# Intellect vs. Affect: Finding Leverage in an Old Debate

## 1 Introduction

We often claim to know about what is good or bad, right or wrong. But *how* do we know such things? Both historically and today, answers to this question have most commonly been rationalist or sentimentalist in nature. Rationalists and sentimentalists clash over whether intellect or affect is the foundation of our knowledge of goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness (henceforth, *value*). This paper is about the form that this dispute takes among those who agree that evaluative knowledge depends on perceptual-like evaluative experiences (*perceptualism*). *Rationalist* proponents of perceptualism invoke *intellectual* experiences (*intellectual perceptualism*), while *sentimentalist* proponents invoke *affective* experiences (*sentimental perceptualism*). The goal of this paper is to offer a fresh strategy for adjudicating between intellectual and sentimental perceptualism. I argue that the perceptualist's hand will be forced either in the direction of intellectual or sentimental perceptualism once she decides between two views about the modal status of our basic evaluative knowledge.

Intellectual perceptualists, I argue, are pressured to say that our basic evaluative knowledge *must be* of (metaphysically) necessary evaluative propositions. Sentimental perceptualists, however, are pressured to say that our basic knowledge *may be* of contingent evaluative propositions. This asymmetry is exciting news, for questions about the modal status of our basic evaluative knowledge are ones we're positioned to make progress on, at least given the assumption of perceptualism. I close the paper by making a preliminary case for two theses: (i) perceptualists of all stripes need to invoke evaluative experiences suited for tracking contingencies, and (ii) those are the only kinds of experiences perceptualists need. The argument, then, is that perceptualists ought to be sentimentalists.

## 2 Brief Historical and Clarificatory Remarks

In their efforts to explain how we get evaluative knowledge, intellectual and sentimental perceptualists both lean on a perceptual analogy. Just as an ordinary perceptual experience (e.g., of a dog running) provides some basic justification for believing that the perceptual experience's content is true, so too does an evaluative experience (e.g., of an act being wrong) provide some basic justification for believing that the evaluative experience's content is true.[1] For the perceptualist, to say that a perceptual or evaluative experience represents some content, C, entails that accurately describing the

[1] A perceptualist who denies perceptual experiences have truth-evaluable content will need to rephrase this thought.

experience's phenomenology, or what the experience is like, requires reference to C. To illustrate, a person can describe her experience of a green cube only by describing a green cube. Similarly, perceptualists insist that we have evaluative experiences that can only be described with evaluative language. So as to avoid confusion with 'representation', which is used in many ways, contemporary perceptualists often talk of perceptual and evaluative experiences as *presenting* their content.[2] 'Presentation' also captures the idea that in perceptual and evaluative experience we present things as being some way (in contrast with say, voluntary visual imaginings, which involve no such presentation).

A key idea here is that of *basic* justification (alternatively, immediate or independent justification). The definition I work with is the following: a state, E, is a basic source of justification for some content, C, just in case E does not confer justification for believing C because some other state confers justification for believing C.[3] I assume in this paper that states which are sources of basic justification can produce beliefs which are basic knowledge.

Why do evaluative experiences justify? Perceptualists say that evaluative experiences justify for the same reason(s) that perceptual experiences do. But why do perceptual experiences justify? Answers here will vary. Most commonly, though, we find appeals to the presentational character (something is presented as being the case) and/or reliability of perceptual experience. For our purposes, however, we needn't fret over the details of the story about justification; our focus will first-and-foremost be on the psychological nature of these perceptual-like evaluative experiences that are supposed to be doing the justifying.

A foundational task for any perceptualist is to make good sense of what the target evaluative experiences are supposed to be. Many early modern rationalists seem to have invoked *intellectual* evaluative experiences as the foundation of their value epistemology.[4] This is the view I call *intellectual perceptualism*. By contrast, many early modern sentimentalists seem to have invoked affective (i.e., desiderative and/or emotional) evaluative experiences.[5] This is the view I call *sentimental perceptualism*.

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[2] Talk of presentation is increasingly familiar in the philosophy of mind. See Silins [2015]. For examples of perceptualists who use presentation-talk, see Johnston [2001] and Kauppinen [2013].

[3] Here I follow Robert Cowan [2015].

[4] See, for instance, John Balguy [1991: 406] and Richard Price [1991: 141 – 42]). Strands of intellectual perceptualism can also be found in early 20th century ethics. For example, Stratton-Lake [2015] finds hints of the view in W.D. Ross's writings. Stratton-Lake argues that, at the very least, Ross *should* have been an intellectual perceptualist.

[5] See, for instance, the 3rd Earl of Shaftsbury [1991: 173]) and Francis Hutcheson [1991: 263]. Sentimental perceptualists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including Franz Brentano [1969], Alexius Meinong [1972], and Max Scheler [1973], developed more detailed versions of sentimental perceptualism, particularly by aiming to be more precise about the nature of the affective perceptions and corresponding evaluative properties/relations.

These two views are exhaustive of possible perceptualist theories, since I understand intellectual evaluative experiences (rather loosely) to be any such experiences which are not affective in nature.[6] As an interpretive matter, we need to be careful about pinning perceptualism on all of the early modern rationalists and sentimentalists. My point is only that perceptualism is one natural, and I think philosophically intriguing, way to read much of their work. The dispute between intellectual and sentimental perceptualism continues through to today.[7]

Perceptualists – whether intellectual or sentimental – need to convince us that the relevant evaluative experiences actually exist. In recent years, sentimental perceptualists have largely converged around a particular strategy for making sense of affective evaluative experience. The strategy is to argue that proper analyses of *ordinary* desiderative and/or emotional experiences reveal some subset of those experiences to involve experiences of value.[8] So, for example, one view about anger, tracing back to Aristotle, is that it involves a presentation of having been wronged.[9] And a historically popular view about desire, also traceable to Aristotle, is that a desire involves a presentation of its object as good.

Intellectual perceptualists typically begin to make sense of intellectual experiences by arguing that they play a role in producing beliefs in a priori inquiry, e.g., mathematical inquiry.[10] When we contemplate, say, the proposition that two and three make five, the proposition strikes us as true. That is, when carefully attending to the proposition, we often have an experience which can only be described as an experience as of the truth of the proposition, or so the story goes. The next move is to argue that these experiences aren't specific to certain non-evaluative domains such as mathematics. Just as we can have intellectual experiences with, say, mathematical content, so too can we have such experiences with evaluative content.

How do perceptualists typically attempt to adjudicate between the intellectual or sentimental varieties of the view? I will mention three of the most common strategies, all of which trace in some form back to the 17th and 18th centuries. First, there are arguments from *motivation*. Sentimental perceptualists often insist that their view is better equipped to account for the connection between

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[6] I use 'affective' to indicate the experiences which are studied by psychologists and cognitive neuroscientists under the headings 'emotion' and 'affect' (the word 'desire' is much less common in those disciplines), and which we tend in everyday discourse to call 'desires' and 'emotions'.

[7] For a major defense of intellectual perceptualism, see Huemer [2005]. And for sentimental perceptualism, see Oddie [2005].

[8] See, for example, Oddie [2005], Döring [2007], and Roberts [2003]. Some theorists who ascribe to this view about ordinary desires and emotions do not write systematically enough about value epistemology to make it clear whether they think of themselves as sentimental perceptualists.

[9] See Aristotle's *Rhetoric* 1378b.

