

Making Sense of Things: Moral Inquiry as Hermeneutical Inquiry¹

We are frequently confronted with moral situations that are unsettling, confusing, disorienting. We try to come to grips with them. When we do so, we engage in a distinctive kind of moral inquiry. Its aim is to *make sense* of our situation. I call this kind of inquiry *hermeneutical inquiry*.

Hermeneutical inquiry is part of our everyday moral experience. But its stakes become particularly apparent when we try to make sense of events that leave us shaken to the core: traumatic events, grave wrongdoing. In such cases, making sense of our predicament is essential for obtaining both intellectual and emotional closure. The central case I will discuss in this paper will be of that kind; I alert the reader to the fact that it involves rape and sexual assault.

Understanding the nature of hermeneutical inquiry and its place in moral epistemology is important. Yet, I argue, that existing accounts of moral inquiry do not give us the resources to do so. My aim in this paper is to develop a positive account of hermeneutical inquiry. Contrary to an influential line of thought suggested by Fricker (2007) in her work on hermeneutical injustice, I argue that hermeneutical inquiry is not simply an inquiry into how to conceptualise one's experience.² Rather, I argue that we should understand hermeneutical inquiry as a search for a perspective on a situation. I draw on work by Murdoch (1951, 1956, 2013), Camp (2019, 2020), and Tiberius (2010) to make the notion of a perspective precise.³ A perspective is a complex set of interconnected cognitive, affective, and motivational dispositions: dispositions to find salient, to be moved by, to see as explanatorily or morally significant, to see a situation as similar or different to another. A perspective is thus a way of making sense of a situation.

This raises questions about the epistemology of hermeneutical inquiry. Inquiry is an epistemic enterprise. When successful, it culminates not just in an answer but in a *good* answer. But perspectives are not the kinds of things that can be truth-apt. So, what makes some ways of making sense of a situation better or worse than others? I argue that one important dimension along which

¹ Versions and predecessors of this paper have been presented at the University of St. Andrews, the University of Cologne, the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management, the University of Fribourg, the University of Bucharest, and the University of Helsinki. I'm very grateful to the organisers and audiences for their comments and criticisms. The paper has also benefited from comments by and conversations with Jessie Munton, Kim Brownlee, Seanna Shiffrin, Errol Lord, Adham El Shazly, Shannon Brick, Sandy Goldstein, Rachel Fraser, Ella Whitley, Alejandro Perez Carballo, Antti Kauppinen, Katia Vavova, Sophie Horowitz and an anonymous referee for this journal. Work on this paper has been supported by a Leverhulme Research Grant RF-2018-158\10.

² As Medina (2017, p. 45) writes: "The semantically produced hermeneutical injustices are the paradigmatic cases on which Fricker and her followers have tended to focus: cases in which hermeneutical disadvantages and harms result from the unavailability of labels; cases where understanding fails because words are lacking."

³ My account is indebted to and inspired by these authors but it makes a distinctive contribution. Murdoch pioneered the idea that attention and affect make an important contribution to moral knowledge. But she did not develop a systematic account of perspective and would have been skeptical that something like perspectives can be shared interpersonally. See Mason (2022). Tiberius is interested in the role of perspective in the prudential realm: adopting a perspective is a matter of structuring one's attention in light of a particular value or commitment one holds. She does not evaluate perspective *qua* epistemic tools. My work is most closely aligned with and inspired by Camp's notion of perspective. It goes beyond it by drawing out the implication of perspectives for moral epistemology.

we can evaluate perspectives is what and how much they put us in position to know. Perspectives are partly constitutive of moral understanding.

The focus of this paper is to explore the nature of hermeneutical inquiry. But its broader ambition is to make a case for the fruitfulness of giving perspectives central stage in our moral epistemic theorising.

1. Trying to make sense of things

Let me start with the central example as narrated in an episode of *This American Life*:

When Kristen was raped a few years later, it took her a while to use that word. He took advantage of me is what Kristen said at first. When that didn't feel right, she said, he's an asshole. But that didn't seem right either. She had no word to summarize the experience.

She was at her friend's house for a party. It was late. People were going to sleep, and she climbed up to the top of a bunk bed to get away from an older guy who was creeping her out.

Kristen was drunk. She remembers her face felt numb. She remembers hearing someone banging on the door, which she later found out he had locked before he climbed up into the bunk bed and took her clothes off. She said no, but he had sex with her anyway. Sex - that didn't feel like the right word, either.

Kristen noticed her friends doing the same thing, describing their experiences with boys in different tones, in different arrangements. And then there was the friend who wouldn't say anything at all about what happened, except she was upset and didn't want to talk about it. And eventually she did explain. He said, can I just put it in you for a second? Her friend said, no. He did anyway. That's when Kristen said she felt like she had an understanding to share.

Kristen: All those times when we were mad at those boys because of what they did to us. We were mad because they raped us, you know. And there was like, several of my friends where it took us a really long time to put the word to it. (*This American Life*, Episode 640)⁴)

Kristen is engaged in a form of moral inquiry. She is trying to figure something out about her moral situation. It seems natural to describe what she is doing as trying *to make sense* of what happened to her in a way that sheds light on its moral significance. But what is it to make sense of something?

2. Varieties of moral inquiry

I want to start with a common way of thinking about moral inquiry and show that it cannot do justice to the type of epistemic project Kristen is engaged in. Its failure to do so is instructive; it helps us home in on some central aspects of hermeneutical inquiry.

⁴ <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/640/transcript>.

