightly remarks, "color has been the natural stand-in for 'secondary quality' in most philosophical discussions of the analogy" ("Red, Bitter, Good," in his *Facts, Values and Norms. Essays Toward a Morality of Consequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 131-147 (p. 143)).

[3] See Simon Blackburn, "Errors and the Phenomenology of Value," in Ted Honderich (ed.), *Morality and Objectivity. A Tribute to J. L. Mackie* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 1-22; Crispin Wright, "Moral Values, Projection, and Secondary Qualities," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society. Supplementary Volume* 62 (1988): 1-26.

[4] See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. Volume 1* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Wittgenstein, *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology. Volume 2* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); Wittgenstein, "Philosophy of Psychology – A Fragment," in Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 203-240.

[5] Ibid., §227; Wittgenstein, *Zettel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), §225; Wittgenstein, *Remarks Volume 2,* §170. While the analogy between moral perception and emotion perception is not itself totally original (see Robert Audi, *Moral Perception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 41 and 58), the Wittgenstein angle is (as far as I know).

[6] McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," p. 136.

[7] McDowell is a dispositionalist about color. For an interesting overview of how different color theories may lead to different views on moral perception, see D'Arms and Jacobson, "Sensibility Theory and Projectivism," in David Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 186-218. They show how McDowell can

be criticized not by criticizing the analogy (which is my focus), but by accepting the analogy and adopting a different color theory which, if colors and values are analogous, then leads to a different theory about moral perception. Elizabeth Tropman argues, for example, that intuitionists can accept the color analogy, although they do not believe that values are essentially dependent on human subjectivity, because they can defend the view that colors are not essentially dependent on human subjectivity either ("Intuitionism and the Secondary-Quality Analogy in Ethics," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 44 (2010): 31-45).

[8] McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities," p. 134.

[9] Wiggins, "Truth, Invention," p. 108.

[10] The immediacy of moral perception is emphasized by, among others, Charles Starkey, "On the Category of Moral Perception," *Social Theory and Practice* 32 (2006): 75-96; Jeremy J. Wisnewski and Henry Jacoby, "Failures of Sight. An Argument for Moral Perception," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 44 (2007): 229-244.

[11] McDowell, "On the Reality of the Past," in Christopher Hookway and Philip Pettit (eds.), *Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 127-144 (p. 129).

[12] Blackburn, op. cit., p. 17.

[13] Blackburn sees the color analogy as "the nub of the matter" (ibid., p. 17) and Wright claims that moral realists rely on the comparison (op. cit., p. 1).

[14] D'Arms and Jacobson, op. cit., p. 212.

[15] Simon Kirchin, *Metaethics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 130-131.

[16] Andrew Fisher and Simon Kirchin (eds.), *Arguing About Metaethics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p. 220.

[17] This is not to say that color perception is entirely passive, that there is no active element in it at all. After all, we have seen that it crucially depends on subjective responses, and responses are not just reactions. P. M. S. Hacker lists some passive and some active elements of perception in *The Intellectual Powers. A Study of Human Nature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), pp. 296-297.

[18] Wittgenstein, "Philosophy of Psychology," §256.

[19] Wittgenstein, *Remarks Volume 2,* §83.

[20] See Nicole Hausen and Michel ter Hark, "Aspect Seeing in Wittgenstein and in Psychology," in Timothy P. Racine and Kathleen L. Slaney (eds.), *A Wittgensteinian Perspective on the Use of Conceptual Analysis in Psychology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 87-109.

[21] On the importance of the active element in seeing emotion, see Rowland Stout, "Seeing the Anger in Someone's Face," *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 84 (2010): 29-43 (pp. 39-40, 42).

[22] See McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements?" and "Values and Secondary Qualities"; Wisnewski, "The Case for Moral Perception."

[23] For reasons of space, not all the differences between color education on one hand and moral and emotional education on the other can be commented upon in the article. Goldie provides an interesting account of certain differences between learning a virtue and learning a skill, and this seems like an interesting way to capture a difference between color education and moral / emotional education. Learning to see moral value and emotion are, arguably, forms of (or close to) learning a virtue, while learning to see color is a form of (or close to) learning a skill. One of Goldie's points is that (fictional) narratives have a more explicit and prominent role in learning a virtue than they have in learning a skill. See Goldie, op. cit., pp. 351-356.

[24] Wittgenstein, "Philosophy of Psychology," §168 and §216.

[25] Ibid., §140, §144 and §235.

[26] See Gordon Baker, "The Grammar of Aspects and Aspects of Grammar," in his *Wittgenstein's Method. Neglected Aspects* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 279-293 (p. 281); Hans-Johann Glock, *A Wittgenstein Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 37. As I said, Wittgenstein provides many different examples of aspect perception. Not *all* aspect perception requires concepts or sophistication. See Baker, op. cit., p. 292, endnote 2.