[10] See, for instance, Huemer [2005].

motivation and evaluative judgment.[11] However, as is well-known, intellectual perceptualists, and rationalists more generally, have a variety of strategies for trying to explain why we're typically motivated by our evaluative judgments, though not in a way that conflicts with a rationalist answer to the question of how we get evaluative knowledge.[12] Second, there are arguments from *psychology*. Sentimental perceptualists often argue that the intellectual evaluative experiences her opponent posits do not exist; and similarly, intellectual perceptualists often press an analogous complaint against sentimental perceptualists. Historically, these psychological arguments are made on phenomenological grounds. Sentimental perceptualists insist that evaluative experiences, or "intuitions," have a feeling component that makes them different from intuitions in mathematics.[13] Intellectual perceptualists push back with phenomenological arguments of their own. For example, John Balguy argues that in some cases, there just isn't an affective experience present to justify a person's well-formed moral judgment.[14] A third brand of argument is directly *epistemological*. The idea here is to allow the psychological reality of both affective and intellectual evaluative experiences (at least for the sake of argument), but then to argue that only one is capable of grounding evaluative knowledge. Perhaps affect fluctuates too much to ground knowledge of eternal evaluative truths, as many intellectual perceptualists have thought.[15]

Despite numerous attempts to update the traditional lines of argument from motivation, psychology, and epistemology (among other arguments), there is still as much disagreement as ever about which version of perceptualism is best. In this paper, I spell out a different strategy for getting leverage in the debate between intellectual and sentimental perceptualism.

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[11] Many early modern sentimental perceptualists offer such arguments. See Gill [2006] for discussion. For an updated version of a sentimental perceptualist argument from motivation, see Oddie [2005].

[12] See Huemer [2005]. Intellectual perceptualists can also borrow lines of argument offered by rationalists who aren't themselves intellectual perceptualists, e.g., those in Enoch [2011].

[13] For a discussion of the history of such phenomenological arguments, see Gill [2006, 2009]. Similar arguments are offered today. For example, Kauppinen [2013] and Oddie [2005] use phenomenological arguments to defend sentimental perceptualism, and Huemer [2005] does the same in defending intellectual perceptualism. In many cases, phenomenological objections to a form of perceptualism are raised by those who reject perceptualism altogether. See, for instance, Williamson [2007] and Sosa [2007] against intellectual presentations; and see Whiting [2012] and Dokic and Lemaire [2013] against sentimental presentations.

[14] For discussion of Balguy's argument, see Irwin [2008: 446 – 47].

[15] Gilbert Burnet, in a letter to Hutcheson, argues that affect is too variable and uncertain to be the foundation of evaluative knowledge. See Burnet and Hutcheson [1971]. For updated epistemological arguments against sentimental perceptualism, see Brady [2013] and Szigeti [2013]. I respond to Brady and Szigeti in my [removed for review].

## 3 A Strategy for Adjudicating Intellectual and Sentimental Perceptualism

### 3.1 Necessary and contingent evaluative truths

As I've already indicated, intellectual perceptualists have tended to argue that our basic evaluative knowledge is of metaphysical necessities, i.e., propositions which are true in all metaphysically possible worlds. There are different views about the proper way to formulate such propositions. They might be thought to take the form of a conditional, "if A, then B," whereby the antecedent is non-evaluative and the consequent evaluative. Here's a candidate such principle: *if an agent, S, intentionally kills another agent, then S acts wrongly*. Others may opt for necessary principles ascribing evaluative properties to act-types (in addition, perhaps, to other types of things), as in the following: *intentional killings are wrong*. The basic form that these necessities take, if indeed there are such necessities, may ultimately matter a great deal (see Schroeder [2014]), though nothing central to this paper turns on the matter.

Although intellectual perceptualists tend to focus on necessities, much of our evaluative knowledge is of contingencies, i.e., propositions which are not true in all metaphysically possible worlds. Here are a couple examples: (1) Cindy ought to attend her daughter's ballgame, and (2) If Lindsey borrows Ronald's carving knife, it would be best for her to return it when next she sees him. Concerning (1), even though it is important for Cindy to support her daughter, her other child might suddenly become ill, in which case she shouldn't attend the game, after all. And regarding (2), it is possible that if Lindsey borrows Ronald's carving knife it wouldn't be best for her to return it when next she sees him, if, say Ronald's partner has just broken up with him on the phone and Ronald is threatening suicide.

A perceptualist may adopt what I call the *necessity-requiring theory*. The necessity-requiring theory says that our perceptual-like evaluative experiences track, when all is going well, how things *must* be evaluatively. (The theory does not require that we present as necessary the evaluative propositions that we have basic knowledge of.) Our knowledge of evaluative contingencies is standardly achieved by *combining* our basic evaluative knowledge of necessities with our knowledge of contingent, non-evaluative facts. We'll spend time later (section 4) on the question of how this combining works; what's important for now is just the idea of a necessity-requiring theory.

Alternatively, a perceptualist may be attracted to the *contingency-allowing theory*, according to which our perceptual-like evaluative experiences track, when all is going well, how things are evaluatively in the actual world but not how they *must* be across all worlds. The contingency-allowing theorist holds that we can have basic knowledge of evaluative contingencies. We could know, say, that

Jesse was wrong to kill Shannon without relying on our knowledge of any necessary evaluative truths. It is contingent that Jesse's killing of Shannon was wrong, since, for example, it is possible that Jesse kills Shannon yet does not thereby act wrongly. The contingency-allowing theorist also believes that our knowledge of necessities, to the extent we have such knowledge, is typically going to be grounded in our knowledge of contingencies. I'll return below (section 5) to the question of how a contingency-allowing theorist thinks we can go from contingencies to necessities. For now, what's crucial is just the very idea of a contingency-allowing view, namely that our perceptual-like evaluative experiences are sensitive not to how things are evaluatively in any world but rather how things are evaluatively in the actual world.

Any contingency-allowing theorist needs to allow that we could *stumble* into basic knowledge of a necessary evaluative truth. (A contingency-*requiring* theory is a non-starter.) To illustrate, suppose that Brenda imagines Randy torturing a baby just for fun, has a perceptual-like response to her imagining that so-acting would be wrong, and concludes that it would be wrong of him to torture the baby for fun. As it happens, Brenda's basic evaluative knowledge here is of a necessary truth, since it isn't metaphysically possible for Randy to torture the baby for fun and for that not to be wrong. This isn't a problem for the contingency-allowing theorist, however. Brenda has stumbled into basic knowledge of an evaluative necessity, but the type of experience she relies on is sensitive to what things are like in the actual world, even when it happens to have content that is true in any world. Put metaphorically, a contingency-allowing theorist says that her evaluative experiences *don't care* about how things must be in all worlds but merely how they are in the actual world.

One way to get adjudicate the longstanding dispute between intellectual and sentimental perceptualists is to adjudicate the (much underexplored) dispute about whether to be necessity-requiring or contingency-allowing. This is because, as I will argue, intellectual perceptualism fits comfortably with a necessity-requiring approach but not a contingency-allowing approach. Sentimental perceptualism is just the opposite.