To inquire is an activity; it unfolds over time. It has a starting point and an endpoint, and an in-between. It is goal-directed: an inquirer aims to figure something out, to settle a question in an “epistemically happy” way. (Friedman, 2019) Consequently, to characterise a specific kind of inquiry, we must tell a story about its beginning, its endpoint, and the bit in-between.

What is distinctive about moral inquiry – so the received wisdom, amongst philosophers, at least – is that it begins with *moral questions*: questions such as whether we ought to perform a given action, whether an action is right or wrong, whether the balance of reasons favours one course of action or another, whether an action is wrong because of one thing or because of another:

“Moral inquiry is an activity in which we all at some level engage. And it's natural to think that some of us some of the time do it quite well while others do it less well. And when we do it well it is natural to think of it as a way of finding things out about how we and others ought and ought not to act.” (Lenman, 2007, p. 63)

Getting clear about moral concepts and about what each moral theory or moral principle implies is important and difficult work that should not be underestimated. But that does not exhaust the function of moral philosophy. It is also one of its goals to decide moral questions: to adjudicate between moral theories and moral principles and to come to ethical conclusions about what to do. (Hills, 2015, p. 35)⁵

A philosophical debate that illustrates how philosophers tend to conceive of moral inquiry is that on moral testimony. Consider some of the examples that motivate the debate:

Eleanor has always enjoyed eating meat but has recently realized that it raises some moral issues. Rather than thinking further about these, however, she talks to a friend, who tells her that eating meat is wrong. Eleanor knows that her friend is normally trustworthy and reliable, so she believes her and accepts that eating meat is wrong. (Hills, 2009, p. 94)

Danielle hears about an upcoming demonstration protesting Israel's war in Gaza. Although she knows the causes of the war and knows that civilians are dying from IDF bombing, Danielle is unsure whether the war is just. She doesn't try to think through the matter for herself. Instead, she asks a reliable and trustworthy friend, who says the war is immoral. Danielle accepts her friend's claim and joins the protest. (Mogensen, 2015, p. 261)⁶

While the questions that the agents in those cases wonder about vary, their moral inquiry proceeds according to the same recipe. It starts as the agents wonder about *whether* eating meat is morally permissible, the war just. These *whether*-questions divide logical space into distinct possibilities of how the world might be: the war may be just or unjust, eating meat morally permissible or impermissible.

The inquiry proceeds as the agent embarks on figuring out which possibility corresponds to the way the world actually is: this can be done by deliberating, weighing reasons, figuring out whether the

⁵ See also Singer, (1972, p. 116).

⁶ A selection: Enoch (2014), an agent wonders whether a war is just, in Jones (1999) Paul wonders whether some potential housemates are sexist, in Nickel (2001) an agent wonders whether to loan his drug-addicted friend some money.

features of the situation under consideration match the extension of the concept at issue, or asking for advice.

Successful inquiry culminates in coming to know the right answer to the moral question: that, say, eating meat is not permissible or the war is unjust. Of course, coming to know this answer may open up new questions, which set us upon a new course of inquiry: why the action is right/wrong, what makes a war just or unjust.

Let's call moral inquiry that aims to settle moral whether-questions *verdictive inquiry*. It has a distinctive phenomenology: it starts from a place of uncertainty about which answer from a set of options is the right one – the one that captures the way the world actually is. When it concludes, this uncertainty is resolved.

Verdictive inquiry is undoubtedly an important part of our lives. But is it *the only* form of moral inquiry we engage in? Is Kristen engaged in verdictive inquiry? I will argue that she is not – moral inquiry takes more than one form.

I have said that inquiry has a starting point, a middle bit, and a resolution. To see why Kristen is not engaged in verdictive inquiry, consider her starting point. Verdictive inquiry begins with a whether-question, which partitions the space of logical possibilities. But Kristen does not start from a neat partition that corresponds to various ways the world might be. Her starting point looks *messy*. Her question is a how-question: how do I think of this mess? She is wondering *how to make sense of her situation*. In asking this question, part of what she is wondering about is just how to distinguish possibilities. She is wondering which of the various features and details of her situation morally matter and how they matter. And importantly, Kristen is looking for emotional as much as intellectual clarity: how to feel about what happened to her.

We can look next at how Kristen's inquiry unfolds. Unlike in the case of verdictive inquiry, Kristen is not weighing options, balancing reasons, or deliberating about possibilities. Nor does it look like she is weighing whether to think of her situation as being taken advantage of versus as having sex versus as dealing with an asshole. Rather, it looks like she is successively moving through different attempts at making sense of her situation: thinking of what happened to her *as* being taken advantage of, *as* having sex, *as* dealing with an asshole and assessing them "from the inside" by what they feel like.

This brings us to the endpoint of Kristen's inquiry: she settles on making sense of what happened to her and her friend in a particular way, namely *as rape*. The endpoint of verdictive inquiry is coming to know the answer to a question: propositional knowledge whether or not p. But when Kristen settles on making sense of her experience as rape, she is not simply gaining a new piece of propositional knowledge – that she and her friends have been raped. Rather she gains a new way of making sense of what happened to her. This involves a holistic shift of outlook, which allows her to see her and her friends' situations as an integrated whole. It affects what stands out to her and how she sees certain features as mattering: her saying *no*, the fact that she was too drunk for consent, the fact that she was followed. And this shift, facilitates emotional closure, too: it makes sense of why Kristen and her friends have been so upset – so "mad at those boys".