[27] Severin Schroeder, "A Tale of Two Problems. Wittgenstein's Discussion of Aspect Perception," in John Cottingham and P.M.S. Hacker (eds.), *Mind, Method, and Morality. Essays in Honour of Anthony Kenny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 352-371 (p. 360).

[28] Audi, op. cit., p. 121.

[29] Starkey, op. cit., p. 79.

[30] Wright, op. cit., pp. 12-13.

[31] Michael Watkins and Kelly Dean Jolley, "Pollyanna Realism. Moral Perception and Moral Properties," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80 (2002): 75-85 (p. 77).

[32] Wittgenstein, "Philosophy of Psychology," §245.

[33] Blackburn, op. cit., p. 14.

[34] See Nigel Pleasants, "Institutional Wrongdoing and Moral Perception," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 39 (2008): 96-115 (pp. 110, 113).

[35] Schroeder, op. cit., p. 366.

[36] Wittgenstein, "Philosophy of Psychology," §220.

[37] Baker, op. cit., p. 281.

[38] Wright, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

[39] Blackburn, op. cit., p. 14.

[40] For a good discussion of the dispute, see Railton, op. cit.

[41] What do we make of the idea of an appropriate color perceiver when confronted, for example, with the fact that women are better at discriminating among colors than men (see Israel Abramov et al., "Sex and Vision II. Color Appearance of Monochromatic Lights," *Biology of Sex Differences* 3 (2012)), or with the fact that languages cut up the color spectrum in different ways?

[42] Wright, op. cit., p. 16.

[43] Ibid., p. 24.

[44] D'Arms and Jacobson, op. cit., pp. 201-202.

[45] Wright, op. cit., p. 24.

[46] For a brief explanation why the circularity need not be vicious, see Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?," pp. 187-189 and Fisher and Kirchin, op. cit., p. 218.

[47] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §115.

[48] There seems to be, for example, an interesting analogy between primary emotions and primary colors. Robert Plutchik, who developed the so-called "wheel of emotions," suggesting eight primary emotions grouped on a positive or negative basis, writes that "primary emotions can be conceptualized in a fashion analogous to a color wheel – placing similar emotions together and opposites 180 degrees apart, like complementary colors. Other emotions are mixtures of the primary emotions, just as some colors are primary and others made by mixing the primary colors" ("The Nature of Emotions," *American Scientist* 89 (2001): 344-350 (p. 349)).

[49] It is important to note, however, that most of these difficulties are difficulties for the color analogy too, so that they do not in any way harm the conclusion that the aspect analogy is a better analogy than the color analogy. An example of such a difficulty is that moral perception

is action-guiding in a way that aspect perception and color perception are not (see Wright, op. cit., p. 8). While it is up to subjects whether they care about the colors or aspects they perceive, it seems impossible to perceive wrongness and not care about it (see Blackburn, op. cit., p. 15). This, however, is not necessarily a problem, as Wright recognizes, because it can be argued that moral perception *is* the perception of a cause for concern, that that is what is specific about moral perception (see McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements?"; Starkey, op. cit., p. 86). Moreover, emotions seem much better placed as causes for concern than colors are. Another way to answer Wright and Blackburn on this point is suggested by Timothy Chappell, who argues that "in evolutionary terms, what is hard to explain is not the representation that motivates, but the representation that does *not* motivate. As a matter of the history of our species, the (original) point of perceptual capacities in a tough world must usually have been to mandate response rather than to get hold of information for its own sake" ("Moral Perception," *Philosophy* 83 (2008): 421-437 (pp. 434-435).

[50] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* §122.

[51] (1) Wittgenstein contrasts color disagreement with disagreement over the question of whether an expression of feeling is genuine or not ("Philosophy of Psychology," §351-352). Seeing the genuineness of an expression of feeling is close to seeing emotion, but arguably already a form of moral perception (which is why I did not choose it as my leading example). So there may be interesting connections between disagreement about emotion and moral disagreement. (2) Wittgenstein asks whether there is such a thing as expert judgement about the genuineness of an expression of feeling ("Philosophy of Psychology," §355). The link between expert judgment about emotion and expert judgment about moral issues has been touched upon in this article, but can be worked out further. (3) Another similarity is that between what Wittgenstein calls the dawning of an aspect and Wiggins's repeated use of expressions such as "lighting up"

with respect to moral values. See Wiggins, "Truth, Invention," p. 137 and "A Sensible

Subjectivism?" p. 207.

[52] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

[53] See Wisnewski, "The Case for Moral Perception."

[54] Wittgenstein, *Remarks Volume 1,* §1000.

[55] Wittgenstein, *The Big Typescript* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 307.

[56] Schroeder, op. cit., p. 364.

[57] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for comments on a previous version of this article.