### 3.2 Intellectual perceptualism, necessity-requiring, and contingency-allowing

#### 3.2.1 How necessity-requiring intellectual perceptualists demystify evaluative knowledge

Intellectual perceptualists, as I have noted, typically use a comparison with mathematics in their effort to make sense of intellectual experiences. The most popular such strategy says that an *understanding* of mathematical propositions often gives rise to intellectual experiences which serve as a

basic source of justification for mathematical beliefs.[16] Typically, understanding is taken to consist in a grasp of the concepts involved in the target proposition. So long as such an experience in fact arises on the basis of understanding alone and is accurate, it can generate knowledge.[17] Intellectual perceptualists who adopt this picture of mathematical knowledge argue that such experiences can also arise when thinking about propositions in other domains, e.g., the evaluative. The understanding-based strategy of illuminating intellectual experience and evaluative knowledge works well for *necessity-requiring* intellectual perceptualists, for a simple reason. Because these intellectual experiences arise on the basis of our understanding alone, rather than on the basis of what the actual world is like, they are naturally taken to justify beliefs in necessary propositions. A contingently true proposition is not true in all worlds, so it seems as if we'd need to know something of what the actual world is like before we could know the proposition.[18]

(There is a complication worth noting. Consider the following: that Randy tortures the baby just for fun is wrong. This proposition is contingent, for if Randy never tortures the baby just for fun, then it won't be true that his torturing the baby just for fun is wrong. (Any proposition which entails a contingent proposition must itself be contingent.) In such worlds, the proposition will be either false or lacking in truth value. However, if Randy does torture the baby just for fun, then what he does is *guaranteed* to be wrong; it is necessary that it *would be* wrong for Randy to torture the baby just for fun. We can label evaluative truths which become necessary when modalized in this way *weakly* contingent. An understanding-based intellectual perceptualist may argue that knowledge of Randy's behavior could lead to a direct apprehension that Randy's torturing the baby just for fun is wrong, even though the truth is contingent. The thought is that the knower is responding to conditions which guarantee the presence of the relevant property, just as she does when reflecting on the question of whether such behavior would be wrong. Such a view is still necessity-requiring, however, since a necessity-requiring perceptualist view says that our evaluative knowledge is grounded in experiences which respond to conditions which guarantee the presence of the relevant evaluative property. For the sake of simplicity, I set aside weak contingencies; when I talk about contingencies I always mean to refer to non-weak contingencies.)

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[16] Elijah Chudnoff, whose view I discuss below, is a rare intellectual perceptualist who resists this model. For a detailed discussion of the history of the understanding-based view and a detailed overview of how it works – albeit with a focus on mathematics – see Chudnoff [2014].

[17] Some rationalists argue that there's no need to appeal to intellectual *experiences* to explain how understanding gives rise to knowledge (see Audi [1998]). Understanding is sufficient all on its own. I do not evaluate this non-perceptualist form of rationalism here.

[18] The reader may be wondering about the contingent a priori. I consider the prospects for an intellectual perceptualism modeled on the contingent a priori in the next section.

Elijah Chudnoff [2013] is a contemporary intellectual perceptualist who resists the understanding-based model, but his alternative view also goes best with the necessity-requiring picture. Chudnoff develops his theory (which he traces back to Plato and Husserl, among others) with mathematical knowledge principally in mind, but he believes it can be extended to other domains, notably the evaluative. According to this alternative, we are capable of intellectual experiences that are not based in understanding but rather on a *direct apprehension* of abstracta, i.e., objects which are non-spatiotemporal and causally inert. On this view, an intellectual experience, say, that circles are symmetrical about their diameters is an experience whereby circularity figures in the explanation of what the experience is. That is, circularity – an abstract object – figures into the mereological explanation of the experience. Chudnoff argues that such an experience provides us with basic justification for the belief that circles are symmetrical about their diameter, since in having the experience, we are directly aware of the truth-maker for the proposition. This requirement that we be aware of a truth-maker pushes us to say that intellectual experiences, so understood, can only give us knowledge of necessities.[19] Even though a contingently true proposition may itself be an abstract object, the truth-makers for contingent propositions will not themselves be abstracta (i.e., non-spatiotemporal and causally inert).

Necessity-requiring intellectual perceptualists, as we have seen, lean on a comparison with mathematics to make sense of evaluative knowledge. But is there is hope for a novel intellectual perceptualism that turns away from the mathematical analogy? In other words, what are the prospects for a *contingency-allowing* intellectual perceptualism?

### 3.2.2 Contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualism?

My contention is that contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualists lack a comparatively attractive alternative for demystifying evaluative knowledge. Proponents of such a view would need to do three things: (i) identify some type of intellectual evaluative experience – one which is featured in actual human psychology – suited for tracking evaluative contingencies, (ii) argue that such experiences can be a source of basic evaluative knowledge, and (iii) show that they can be the basis for a complete perceptualist value epistemology. I'm highly skeptical that there is any experience which does all three of these things. To motivate why, I first explore the domain of the a posteriori for an attractive kind of intellectual experience, and thereafter I turn to the contingent a priori.

[19] We could give up this requirement, but then it would be puzzling how these experiences could generate knowledge (see Chudnoff [2013]).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the possibility of what is often called *high-level perception*, and high-level *value* perception, in particular; and contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualists may look to such experiences to develop an a posteriori value epistemology.[20] To illustrate high-level perception (evaluative or otherwise), I'll use visual experience as the paradigm. Contemporary philosophers of mind mostly agree that we can have *low-level* visual experiences, namely experiences of shape, color, motion, and body. But some argue that visual experiences can have high-level content, e.g., natural kinds, causation, emotions, and values. The distinction between high-level and low-level content is initially defined as that which is uncontroversially part of visual experience (low-level) and that which isn't (high-level), but defenders of high-level content normally take the high-level experiences to get their content in a certain distinctive way. Defenders of high-level *value* perception standardly argue that such experiences are made possible by the *cognitive penetration* of other mental states such as beliefs, desires, or emotions on our perceptual faculties.[21] A visual experience is cognitively penetrated when some non-visual mental state (it needn't be "cognitive" in any traditional sense) alters the representational content of the visual experience, and not by merely altering attention. Suppose that a person observes a group of kids torturing a small animal. A high-levelists might say that the observer's *outrage* at the treatment of the animal may alter the content of the visual experience such that she counts as *seeing* the torturing as wrong.

Contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualists should not appeal to high-level value perception. First, desires and emotions are some of the most popular candidates for the mental states that cognitively penetrate visual experience to produce visual experiences of value.[22] If that's the right picture of high-level value perception, though, then the view is better characterized as a version of sentimental perceptualism. But even if we allow that non-affective evaluative beliefs are doing the penetrating, we still run into a problem. If evaluative beliefs are the *sine qua non* for any such experiences, then the justification the experiences supply does not seem to be basic, i.e., it does not seem to be independent of the justification for the relevant beliefs, as others have already pointed out.[23] To illustrate, suppose Francis has the irrational belief that it is always bad to pursue what isn't in one's self-interest. This belief in turn often causes him to visually experience selfless acts as bad. As Pekka

[20] On high-level perception in general, see Siegel [2011]. On high-level *value* perception, see, for instance, Cowan [2015] and Werner [2016].
[21] Cowan [2015] explains in detail why cognitive penetration of this sort is the best explanation for how high-level value perception is possible. Another possibility, as Cowan notes, is that dispositions to experience visual evaluative representations in response to certain stimuli are innate. I consider this alternative below.
[22] See Cowan [2015] and Werner [2016].
[23] See Cowan [2015] and Väyrynen [forthcoming].