Finally, the verdictive model does not do justice to the phenomenology of Kristen's inquiry. Kristen does not start from a place of uncertainty – uncertainty about which option from a menu is the correct one. She starts from a place of *confusion*. She is confused about which details she should be paying attention to, which ones are actually significant, how they are relevant, and how to feel about it all. When she finally arrives at making sense of what happened to her, there is a phenomenology of things “clicking into place”. It's not just coming to know something. It's a matter of arriving at a different way of looking and feeling about the subject matter at hand.

You may not be convinced. Maybe Kristen's inquiry is a form of verdictive inquiry into how to conceptualise her experience. Miranda Fricker has argued that there is a close connection between being able to conceptualise one's experience and making sense of it. Fricker's central cases of hermeneutical injustice all involve agents who are disadvantaged by “collective hermeneutical lacunas” – Carmita Wood is being groped by her superior but lacks the concept of “sexual harassment”, Wendy Sanford experiences distress after the birth of her child but lacks the concept of “postnatal depression”. These women try to make sense of their situations against the backdrop of a general “societal conceptual impoverishment” with regards to women's experiences.⁷ This means they cannot *name* their experience, nor can they communicate it to others. (Fricker, 2007, p. 150) This constitutes hermeneutical injustice.

Kristen does have the concept of “rape” – in that respect, her situation is unlike that of Carmita Wood or Wendy Sanford. Still, you might suggest, she is uncertain about whether the word applies to her situation and that accounts for her confusion and distress. Her inquiry is directed at settling whether her experience was one of “rape”.

The objection picks up on something that's right. Once Kirsten settles on thinking of what happened to her *as* rape, she conceptualises it as such – and rightly so. More broadly, making sense of an experience often goes hand in hand with bringing it into the fold of a given concept.

But even if applying a given concept to one's situation is part of the successful conclusion of one's inquiry, it does not follow that this is all that one's inquiry was *about*. It does follow that what Kristen is wondering about at the outset of inquiry is whether her experience was one of rape. First, note that the concept of rape does not figure in Kristen's mind at all – it does not occur to her until her later conversation with a friend. Second, contrast Kirsten situation with another case:

Anna is a journalist who is preparing to go on a reporting trip to a dangerous and conflict-ridden area. She has to tell her family that she will be away but she really doesn't know what to tell them. If she tells them where exactly she's going and why, they will be extremely worried. On the other hand, she worries that by evading the questions she would be lying. She goes back and forth but cannot decide what the right thing to do is and eventually decides to ask a friend whose judgment she trusts. (Sliwa, 2012, p. 178).

Anna is trying to figure out whether her reticence amounts to lying; she is wondering whether the concept of lying applies. But Anna's situation is different from Kristen's situation. Anna is clear on the morally relevant features of her situation. Her situation is one of uncertainty about whether to categorise the relevant action as lying.

⁷ See also Medina (2017).

Kristen, in contrast, is confused about the moral contours of what happened— what is central to it, what is morally significant. Her ignorance of what name to put to her situation stems from a deeper ignorance of *what that situation was*. Thus, the suggestion that we can subsume Kristen’s inquiry as an attempt to adjudicate between various concepts, trying to figure out which one is the best fit misdescribes Kristen’s epistemic situation.

Here is another way of seeing this. If hermeneutical inquiry was simply directed at which concept to use to describe one’s situation – which word to apply to it – the end point of Kristen’s inquiry would simply be a linguistic fact: “that’s what my situation is called!” But it does not seem like Kristen’s making sense of what happened to her as rape merely involves coming to know a linguistic fact. Rather, it seems that Kristen learns something *about her situation*: what about it was morally significant, how it matters, how it is similar to her friends’ experiences.

I have argued that in trying to account for some of the central features of Kristen’s inquiry, the verdictive model of inquiry is not a good fit. The challenge is to provide an alternative account. What is it, exactly, that Kirsten is looking for when she is looking for a way of making sense of her situation? What does *making sense* consist in?

Let me put my proposal on the table: Kristen is looking for a *perspective* on her situation that locates it in the moral landscape. When she is successively trying to think about what happened to her as being taken advantage of, dealing with an asshole, sex, she is moving through different perspectives on her situation and finding them wanting. Call this type of moral inquiry – inquiry that aims at an *apt* moral perspective on a situation – *hermeneutical inquiry*.

3. Being lost in the moral landscape

As a first step, we need to get clearer on the kind of confusion that sets us on a path of hermeneutical inquiry. I suggest that the notion of a moral landscape is helpful for spelling it out.

We are all embedded in an intricate web of duties, rights, permissions, and expectations that connect us to one another. This moral web forms the fabric of our relationships. For example, friendship comes with a signature set of duties, rights, and expectations – the exact shape of which depends on its history, context, and closeness. These rights, duties, and expectations concern actions, feelings, and attitudes: I owe my friends trust and goodwill, I can count on their help and support. The moral relations that surround us encompass more than the deontic: relationships (friendship, love), activities, choices all instantiate values, too. Nor are our moral relations and values limited to the interpersonal.⁸ We have duties not just to each other but also to animals. Ecosystems have moral value.

This web of moral relations is complex. Rights, duties, permissions can be multiply overlapping. We can be friends with our colleagues. A given relationship may instantiate several values at once. An action may increase some value at the expense of another. Values, rights, and obligations can conflict outright or be in tension with one another. We can think of the totality of these moral relations – values, rights, duties, permissions – as forming the *moral landscape*.

⁸ I owe this point to an anonymous reviewer.