Väyrynen rightly points out, a "garbage in, garbage out" principle seems to apply in these cases. Because the belief that plays a crucial role in the etiology of the high-level value experiences is irrational, the high-level value experiences cannot then be used to justify an evaluative belief.[24]

It's important to notice that the claim here is *not* that high-level experiences cannot justify evaluative beliefs or that they can play no important epistemic role. The claim, rather, is that they are not good candidates for being a *basic* source of justification. This is for the simple reason that high-level experiences are *sophisticated* in that they are made possible by more primitive evaluative experiences or beliefs; and it is very natural to think that *any* sophisticated experience is going to be largely epistemically dependent on the evaluative beliefs or experiences that make them possible. But even if you don't buy this, there is still trouble for a contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist who wishes to appeal to high-level experiences. Namely, such sophisticated experiences won't be able to account for the *full scope* of our evaluative knowledge. If the sophisticated experience is made possible by a primitive kind of evaluative *experience* (e.g., an emotion or intellectual perception of the sort outlined in section 3.2.1), then we would expect more primitive experiences of that type to be a source of justification independently of its impact on perception. But if the penetrating state is a *belief*, then presumably the belief will often already be justified, independently of any influence that it has on high-level experience.[25]

A contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist may, then, seek to understand intellectual evaluative experiences as primitive in nature, i.e., not made possible by other evaluative experiences or beliefs. I'm not aware of anyone who has developed such a view, but it is worth reflecting on how such a theory might be developed. The most obvious candidate experiences are low-level perceptual experiences (e.g., visual experiences of shape, body, and color); but to my knowledge, no psychologists or philosophers have ever thought that any of these more primitive perceptual experiences can sometimes have evaluative content. But some psychologists and philosophers *do* think that some evaluative principles are *innate*, and perhaps (although this is a *major* additional commitment) our innate evaluative structure plays a role in generating primitive presentations of evaluative contingencies.[26]

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[24] Even if the belief in the example above were rational, the justification supplied by the experience would still intuitively fail to be basic (Väyrynen [forthcoming]). Cowan [2015] makes a similar argument.
[25] I defend this claim at length in my [removed for review].
[26] Perhaps our innate evaluative structure consists in innate evaluative *beliefs*, in which case the experiences aren't primitive (i.e., because they arise out of prior evaluative beliefs).

Before evaluating the prospects for this view, we need to be sure we're zeroing in on a class of theories friendly to intellectual perceptualism. Some psychologists and philosophers, including Jonathan Haidt and Craig Joseph [2004], Shaun Nichols [2004], and Chandra Sripada [2008] – propose theories which posit innate *affective* structure in order to explain the emergence of evaluative thought. Let's set these theories aside. Friendlier to intellectual perceptualism are the views of Susan Dwyer [2008, 2009], John Mikhail [2007, 2011], and Gilbert Harman [2008]. These theorists argue that there is an innate, non-affective "moral grammar," characterizable by a set of principles. (I will use 'evaluative' rather than 'moral', but nothing I argue here turns on the matter.) The principles which characterize the grammar are ones which may be different from the ones we invoke in actual discourse, but just as it is difficult for competent speakers to articulate linguistic principles, so too may it be difficult for competent evaluators to articulate these innate evaluative principles.

The appeal to a non-affective innate evaluative structure is, I think, the best hope for a contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualism, but it is nevertheless not very promising. One concern is that intellectual perceptualists who choose this path have to argue that this structure gives rise to non-affective experiences, but the best way of thinking about the view may be that the innate structure directly gives rise to evaluative beliefs without any mediation by experiences. But even if that worry can be overcome, I am skeptical that such a theory could never be the basis for a *complete* value epistemology. Psychologists and philosophers who defend innate evaluative structure generally take the innate structure to place *boundaries* on evaluative belief. For example, Susan Dwyer suggests that our innate evaluative principles may prevent us from ever believing that it would be good to torture babies just for fun.[27] But the innate structure is consistent with a variety of different evaluative systems. To illustrate, our innate evaluative structure is, according to most accounts, consistent with both accepting or rejecting a culture of honor, and so if we learn that such a culture is misguided, it presumably won't be on the basis of our innate principles. To be sure, a committed contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist could make the bet that our non-affective, innate evaluative structure is far more robust (and internally inconsistent) than we now realize, and that that structure is the origin of all non-affective intellectual experiences of value which immediately justify evaluative beliefs; but until we get serious empirical evidence for such a view, such a bet seems to me unwise.[28]

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[27] See Dwyer [2008: 414] for the claim that innate evaluative (or moral) principles would rule out this belief.

[28] Proponents of non-affective, innate moral grammars have been very hesitant to characterize that structure in a precise way. Dwyer [2008: 414] even says "To be frank, the form and content of the principles that I claim characterize the moral faculty remain a mystery." John Mikhail [2007: 143 – 52] does propose several principles, but they do not specify in non-evaluative language the conditions under which some evaluative property/relation is instantiated. For example, one says that negating a good effect is bad; but that principle

We're in a good position now to see that appealing to a posteriori intellectual experiences is not so promising for the contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist. Such evaluative experiences will be sophisticated (made possible by other evaluative experiences/beliefs) or not. We can reasonably expect the sophisticated candidates to either not be a plausible source of basic evaluative knowledge or else to be insufficient for explaining the full scope of our evaluative knowledge; and we can expect the primitive candidates to either be psychologically dubious or else to be similarly insufficient. Assuming all basic knowledge is a posteriori or a priori, the only avenue remaining for the contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist appeals to the (highly controversial) *contingent* a priori.

But this isn't a promising avenue, either.[29] Saul Kripke [1980] offers the most well-known (purported) example of the contingent a priori. He argues that we can know a priori that the standard meter stick is one meter long. We know this a priori because the referent of 'meter' is just whatever length the standard meter stick happens to be. But the length of the stick could have been other than it is and so our a priori knowledge is of a contingency. Even if we grant that this is an example of contingent a priori knowledge, however, it is not a good model for a contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist.

There are several reasons why. First, it is not as if there is a standard action – say, whatever type of action Adam does after time *t* – which fixes the reference of an evaluative term – say, 'good'. Furthermore, the knowledge in Kripke's case is derived from our understanding of the meaning of 'meter'.[30] But while *some* of our evaluative knowledge may be semantic (e.g., that the evaluative supervenes on the descriptive), much of it is not. Finally, we do not seem to need to invoke intellectual presentations to explain the knowledge acquired in Kripke's example. And this points to a general difficulty for a contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualist who wants to appeal to the contingent a priori: such a theorist needs to find not only a reasonably plausible class of contingent a priori truths

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won't do us any good until we have some way of figuring out what is good. One substantive principle he proposes is "an effect that consists of the death of a person is bad." But it seems to me that this is probably only true all else equal, and in any case, it is only one principle. For some interesting remarks about Mikhail's view, see Dancy [2014]. My aim here is not to criticize Dwyer, Mikhail, or anyone else; it is only to say that intellectual perceptualists shouldn't think that they can appeal to the work of these theorists to formulate a plausible basis for a contingency-allowing theory.

[29] Dancy [2004] argues that that our basic evaluative knowledge is a priori and contingent. McKeever and Ridge [2006] develop powerful objections to this position.

[30] McKeever and Ridge [2006] make essentially the same point against any rationalists who wish to appeal to Kripke-style examples of the contingent a priori to make sense of ethical knowledge.

(a controversial enough commitment) but, moreover, those truths need to be plausibly grounded in intellectual presentations.[31]

The aim in this section has been to vindicate the wisdom of the common tendency among intellectual perceptualists to posit evaluative experiences which track how things must be evaluatively. A necessity-requiring approach allows the intellectual perceptualist to demystify evaluative knowledge by arguing that it really isn't so different from mathematical knowledge. (Or at least to demystify it for those who find it plausible that intellectual presentations justify our mathematical beliefs.) But there is no comparatively attractive approach for contingency-allowing intellectual perceptualists.

### 3.3 Why sentimental perceptualists should be contingency-allowing

As I noted above, the view that some of our affective experiences present their objects as valuable is a popular view, both historically and today. I won't attempt to argue for this psychological picture, however. Rather, I take it for granted that at least some desires and/or emotions present value and then argue the following: it is more plausible that well-functioning affective experiences of value present, at least typically, evaluative propositions which are only contingently true than it is that they must present evaluative propositions which are necessarily true. This means that sentimental perceptualism fits comfortably with a contingency-allowing, but not a necessity-requiring, approach to value epistemology. There are at least a couple ways to motivate the claim that sentimental perceptualists should be contingency-allowing.