This landscape is rich and intricate. It is also dynamic: it is constantly shifting and changing. One reason it is constantly shifting and changing is that *we* change it. We intentionally create new rights and duties by exercising our normative powers. We promise to love and cherish, we consent to surgeries and hair cuts, we forgive betrayals and forgotten birthdays. In doing so, we change what rights, duties, and permissions are in play. We can also change the distribution of values: we increase trust, we bring pleasure, we foster a sense of belonging. Our intervention in the moral landscape can be minor or they can profoundly reshape and reconfigure a part of it.

Wrongdoing, in particular, is an intervention in the moral landscape. By wronging someone we create new duties: the duty to apologise, to explain, to compensate, to make amends. We create new rights: the right to resent us, to feel upset, humiliated, or betrayed. We change the distribution of values: we may cause suffering and pain, we destroy trust and goodwill.

It is important that we keep track of the moral landscape. We need to know its contours not only to know our rights, duties, and obligations but also to understand what relationships we stand in. The moral significance of our actions, choices, and affective responses only makes sense against its backdrop.

Let us return to Kristen. We were wondering about her epistemic state at the outset of her moral inquiry. What is it that she is *wondering about*? The idea of a moral landscape helps us get a grip on Kristen's epistemic predicament. Kristen has a sense that what happened to her was some kind of grave wrong that reconfigured how things are morally around her. The moral landscape has shifted. But what is the shift? Which rights, obligations, permissions were in play before, which ones are in play now? Which values should she pay attention to? Is there a pattern to the various normative changes? Which of the features of the sequence of events morally matter and how do they matter? What was morally at stake, what is at stake now? Kristen feels like her attention is pulled to different aspects and details of the situation and that she has conflicting feelings but she is unable to put those together into a coherent whole. She is disoriented and overwhelmed.

The richness and complexity of the moral landscape outstrips our finite attentional resources and modest cognitive powers. We simply cannot take in all morally relevant features and relationships at once. Amongst all the detail, questions about what moral choices there are and how they relate become intractable. Thus, we need tools that will mediate between the richness of the moral landscape and the attentional resources and concerns of the agent.

This is what Kristen is looking for. She needs something to provide guidance as to how the features of her situation fit into the moral landscape – a cognitive tool that will act as a filter and an organisational device. To this end, let us now look at *perspectives*.

4. Introducing perspectives

Consider the following experience from a short story by the writer Artem Chapeye:

When, an hour later, it turned out to be Starokostiantyniv, for some reason she grew disenchanted, pouted, and withdrew into herself. For the next hour, everything seemed horrible. In Starkon, two young men sat down behind us, reeking of alcohol. All the passengers were gray in the partial darkness of the cabin and swayed like sacks on the rugged road; no one was smiling. Then, suddenly, one of the drunks behind us began to tell the other one about his little son.

'I look over, and he's got a snotty nose and he's crying. I tell him, 'Open up your mouth, I'll take a look. He shows me his mouth, and he's got a little side tooth that, you know, had

pushed through in two places. I felt so sorry for him. ‘Poor little kid! I say. And I start kissing him, and I grab him in my arms. . . .’

The bus was suddenly bathed in love and beauty. All the people who had been sitting silently, swaying with the bus’s motion, lost in their own thoughts and their own problems, ceased to be gray mannequins: inside each of them, behind the mask of weariness, was an entire universe, a gigantic cosmos brimming with internal stars, and she leaned over and whispered in my ear, ‘People are beautiful, even if they don’t realize it.’

The protagonist’s experience of the dark bus full of weary passengers undergoes a sudden and radical shift, akin to a gestaltshift. This shift encompasses what she attends to, what she perceives about the situation, which images and associations come to her mind, how she thinks and feels about her fellow travellers. The protagonist’s attention is drawn from the drab uniformity of their external appearance to the rich inner life, the particular experiences and attachments of each individual. She becomes aware of their value and this gives rise to an affective response: the experience of love and beauty. She becomes attuned to parts of the moral landscape that she was initially not sensitive to.

The shift our protagonist experiences is a complex affair; it does not merely involve how she directs her visual attention, but also what is cognitively salient to her – what she thinks of, which memories and beliefs “surface” in her mind – which mental images and analogies strike her as apt – “grey mannequins” versus a “cosmos brimming with internal stars” – which features engage her imagination and affective responses, which concepts she draws on to think about her fellow passengers.

Let’s pursue this thought further. Drawing on Elizabeth Camp’s work, we can think of *a perspective* as a complex set of interconnected cognitive and affective dispositions that guides our attention, our memories, and our intuitive associations.

“A *perspective* is an open-ended disposition to characterize: to encounter, interpret, and respond to some parts of the world in certain ways.” (Camp, 2019, p. 24)

My suggestion is that the protagonist experiences a shift in perspective, understood in this way. We can fill out this notion of a perspective as follows. A perspective on a subject matter is constituted by the following complex set of interconnected dispositions:

Salience. Dispositions to find certain features within that subject matter salient. Salience here encompasses experiential salience (what stands out in one’s visual field, in one’s auditory experience) as well as cognitive salience (which beliefs and memories are prompted).

Concern. Dispositions to foreground certain values, concerns, desires, commitments over others.

Concepts. Disposition to employ certain sets of concepts to think about the subject matter, to taxonomise features of the situation in particular ways, to draw specific distinctions about ways the world might be with respect to that subject matter.

Associative thought. Dispositions to draw particular inferences, to engage one's imagination, to see similarities and differences, to experience certain metaphors, stereotypes, and analogies as fitting, to draw intuitive connections, to employ particular mental imagery.

Significance. Disposition to attribute significance to salient features: moral significance, explanatory significance. A perspective does not just make certain features stand out in our experience but it also highlights particular relationships between those features: explanatory dependence, moral valence, what's central, what is surprising, what is important.

Affect. Dispositions to respond affectively to certain features or to experience those feelings as fitting.⁹

In this way, perspectives are bundles of dispositions that incorporate cognitive, experiential, affective, and motivational elements. Perspectives shape how we interact with the world. Amongst the myriad of things and features that could command our attention when thinking about a subject matter, perspectives guide our attention to a subset and organise this subset in a particular way. The intuitive beliefs and associative connections provide a backdrop – a “mental setting” – from which we respond to evidence, integrate different aspects of the situation into a coherent whole. These backdrop mental states “flavour the contents of conscious states and influence the direction of thinking”. (Woodfield, 1991, p. 550) At the same time, by incorporating the agent's concerns, perspectives build in practical and explanatory aims.

Let me fend off an important objection. Looking at the motley of dispositions that make up a perspective, you might be sceptical that there really is a unified phenomenon here. Why think that the various dispositions make up a genuine psychological “thing”? Why think perspectives are the kind of thing that can do explanatory work in theorising anything, including inquiry?

But there is more unity to the various dispositions that make up a perspective than this objection allows. The various components that make up a perspective are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Thus, which mental images, associations, thoughts are cognitive salient to you when you approach a subject matter, influences what you experience as salient, which in turn makes some ways of taxonomizing come to mind more easily than others.¹⁰ Which concepts you bring to bear to a situation, influences what you remember, which beliefs surface to mind, which features strike you

⁹ In developing the notion of perspectives I am hemming closely to Camp's account, drawing particularly on her (2019), (2020). A number of philosophers have taken up or introduced similar notions to explain a variety of phenomena. Tiberius suggests that “[A] perspective is defined by which value or values we are focused on, what we attend to, and what we take to be salient at the moment.” (Tiberius, 2008, p. 91); she takes the ability to shift perspectives as constitutive of wisdom. Munton (2021) and Whiteley (2021) appeal to “salience structures”, which are dispositions to attend to certain features and see them as explanatorily central. Munton uses those to give an account of prejudice, Whiteley for an account of harmful patterns of attention. See also Watzl (2017) for an account of salience. Fraser (2017) highlights the disposition to draw certain inferences to explain why rape metaphors are harmful and their connection to hermeneutical injustice.

¹⁰ See Fraser (2018) for an argument about how metaphors can affect cognitive availability of certain inferences. See also Camp (2019, p. 30).

as salient.¹¹ Which of your many agential concerns is at the forefront of your mind, influences what you attend to, which emotions you feel. But those again, bear on what stands out to you as salient about the subject matter.

In this way, perspectives are structurally similar to virtues. Virtues, too, are complex sets of interrelated and mutually reinforcing dispositions.¹² For example, according to a recent account of the virtue of modesty, this virtue encompasses dispositions to direct one's attention in particular ways (away from one's own achievements and their importance, towards the contribution from others), to have particular affective responses towards one's own achievements and qualities, to have particular concerns.¹³ This, too, is a motley of dispositions. What makes them into something stable is the way those dispositions interact to reinforce one another. Importantly, one concern about virtues – the situationist threat – does not arise for perspectives.¹⁴ For perspectives have some stability and robustness but make no claim to being enduring, fixed traits that guide an agent's behaviour in all settings. On the contrary, we have already seen that a perspective is something we can shift in and out of – just as, in the short story, the protagonist's perspective on her fellow passengers suddenly undergoes transformation. The explanatory ambitions of perspectives are more limited than those of character traits.

This tells us something about the nature of perspectives. Not just any bundle of dispositions will constitute a perspective. For a cluster of cognitive, affective, attentional dispositions to constitute a perspective on a situation, these dispositions must interact in ways that are mutually reinforcing. To borrow a term from the metaphysics of natural kinds: this set must form something akin to a homeostatic cluster.¹⁵ This gives perspectives the kind of stability needed for them to feature in explanation and prediction of how an individual will respond to and interact with a given situation. Thus, knowing that an individual manifests characteristics that are partly constitutive of a given perspective (e.g. the fact that they reach for specific concepts or metaphors to describe the situation), we can make predictions about their other responses: which features they will pay attention to, which questions will strike them calling for investigation, how they will feel about it.

How should we think about changes in perspective? A change of perspective involves jettisoning one perspective on a situation in favour of another perspective on that same situation. On the proposed view this is a matter of ceasing to have the dispositional profile that constitutes the first perspective and instead coming to have the dispositional profile that constitutes the second perspective. But wait, you may object, can we not have intermediate cases? What if I simply cease to have a subset of the dispositional cluster which characterises a given perspective? For example, I

¹¹ Thus, Yalcin (2018) argues that deploying concepts is a matter of distinguishing certain possibilities in logical space: it imposes a “resolutions” on logical space, making some beliefs more cognitively accessible than others.

¹² See, e.g. Annas (2011).

¹³ Bommarito (2013).

¹⁴ For an articulation of the situationist challenge, see Harman (2000), Doris (1998) and (2002). There have been a number of defences of virtue ethics against the situationism critique. See Kamtekar (2004), Merritt (2000), Sabini & Silver (2005).