#### 3.3.1 The way of examples

The first line of argument involves working through examples. I will offer two illustrations, one involving a familiar type of emotion (anger) and another involving a familiar type of desire (parental concern); and I hypothesize, reasonably in my view, that similar examples could be constructed for other candidate affective experiences.

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[31] There are other purported examples of the contingent a priori. McKeever and Ridge [2006] discuss some of them and explain why they're not good models for any rationalist.

It is worth noting that some theorists who invoke the contingent a priori do so in order to explain how we can be justified in taking our sense experiences to be reliable. See, for instance, Cohen [2010]. Our a priori knowledge of the reliability of sense experience, if we have it, would be contingent, for sense experience might not be reliable. But theorists who believe that we can have a priori contingent knowledge for the reliability of sense experience do not think that we achieve such knowledge by way of intellectual presentations of the reliability of sense experience. This is (*inter alia*) presumably because it would force us to ask how we know intellectual presentations of contingencies (e.g., that sense experience is reliable) are reliable. Thus *whatever* model of the contingent a priori these theorists defend won't be a good model for intellectual perceptualists.

Here is the first case. Jacqueline is walking down one of the (fairly uncrowded, at this point) corridors of a stadium. To her surprise, her favorite athlete walks past. He doesn't initially make eye-contact, but the large athlete does manage to step firmly onto her foot, offering in response no more than an apathetic glance. Jacqueline is likely to be *angry* about his lack of concern. As mentioned above, a number of theorists, including Aristotle, take anger to present a slight, or wronging. Let's work with that view. (Some may prefer to label Jacqueline's emotion as outrage or indignation. It makes no real difference here.)

There are numerous possibilities for how precisely to characterize the content of Jacqueline's anger, each of which a sentimental perceptualist can allow is possible. One possibility is that the anger involves a presentation of (perhaps among other things) the athlete as wronging her by uncaringly stomping on her foot. It may also be that she experiences the athlete as wronging her by stomping on her foot, without also experiencing the stomping as uncaring. There are presumably other possible ways the content of her anger might be filled-out. In each case, the anger presents an evaluative contingency. For example, all stompings aren't wrong, since some stompers take care not to step on others but do so accidently. And even some uncaring stompings might not constitute a wrong, since uncaring stompers could be delirious from head injuries.

The key observations I want to make about the case are these: (i) by stipulation, Jacqueline's anger response involves an accurate presentation of an evaluative contingency, and (ii) her response is, at least for all we can tell, the product of her well-functioning anger-system. But then this indicates that sentimental perceptualists should be contingency-allowing, since it is precisely our well-functioning, accurate evaluative presentations that should we would expect to play the foundational role in a sentimental perceptualist theory.

Now consider a second case. A mother is driving to her son's school to pick him up. When she pulls up, she observes several other kids mocking him. She is *averse* to the treatment of her child. On a traditional sentimental perceptualist model (see Oddie [2005]), aversions involve presentations of their object as bad. Let's assume this view. On this picture, her aversion involves a presentation of the other children's mocking her child as bad. This is a presentation of an evaluative contingency, since, for example, her child may encourage and even enjoy the mocking, perhaps in the context of some kind of game, or it may be that he has done something very bad to merit such treatment. But these are rather unlikely possibilities. The mother's aversion seems from the description of the case to be the product of her well-functioning desiderative system, and, moreover, her aversion involves, by stipulation, an accurate presentation of an evaluative contingency. Once again, it seems to me that

this is just the sort of experience we would expect to play a foundational role in a sentimental perceptualist's theory.

### 3.3.2 Explaining affective content

Now consider a second way of motivating why sentimental perceptualists ought to be contingency-allowing. As noted above, some resist sentimental perceptualism because they doubt its psychological framework. The resistance often takes the form of what I will call *the content challenge*: it needs to be explained how emotions and/or desires could have come to present evaluative content (and this needs to be done in a way that preserves the epistemological ambitions of the view).[32] Surprisingly, sentimental perceptualists have paid little attention to this important challenge. However, the most natural strategy for addressing it pushes the sentimental perceptualist toward the contingency-allowing view.

A natural assumption I will make here is that sentimental perceptualists should stick close to their perceptual analogy and model their content-determination story on that of (low-level) perceptual experience. Philosophers of perception, at least those who think perception has content, often seek to explain how, for example, we have come to experience (in the case of vision) greenness, squareness, motion, and so on. Typical stories for how perceptual content-determination works appeal to *biological functions*. The basic idea is that our perceptual systems have the function of producing experiences which *carry information* (whereby 'information' is usually given a covariational and/or causal analysis) regarding whatever those experiences are supposedly about.[33] For our purposes, we needn't delve into the details of such theories, which are often quite complex. But to illustrate, here is a more precise statement of the shape such a theory might take. According to one precisification, we explain how we have, say, visual experiences of greenness by appealing to the biological function of our visual system to produce such experiences in response to proximal stimulations (notably, light arrays on the retina) that tend to covary with the presence of green objects.

Sentimental perceptualists could give a natural and reasonable answer to the content challenge, if they can make the case that desiderative and/or emotional experiences (or underlying

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[32] See Schroeder [2008] and Schafer [2013].

[33] For a discussion of this view and its history by one of its proponents, see Neander [2012]. For other defenses, see Prinz [2004] and Burge [2010]. Burge in particular appeals to bio-functions *not* in order to reduce content, as some others do, but merely to explain how perceptual experiences end up with certain content. I'm suggesting that sentimental perceptualists do something similar. The content challenge, as I conceive it, is not a challenge to give a reductive analysis of affective evaluative experiences but rather to explain how there are affective experiences with such content.

affective systems) have the biological function of carrying information about value. The important point for our purposes is that a *necessity-requiring* sentimental perceptualist is in a poor position to take advantage of this functional story about content determination. The necessity-requiring sentimental perceptualist would have to say that our desires and emotions have the function of responding only when there are stimulations (perceptions, beliefs, imaginings, etc.) which, if true, would guarantee the presence of the relevant value. But why would they have such a function? There's no precedent for this with ordinary perception. Ordinary perceptual experiences do not have the function of tracking necessary truths, nor do they have the function of responding to stimulations which guarantee the accuracy of the experience. For example, an agent's visual representations of edges and surfaces may trigger a visual representation of solidity, but it is possible for a non-solid object to have edges and surfaces. Beyond generating a peculiar disanalogy with ordinary perception, the view would have other problems. For one, it doesn't seem to fit with our case judgments about when our desires and/or emotions are well-functioning (see the examples above). We often judge that our emotions are well-functioning, accurate responses to value, even though the agent hasn't ruled out that some defeating condition hasn't obtained.

Setting aside comparisons with perception and case judgments, the view that affect has the function of responding to evaluative necessities still has problems. What would seem to be important from an evolutionary perspective is that affective experiences respond to conditions which indicate the presence of the relevant values *in the actual world*. To give a concrete illustration, fear will typically trigger on the basis of limited information that far from guarantees the presence of a threat to our well-being (or whatever value fear presents).[34] And this is presumably because if we required great evidence of a threat before being afraid, we'd often end up dead.[35] If some emotional or desiderative experience (much less the full suite of such experiences) ever ended up being such as to respond (when well-functioning) only to conditions which guarantee the presence of the property the experience is about, this would be a surprising bit of happenstance rather than something our theory of content determination would lead us to predict. Barring empirical evidence of systematic happenstance, then, sentimental perceptualists who wish to model their answer to the content challenge on ordinary

[34] If one doubts that fear presents any sort of value, then some other example could be substituted.
[35] See Ellsworth [1994]. Note that the justification we get from affect that triggers on the basis of highly limited non-evaluative information needn't be knowledge-level justification.

perception should leave open the possibility of basic knowledge of evaluative contingencies, i.e., they should be contingency-allowing.[36]

### 3.4 Taking stock

I started out this section by distinguishing necessity-requiring and contingency-allowing perceptualist theories. Necessity-requiring theories posit perceptual-like evaluative experiences that track how things must be evaluatively. Such experiences are supposed to provide us with basic knowledge of necessary evaluative truths. Contingency-allowing theories, in contrast, posit perceptual-like evaluative experiences sensitive to how things are in the actual world. Such experiences paradigmatically provide us with basic knowledge of evaluative contingencies. I then argued that intellectual perceptualism pairs well with a necessity-requiring theory but not a contingency-allowing one. Sentimental perceptualism is just the opposite. This result is encouraging, for it tells us that if we can settle the question of whether perceptualists should be necessity-requiring or contingency-allowing, then we can get leverage in the old debate between intellectual and sentimental perceptualism.