¹⁵ See Boyd (1991). This leaves open what the underlying mechanisms are that ensure that those dispositions are mutually reinforcing, which is an important question about how perspectives are realised in an individual's psychology.

come to foreground a particular concern in a way that does not belong to the perspective I was inhabiting. There are a few things to say here. The first is that inhabiting a perspective need not be an all-or-nothing affair. Failing to have some of the dispositions that are part of the cluster characterising a given perspective may simply mean you aren't fully inhabiting the perspective in question – as long as there remains substantial overlap between your psychological profile and the dispositional profile that characterises the perspective. How substantial is substantial enough? I don't think we can give a precise cutoff but plausibly at some point the remaining dispositions may simply no longer form a mutually reinforcing set. In this case, you will have ceased to inhabit the perspective in question. As with all dispositional kinds, some degree of vagueness is par for the course.

Two agents share a perspective on a situation when there is significant overlap in their dispositional profiles with respect to that situation: that is, when they are disposed to notice the same features, to apply the same concepts, to bring to bear similar bodies of background knowledge, to make similar associative connections (metaphors, stories, mental images), to have similar evaluative and emotional responses. That overlap will never be a perfect match. That's because in addition to shared knowledge and associative connections that are part of our collective consciousness, our perspectives are always filled out by the particular experiences and backgrounds that make up our individual life history. Still, as long as there is a significant degree of overlap, we can talk of a shared perspective or outlook.¹⁶ *How* significant must the overlap be for a perspective to be shared? Again, I do not think we can hope for a precise cutoff point – rather, we should expect context to play an important role in setting the standard.¹⁷

The final observation is that perspectives can be communicated. One important vehicle for communicating perspectives are *framing devices*. Expressions that function as framing devices include metaphors, imagery, stereotypes. They are “expressions that function, not just to communicate factual information, but to suggest an intuitive way of thinking about their subjects.” (Camp, 2019, p.17) But we can also communicate a perspective by drawing our interlocutor's attention to certain features, which correspond to the perspective we are trying to get across.¹⁸

¹⁶ As Camp (2019, p. 26) notes: “Rather than seeking to identify absolute sameness and difference in perspectives, it is often more accurate to speak only of relative overlap and stability.” Note that there may be a difference between sharing a perspective and having a joint perspective. To share a perspective is simply to have a sufficiently large overlap in cognitive, attentional, evaluative and affective dispositions with respect to a subject matter. Two agents can share a perspective on a subject matter without having ever interacted simply in virtue of being disposed to respond in sufficiently similar ways. Joint perspectives, in contrast, require coordination between the agents, including responsiveness to how the other agent responds to the situation. Thank you to an anonymous referee for alerting me to this distinction.

¹⁷ We can take comfort in the fact that these questions are slippery to settle for anything whose nature is dispositional. Thus, a similar point has been raised about belief: if belief is dispositional, what is it to share a belief? In what sense does a 6 year old and her mother share the belief that the child's father is a doctor? See Robert Stalnaker, (1984), 64–65.

¹⁸ Whiteley (2021, pp. 195-196) calls the linguistic devices that aim to engender a particular cognitive perspective linguistic salience perspectives: those are ways of structuring linguistic content, for example, a newspaper headline.

So much for the general idea of perspectives. The next step is to show how perspectives can shed light on hermeneutical inquiry. We can then consider what makes for an apt moral perspective on a situation.

5. Hermeneutical inquiry as a search for moral perspectives

To take up a perspective on a situation is to take up particular ways of thinking about it. When Kristen successively thinks of what happened to her as “sex”, “being taken advantage of”, “dealing with an asshole”, “rape”, she is successively taking up – and rejecting as inadequate – different ways of making sense of her moral situation. To make sense of one's moral situation is to take up a moral perspective on it. This encompasses not just which concepts one uses to describe and refer to it but what about it strikes one as salient, how one sees the various features fitting together explanatorily, how one feels about it. What makes the perspectives Kristen takes up – with the exception of the initial one “sex” – *moral* perspectives is that they situate what happened in the moral landscape. They foreground different moral norms, rights, values and imbue different aspects of the situation as morally significant.¹⁹

Let's draw out what is plausibly involved in the perspectives that Kristen jettisons, by comparing the one expressed by “dealing with an asshole” with the perspective that she finally settles on. What are some of the dispositions involved in making sense of her situation as “dealing with an asshole”? First, note that this perspective locates the interaction in the moral landscape: that is, it disposes us to view certain features of the situation as morally significant. It highlights certain moral norms and values as having particular relevance: first and foremost the norms of respect and the value of kindness. To take up the perspective of “dealing with an asshole” is to see the incident as an affront to this set of norms and values. Consequently, the perspective highlights features of the situation – the action, behaviour, intentions, feelings – of the perpetrator that are most closely associated with those norms. Thus, it makes salient the perpetrator's lack of regard for Kristen's feelings and preferences and attributes to it moral and explanatory significance. It also comes with a set of concepts: “asshole”, “jerk”, “bully”, “unkind”. “Dealing with an asshole” evokes a range of associations, images, and stereotypes: the paradigmatic red faced, angry businessman shouting abuse at a young server for bringing him the wrong drink, the SUV driver dangerously overtaking a cyclist while honking his horn. It evokes bullying, insults, and losing one's temper, condescending and unkind remarks, the character traits of selfishness, callousness, and narcissism. The perspective foregrounds the agent's concern of being treated with respect. And it highlights certain emotional responses as particularly apt: when norms of respect or kindness are violated, it is apt to feel aggrieved and humiliated, astonished and angry.

The perspective of “dealing with an asshole” thus furnishes Kristen with a particular interpretive key: it highlights a set of features of her experience and organises them into a coherent whole. It presents Kristen with a particular map of the moral landscape: it highlights norms of respect and the value of kindness towards others and attributes moral significance in light of those norms and values. And it locates the wrong Kristen has suffered in the same family as those suffered by the humiliated waitress, the shaken cyclist, the victim of bullying.

¹⁹ My focus here is on moral inquiry. But plausibly we also try to make sense of situations that are not moral. Such nonmoral hermeneutical inquiry may particularly arise in prudential cases. In these cases, we are not concerned with shedding light on the moral significance of the situation. Rather, we are concerned with prudential values and how a situation bears on those. I believe that we can fruitfully extend the present to such prudential cases but doing so in this paper would lead us too far afield.

I have noted what the perspective expressed by “dealing with an asshole” highlights, what it draws attention to, what it imbues with moral significance. It is equally worth noting what it relegates to the background. As Munton notes:

Information is salient *relative to* other information. The promotion of some information comes at the expense of the demotion of other information. (Munton, 2021, p.7)

First, it does not impart any special significance to the fact that Kristen’s experience involved *sex* that Kristen had explicitly *refused*. That is not to say that it somehow involves the disposition to deny that sex was involved or that Kristen said “no”. Rather, it does not attribute any prominence or explanatory significance to those aspects of the situation. It treats them as incidental: an asshole will force others to do things that are unwelcome to them. They will force a cyclist off the road, force the server to get them another drink, or, in Kristen’s case, force someone to have sex with them. An asshole is simply indifferent to another’s wishes and feelings, including one’s wish not to have sex.

These observations bring out why Kristen’s inquiry is not finished: the perspective of “dealing with an asshole” does not resolve her confusion and it is not one she can sustain. For there are features of the events that command her attention – like the fact that she was forced to have *sex* – that she is unable to relegate to the background. There may be other incongruences. Kristen may sense that the comparisons that the perspective invites – to aggressive drivers, bosses high on power over their subordinates, obnoxious restaurant patrons – are off. Her experience may not sit easily alongside those occurrences – Kristen may have a sense that what happened to her has a different moral quality from those other incidences. And finally, the perspective expressed by “dealing with an asshole” may be profoundly at odds with how the situation made and continues to make her feel. It makes sense to feel humiliated when dealing with an asshole and Kristen may well feel humiliated. But what about the sense of violation, shame, numbness that may also be her reactions? On the perspective of “dealing with an asshole” these are uncalled for and inexplicable.

What happens when Kristen takes up the perspective of “rape”? First, there is what it will dispose her to see as salient: namely, that there was *sex* and that this *sex* was *nonconsensual* and *forced upon her*. The perspective expressed by “rape” thus renders salient Kristen’s expressed *refusal* to having sex and her vulnerable position because she was drunk. It makes salient that the perpetrator acted deliberately: following her, locking the door – there was no misunderstanding involved. It disposes Kristen to see those features as being of central moral importance. At the same time, it situates Kristen’s situation against the backdrop of gender oppression and inequality. Second, the perspective of rape foregrounds a particular set of moral rights as pertinent to the series of events, namely the rights to bodily autonomy and sexual integrity.²⁰ In doing so, it disposes us to see the experience as an affront to those rights. Those are fundamental moral norms, the violation of which constitutes a grave moral wrong. The perspective of rape thus disposes us to see the events as one in which Kristen suffered a grave wrong: she was used, violated. Third, the perspective of rape disposes Kristen to employ specific concepts to describe her situation: the concept of rape, consent, sexual assault. Fourth, the perspective of rape conjures up a range of associative connections: to other types of sexual violence and assault, drawing our attention to the similarities to those moral offences. Fifth, it brings to the foreground certain affective responses: when your sexual autonomy

²⁰ Lacey (1997) argues that rape is an affront to sexual autonomy “the freedom to determine one’s own sexual experiences, to choose how and with whom one expresses oneself sexually.” (148) Gardner & Schute (2000) argue that what sets rape apart as a wrong is that it involves using the raped person. (p. 32-33)

has been violated, it makes sense to feel used and violated, to have one's basic sense of trust shaken and one's feelings of self-worth shattered.

The perspective of rape thus locates the incident Kristen experienced within a different set of moral norms, foregrounding norms of bodily autonomy and sexual integrity. These norms form the interpretive backdrop for Kristen's experience, drawing her attention to certain features of her situation (her refusal, her vulnerable state) and attributing moral significance to them.

Unlike the perspective of "dealing with an asshole", the perspective of "rape" assigns prominence to those features that persistently tug at Kristen's attention – the fact that the perpetrator forced her to have sex despite her explicit refusal. It identifies a pattern across different contexts – her friends' stories about their interactions with their boyfriends and acquaintances and their emotional responses to them ("being mad", as Kristen puts it, though this is more a matter of being deeply upset). The perspective of "rape" brings those aspects together into an intuitively coherent whole: these boyfriends and acquaintances are committing rape, Kristen and her friends are victims of rape. Crucially, feeling deeply upset – violated, used – is a wholly appropriate response, as is the sense that one has suffered a *wrong* and not just an unpleasantness or inconvenience. Thus, the perspective of "rape" makes sense of Kristen's feeling deeply upset as feelings of violation; it explains and legitimises them. Hence, the feeling of "things falling into place".