The remainder of this paper aims to show that we can at least make significant progress on the question of whether perceptualists should be necessity-requiring or contingency-allowing. I argue, in a preliminary way, that perceptualists need to allow basic knowledge of contingencies (section 4), and that, moreover, for the most part, perceptualists only need to allow basic knowledge of contingencies (section 5). (In fact, I think *any* foundationalist about evaluative knowledge should be contingency-allowing, but as we'll see, the reasons are especially compelling for perceptualists.) I say 'for the most part', since, as I have already pointed out, contingency-allowing perceptualists should allow that we can "stumble into" basic knowledge of evaluative necessities. (Or, in other words, a contingency-*requiring* view is untenable.) Whether one finds the ensuing arguments compelling, I hope it can at least be agreed that the question of whether to be necessity-requiring or contingency-allowing is an important one we can make progress on.

[36] Even if a sentimental perceptualist favors some alternative answer to the content challenge, the argument I give in this section can still be recovered. Appealing to such bio-functions is the most straightforward way for sentimental perceptualists to address evolutionary debunking arguments (e.g., Street [2006]).

## 4 Why Perceptualists Need Basic Knowledge of Contingencies

### 4.1 How perceptualists might try to avoid basic knowledge of contingencies

The aim of this section is to argue that perceptualists should allow for basic knowledge of evaluative contingencies. I'll address this question by first considering how a necessity-requiring perceptualist might think we can come to have *non-basic* knowledge of such contingencies.

A necessity-requiring perceptualist needs to argue that we derive evaluative contingencies from evaluative necessities along with contingent non-evaluative truths, since no contingencies follow from necessities alone. Invoking what I call *the standard model* is the most obvious strategy for a perceptualist hoping to make sense a necessity-requiring view. On this picture, we *deduce* our knowledge of evaluative contingencies from our a priori knowledge of necessary evaluative principles and our a posteriori knowledge of the non-evaluative facts.[37] (Such deductions needn't be transparent to the one who makes them.) These principles might take the form "if A, then B," whereby the antecedent is non-evaluative and the consequent evaluative. For example, a candidate principle might look like this: *if an agent, S, intentionally kills another person, then S acts wrongly*. Assuming this principle is true, we can derive that the contingent evaluative truth that Jesse was wrong to kill Shannon (a contingent evaluative truth), if we know the principle (a necessary truth) and we know that Jesse intentionally killed Shannon (a contingent non-evaluative truth).

Despite the standard model's seductiveness, it's easy to see why some necessity-requiring theorists will be uneasy about it. Take the principle just mentioned: *if an agent, S, intentionally kills another person, then S acts wrongly*. This principle seems susceptible to clear counterexamples, e.g., a case in which an agent intentionally kills a villain because that is the only means to prevent the villain from poisoning a city's water source. It might be very hard to formulate an indefeasible principle about when it is wrong to kill, and even if we could, it might seem a stretch to say that ordinary agents use (or must use) such complicated principles to discover which killings are wrong. Indeed, it might be rare that we ever acquire knowledge of indefeasible principles about what we ought to do (e.g., about when we ought to keep promises, tell the truth, and so on). A necessity-requiring perceptualist may argue, following W.D. Ross [2002], that the only necessary evaluative truths we know are about which considerations *count in favor* of which "all-things-considered" verdicts. For example, we might know principles about normative reasons – say, *if an agent promises to* $\varphi$*, then the agent has a reason to* $\varphi$ – which help us to discover facts about what agents *ought* to do. "All-things-considered" contingent evaluative

[37] Schroeder [2005] uses 'the standard model' to denote a view about moral explanation. I am using it to denote a similar view about the order of knowing in evaluative inquiry.

truths will not be *entailed* by the necessary evaluative principles we know along with the contingent non-evaluative truths. However, the necessary evaluative principles we know do in some way *support* (e.g., render more probable) certain all-things-considered judgments. Call this the *support model*. I won't explore support models in more detail here, since the problem such models run into does not turn on details about how it is developed.

There is a common problem for both standard and support models. Each requires that *whenever* we know a contingent evaluative truth, we know some necessary evaluative truth which we use to support it (deductively or non-deductively).[38] But I will argue that it is implausible we always arrive at knowledge of contingencies in this way.

### 4.2 A problem for necessity-requiring perceptualism

When coupled with perceptualism, standard and support models run into a simple problem. The problem is one of *extensional inadequacy*; they predict that people lack evaluative knowledge when they clearly have it. Let's work with the following example. Suppose Sasha sees her elderly neighbor, Hans, struggling to cross the street. Sasha is *very* confident that it would be good to help struggling Hans to cross the street. And she's right to be confident about this evaluative contingency. If we know any evaluative truths, it seems we know ones like this. The standard and support models require that Sasha know some necessary evaluative truth which she uses to help justify her particular judgment. But she might be deeply unsure about any such truths. One candidate necessary truth, friendly to the standard model, is this one: *if an agent is struggling to achieve her ends and another agent, S, is able to help, then it would be good for S to do so.* But Sasha might never have thought about this principle. And, in any case, the principle is clearly false, since it isn't good to help some agents struggling to achieve their ends (e.g., axe murderers).[39] A defender of the support model might propose a weakening of this

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[38] The argument I give works against other models that necessity-requiring theorists might adopt, too. Elijah Chudnoff [forthcoming] defends what he calls *low-level intuitions*, which consist in seeing a general evaluative (or mathematical, etc.) truth by seeing a particular one. (I assume that Chudnoff means for the general truths to be necessary and the particular ones contingent, but I won't try to settle the interpretive question.) According to Chudnoff, when we have low-level intuitions, "The same experience puts you in a position to learn about the general and the particular. And though the general has some epistemic priority, this priority does not take the form of epistemic dependence on background beliefs." I have no direct argument against low-level intellectual intuitions, but my argument does suggest that there are certain instances of evaluative knowledge in which the necessary does not have epistemic priority over the contingent. And that's all I need, as far as the argument for this section is concerned.

[39] One might think we can just add that the agent struggling to achieve her ends has to have a *good* end. But this move doesn't help. By putting evaluative content into the antecedent of the principle, we make it too trivial for Sasha's purposes. For such a principle to be of any use, she'd need some evaluative insight into which ends are good.

principle: *if an agent is struggling to achieve her ends and another agent, S, is able to help, then S has a reason to do so*. But this principle is also questionable. It is natural to think that we do not have *any* reason to help struggling axe murderers to achieve their ends. More importantly, though, whatever we think about the foregoing principle, it also doesn't seem as if *Sasha* needs to know any such principle to know it would be good to help Hans to cross the street. Sasha knows that it would be good to help her struggling neighbor to cross the street, but, intuitively, she needn't know any necessary evaluative truths which she might use to support her belief. That's a big problem for the standard and support models.

A necessity-requiring perceptualist who defends a standard or support model might try to resist my analysis of the case. One response would be to argue that Sasha must be covertly relying on some necessary truth. But this is an especially bad move for a *perceptualist* to make, since perceptualism says that when we have basic justification for believing some necessity, the truth must be *presented* to us in a perceptual-like way (see section 2). This means that if an agent forms a belief about an evaluative contingency in part on the basis of her justified belief in a necessity, then she must have (or at least have had) *attended to* the necessity.

A second strategy for resisting involves *going specific*. In my assessment of the case, I imagined Sasha's being confused about highly general necessary principles. But a necessity-requiring perceptualist who goes specific argues that Sasha might well know some less general necessary truth. For example, perhaps she knows this: *if a close friend of agent S is struggling to cross a street and S is easily able to help, then it would to some extent be good for S to help.* But even this principle might be false, since a person might have a close friend who aims to cross the street because doing so is part of a plan to poison a friendly but noisy dog. It doesn't seem as if Sasha must have in mind, much less know, *any* such specific principle.[40] To insist that she must would be to set the bar on knowledge too high. To illustrate with a familiar non-evaluative case, visitors at the zoo can know that the animal they are observing is a zebra on the basis of their visual experience as of a zebra; they needn't also experience it as not being a painted mule, even though if it were it wouldn't be a zebra.[41]

But suppose that Sasha *imagines* the scenario. Some philosophers assume that knowledge obtained through the imagination in this way is going to be of a necessity (e.g., McKeever and Ridge [2006]). But it is important to notice that the perceptualist can, and should, insist that this needn't be

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[40] A similar argument can be offered for *any* candidate principle. One might think, for instance, that the following is more likely true: *if an agent is struggling to achieve her ends, the achievement of which would harm no one, and another agent, S, is able to help, then S has a reason to do so*. Even if this principle is true (and I doubt it is), *Sasha* might well be confused about whether it is, and it is counterintuitive to insist that agents confused about the truth of such principles cannot know contingent evaluative truths of the sort Sasha seems to know.

[41] This is a variation on an example originally presented by Dretske [1970].

so; Sasha could have basic knowledge of an evaluative contingency even if she responds to an imagining. Upon imagining a scenario in which her elderly neighbor, Hans, is struggling to cross the street, she comes to believe that if the scenario she imagines were to come about, then it would be good to help him. Whether this counterfactual is true depends on whether in the closest possible world in which the imagined scenario comes about the consequent (that it would be good to help him) is also true. Presumably the closest world *won't* be one in which helping him turns out not to be good (e.g., the world in which he is crossing the street to poison a friendly but noisy dog). However, since the actual world *could* be such that the world closest to the actual world is a world in which it is not good for Sasha to help, the counterfactual is only contingently true. The fact that Sasha is imagining the scenario rather than actually visually experiencing it doesn't make it more likely that Sasha needs to know any necessary principles.

The example I've been discussing is just the tip of an iceberg; it isn't an exceptional case of evaluative knowledge. If Sasha needn't know any necessary evaluative truths in order to know that it would be good to help her elderly neighbor, Hans, to cross the street, it is hard to see why she would need to know any necessary evaluative truths in order to know, say, that it was wrong of Jesse to kill Shannon or that it would be bad for Claude to steal the watch. Sasha might be confused about the conditions under which killing is always wrong or even *prima facie* wrong. Similarly, Sasha might be confused about the conditions under which stealing is always bad or even *prima facie* bad. A perceptualist who goes for the standard or support models has a theory which can be expected to predict that people lack evaluative knowledge when we have a strong pretheoretical intuition that they have it. If perceptualists allow that there are perceptual-like experiences that immediately justify evaluative beliefs about contingencies, then we open up the possibility of a more extensionally adequate theory that predicts people really do know the contingent evaluative truths we pretheoretically take for granted that they do.

In sum, necessity-requiring perceptualists appear forced to be revisionary about when people have knowledge, for there are cases in which it appears people know contingent evaluative truths without knowing any necessary ones. We should try to avoid being revisionary if we can.

**5 Toward a Contingency-Allowing Value Epistemology**

The aim of this section is to illustrate why we should expect that perceptualists can use basic, perceptual-like knowledge of evaluative contingencies to explain our knowledge of evaluative necessities. Perceptualists should thus be contingency-allowing, for on a perceptualist picture, we'd

*need* basic knowledge of contingencies and, moreover, we'd only need to allow basic knowledge of necessities when we stumble into such knowledge (see section 3.1). That is, perceptualists only need to posit evaluative experiences that, when well-functioning, are sensitive to how things are in the actual world.

### 5.1 The picture

It is common to test candidate necessary principles by appeal to cases, both actual and (perhaps more commonly) imagined. When we find a case in which a principle seems to get the wrong result, we often give up the principle, unless we have some reason to be skeptical about the response to the case at hand. Here is an illustration of the procedure using the following principle: *necessarily, if an agent, S, intentionally tortures a baby merely for fun, then S acts wrongly*. Perhaps we think hard about this principle and come up with no counterexamples. In that case, many ethicists will agree (as seems reasonable) that we get some justification for believing that the principle is true. Now consider a second candidate principle: *necessarily, if an agent, S, intentionally kills another agent, then S acts wrongly*. We might initially come up with this principle when we notice that in many cases, agents seem to act wrongly by intentionally killing other agents. But then we imagine a case in which an agent intentionally kills a well-known villain because that is the only means of preventing the villain from poisoning a city's water source. It seems that the killer in this case would be acting rightly.[42] On a standard picture, then, the principle is revealed to be false, unless we have some reason to be skeptical about our response to the imagined case; and these truths about cases that we know are very typically contingent (e.g., it would be wrong for Jesse to intentionally kill Shannon).[43]

But what about this idea that we have reason to be skeptical of some responses to cases? An obvious scenario in which we should be skeptical about our perceptual-like evaluative experiences (familiar from evaluative and non-evaluative inquiry alike) are cases in which we have a personal stake. For example, an extremely wealthy businessman who is considering whether it is permissible for him

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[42] A contingency-allowing perceptualist believes that what we experience as true in imagined cases is a counterfactual conditional. Such counterfactual conditions are (normally) only contingently true. This is because we evaluate the conditional by going to the nearest world in which the antecedent is true and see whether, in that world, the consequent is also true. This allows that there may be more distant worlds in which the antecedent is true and the consequent false. See section 4.2.

[43] This method relies on a common, but controversial, assumption that the imagination can be at least a decent guide to possibility. But if the imagination isn't such a good guide, then the contingency-allowing perceptualist needn't give up her view. She will say that we just don't have much knowledge of (non-analytic) necessary evaluative truths, or at least we cannot know of any truth that it is necessary. Perhaps we just know fairly general *ceteris paribus* principles. That seems to me not such a bad result.

to hoard billions of dollars while his workers scrape by at minimum wage may experience this inequality as permissible. When we're personally interested in the case we're evaluating, or are otherwise skeptical about one of our evaluative seemings, the right move is often to consider other cases. The businessman might try to figure out why his extreme stockpiling of wealth strikes him as permissible. If the reason it strikes him as permissible is because his workers "voluntarily choose" to work for him, then he ought to get clear on the sense in which his workers have a choice and then imagine other, similar cases. He might imagine workers in other countries, see whether the conditions those workers experience strike him as acceptable, and then try to figure out whether there is a relevant difference. If the conditions of those workers strike him as unacceptable, and he can find no relevant difference, then if he's honest he should toss out his judgment about the case in which he has a personal interest. He might also use fictional cases, or shift his perspective, imaginatively occupying his workers' perspective (to the best of his abilities) to see how things appear to him from that angle. Another option, not to be overlooked, would be for him to see how others, especially those who have no personal stake in the situation (but nonetheless understand it well) respond to it. In general, a perceptualist who accepts a contingency-allowing value epistemology seems able to account for the idea that we can to some extent correct for questionable evaluative experiences by shifting to new cases, shifting perspective, and asking others.

My aim in this section so far has been to sketch a picture (not necessarily the only possible such picture) according to which our knowledge of necessities is downstream from our basic knowledge of contingencies; according to the model outlined here, we only *need* to allow for basic knowledge of necessities when we stumble into such knowledge. I have already presented a story about how our well-functioning responses to cases (actual and imagined) can present contingent evaluative truths (section 3), and also that we need to allow for basic knowledge of contingencies (section 4). Given perceptual-like evaluative experiences that track how things are in the actual world, we do not need to posit perceptual-like evaluative experiences that track how things must be across all worlds. But, for reasons that I outline in the next section, intellectual perceptualists may not be fully prepared ready to concede that there's no need for evaluative experiences suited for tracking necessities.[44]

### 5.2 Directly plausible principles

Howard Nye [2015] has, I think, done a particularly good job of capturing why some perceptualists will wish to maintain that we have evaluative experiences suited for providing direct

[44] If perceptualists need to make room for such principles, then, given the arguments in sections 3 and 4, there would be serious pressure to defend an awkward combination of intellectual and sentimental perceptualism.

knowledge of necessities. The idea is that some necessary evaluative principles are *directly plausible*. A principle is directly plausible if it seems true independently of its relationship (logical or otherwise) to anything else; directly plausible principles seem true *in themselves*. An agent knows a directly plausible principle when the principle strikes an agent as true in itself, the agent believes it on that basis, and the principle is true. *Must* a perceptualist allow that some evaluative necessities are directly plausible in this way? I doubt it.

The most plausible candidates for directly plausible principles are ones that are incredibly obvious (to us). Here's one of Nye's prime examples. A 19th century white slaveholder has the perceptual-like evaluative experience that it is permissible to force Ron, a black man, into slavery. His intuition here is being influenced by Ron's race. A natural way the slaveholder could come to see his mistake, Nye argues, is by getting clear about what race *per se* is, i.e., phenotypic characteristics such as skin color and hair texture which are the result of one's area of ancestry. He would (hopefully) *directly* see this to be of no intrinsic ethical significance and would likely search for alternative justifications, e.g., his "greater intelligence," or so Nye argues.

There is a competing explanation of what is going on with this example, however, which is friendly to the contingency-allowing perceptualist. Readers of Nye's work already have a large collection of beliefs about which kinds of things can be of intrinsic ethical significance (e.g., pleasure/pain, certain special relationships, knowledge). And one of the things *not* included on any of these lists is (hopefully) race. So when we're invited to consider the principle that *race* per se *is ethically irrelevant*, we immediately judge that the principle is true. An explanation friendly to the contingency-allowing theorist is that we're immediately inclined to judge the principle true because of our extensive set of background beliefs about which kinds of things can be of intrinsic ethical significance.

But what of the slaveholder? It seems that he could agree with us (i.e., that race is of no intrinsic ethical significance) but still continue to experience enslaving Ron as permissible. And so wouldn't contingency-allowing theorists be unable to explain *his* justification for believing the general principle? No. The slaveholder might agree that he was confused about the nature of race (he didn't take it to be about phenotypic traits), but he'll presumably continue to insist that whatever he thought race was *is* of intrinsic ethical significance; race is just a "mark," the slaveholder might insist, of the divinely ordained superiority and inferiority of different people. When we get clear about whatever factor the slaveholder took himself to be responding to, it strikes me as doubtful he'll see directly – without the help of any other background evaluative beliefs or reflection on other cases – that *it* (e.g.,

the divine rankings of peoples) is of no importance. After all, the principle he is asked to consider is, in the end, not about what he took to be important. And his grounds for believing phenotypic traits are of not intrinsic ethical import could (as easily as ours) depend on his background beliefs about what's valuable.

I suspect the contingency-allowing explanation of what's going on in the slaveholder example is at least in one respect *better* than the explanation in terms of directly plausible principles. Suppose we're thinking about *controversial* principles, e.g., that we have a fundamental duty to be autonomous, that we ought to act so as to maximize net pleasure, or that torturing innocent human beings is always wrong. Assuming our ordinary practices aren't entirely off the mark, it does not appear that we ever really justify a belief in any of these principles *merely* by experiencing it as true. When we're deciding whether to believe these principles, we should try to imagine whether they have unacceptable implications for particular cases (emphasizing cases that we have no personal stake in). But then if this is how it works for principles we find *controversial* (i.e., our knowledge of them, if we have it, is epistemically dependent on our thinking about cases), this gives us some reason to prefer the contingency-allowing perceptualist's account of what's happening when we evaluate *uncontroversial* principles. The contingency-allowing perceptualist has a simple, unified account of how necessary principles are justified.

**6 Conclusion: A Historical Note**

I close the paper with a historical observation. The argument I have given bears a *structural* resemblance to an argument that Francis Hutcheson pressed against Gilbert Burnet.[45] Hutcheson and Burnet agreed that being virtuous requires a commitment to promoting the general happiness, but they disagreed over how we learn that this is so. Burnet argued that the proposition is self-evident, knowable on the basis of reason alone. Hutcheson objected that this cannot be so, for there is no logical contradiction in supposing that lesser quantity of happiness is better than a greater quantity. To justify the belief that the greater happiness is better, we need a prior affection for happiness. Hutcheson's reply to Burnet relies on the assumption that reason alone is only capable of helping us to know propositions guaranteed to be true by their meanings alone (analyticities). Faced with this objection, the strategy for rationalists, or intellectual perceptualists more narrowly, has typically been to defend the synthetic a priori (see, for instance, Huemer [2005]). To this day, the existence of synthetic a priori knowledge is hotly contested (Väyrynen [2008]).

[45] See Burnet and Hutcheson [1971]. For a more detailed discussion of this dispute, see Gill [2006].

Here is a way of repackaging Hutcheson's defense (in this instance) of a sentimentalist epistemology. We start out with two conditional theses. First, if our basic evaluative knowledge is only ever analytic, then we should be rationalists. But if our basic evaluative knowledge is sometimes substantive, then we should be sentimentalists. As it turns out, much of our basic evaluative knowledge is substantive. Thus we should be sentimentalists.

My strategy in this paper was structurally similar to Hutcheson's, although I only aimed to adjudicate between perceptualist varieties of sentimentalism and rationalism. I argued that if perceptualists should be necessity-requiring, then they should be intellectual perceptualists. But if perceptualists should be contingency-allowing, then they should be sentimental perceptualists. I then argued in a preliminary way that a contingency-allowing perceptualism is preferable to a necessity-requiring perceptualism. This is because perceptualists *need* to allow basic knowledge of evaluative contingencies, and moreover, we can use basic knowledge of contingencies to explain our knowledge of necessities. In crucial distinction from Hutcheson, the argument I give for a sentimentalist epistemology is (fortunately) not hostage to well-worn, difficult debates about the synthetic a priori.

My view, then, is that perceptualists should be sentimental perceptualists, on the grounds that sentimental perceptualism, but not intellectual perceptualism, pairs with the most attractive view about the modal status of our basic evaluative knowledge. Or, if you are inclined to reject sentimental perceptualism on the basis of some other line of argument (see section 2), then perhaps this paper gives you a reason to reject perceptualism altogether. But whether one finds the arguments for a contingency-allowing over necessity-requiring perceptualism persuasive, I hope the strategy advanced here at least suggests that significant headway can be made on the question. And, so long as that is true, we should be optimistic about finally resolving the debate between intellectual and sentimental perceptualists.[46]

[46] [acknowledgments]

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