Thinking about Kristen's epistemic project as a search for perspective thus allows us to account for the central features we identified: the fact that it starts from a place of confusion as opposed to uncertainty, that it does not involve weighing or deliberating about reasons but something closer to trying out: taking up a perspective and seeing whether it *feels right*. It also captures the fact that the endpoint is not simply an arrival at a question to a whether-question but rather a coherent way of looking at, thinking about, and feeling about a situation. Perspectives give us the resources to account for the distinctive phenomenology of hermeneutical inquiry: the confusion at its start, the absence of weighing or explicit deliberation, and the feeling of "things clicking in place" at its conclusion.

Recall an earlier worry: that hermeneutical inquiry may just be a matter of thinking about whether a particular concept applies to a situation. It is clear now that this concern is unfounded. For by settling on the perspective of rape, Kristen's project could be successful even if she remains uncertain about whether what happened to her should be categorised in this way. First it can be successful in virtue of attuning her to a range of features about her situation, which may allow her to locate her experience in a family of wrongs (sexual assault, rape). This is enough to render certain feelings and emotions as reasonable. The question how to think and how to feel about a situation can be settled even in the absence of a clean-cut answer as to exactly how to categorise it – it's enough that we recognise it as similar enough to exemplars of a category. Second it can be successful in virtue of putting the question whether what happened to her was rape on the table, as one to be grappled with and inquired into further.

Thus, the success of a search for a perspective need not be tied to arriving at a definite answer about whether a given concept applies. Rather, its success may lie in attuning us to a specific range of features of our moral landscape and the patterns they form and prompting us to ask questions about them.

6. Apt perspectives

Let me now pick up the final strand of the view I am proposing: namely that hermeneutical inquiry aims at an *apt* perspective. What is it that makes a moral perspective on a situation more or less apt for an agent?

I suggest that we can evaluate perspectives along three distinct dimensions. First, we can evaluate them epistemically with respect to how much knowledge they put us in a position to gain. Second, we can evaluate them with respect to their accessibility for the agent: is a given perspective one that the agent is able to take on and sustain? Third, we can evaluate perspectives practically by how well they serve the aims of the agent.

Perspectives are subject to *epistemic* assessment. While they do not have propositional content, and so cannot be evaluated as accurate or not, *qua* epistemic tools, perspectives render some knowledge more and some less accessible to us.²¹

Perspective play this role because they guide our attention to specific features and imbue them with significance. In this way they direct our inquiry. A perspective determines what we take for granted about a situation and what we find puzzling, which questions we ask, which evidence we look for to settle those questions, and how we interact with this evidence.²²

We can see this play out in Kristen's case. Because the two perspectives highlight different norms, suggest different sets of concepts, different explanations of Kristen's responses and legitimise different feelings, they put Kristen in a position to ask different questions about her situation. There is knowledge about the moral landscape that will not be accessible to Kristen from the perspective of "dealing with an asshole": that her sexual autonomy was violated, that the wrong she suffered was a grave one, that the way she was wronged by the stranger and her friends are being wronged by their boyfriends belongs to the same moral kind.

This means we can evaluate perspectives for whether they enhance or stunt our moral understanding. On a reductionist approach to moral understanding, to have moral understanding of a particular subject matter or domain is having the ability to acquire moral knowledge about that subject matter. Thus, elsewhere I have suggested that:

...the capacity of moral understanding is the ability to acquire moral knowledge. The ability to acquire moral knowledge is constitutive of moral understanding. So, an agent has moral understanding if and only if (and to the degree to which) she has the ability to acquire moral knowledge. (Sliwa, 2017, p. 546)

I argued that having the ability to acquire moral knowledge, we need a psychological mechanism (or plausibly, a set of psychological mechanisms) which, if it works correctly, yields moral knowledge when the agent is in the right circumstances—in particular, when she is presented with the relevant moral evidence. (ibid.)

²¹ See also Camp (2019, p. 30). Flores (2021) develops an account of epistemic styles – which draws on Camp's notion of perspectives – and argues that one's epistemic styles influences how one interacts with evidence. "Epistemic styles are unified ways of interacting with evidence which express a cohesive set of epistemic parameters, and which agents can put on and take off". (p. 36)

²²Camp (2019, p. 32-33).

On such an account of moral understanding, perspectives may instantiate such psychological mechanisms. Some perspectives constitute moral understanding because they allow the agent to acquire more moral knowledge, as opposed to false beliefs, about their situation.²³

Thus, there is a close relationship between hermeneutical and verdictive inquiry. Perspectives set the stage for and prompt us to embark on verdictive inquiry into particular questions. They (partly) explain why you embark on specific projects of verdictive inquiry. When you wonder about whether the war is just this is precisely because you already bring a particular perspective to bear on the situation: you think of what is going on as a *war* (as opposed to, say, a conflict, a “peace-keeping” or “civilising mission” or a “limited military operation”), certain features about it stand out to you as morally significant (the suffering of civilians, the large-scale damage, the death and injuries of the soldiers), comparisons to other historical events suggest themselves.

A perspective cannot be apt unless it passes epistemic muster. Thus, the epistemic dimension imposes a constraint on aptness. For a moral perspective to be apt, it needs to be epistemically apt: it needs to improve the agent’s position with respect to moral knowledge about the situation in question.

But when we evaluate whether a given moral perspective is apt *for an agent*, we have to consider more than just how much knowledge it puts us in a position to gain. We have to take into account specific aspects of the agent. After all, perspectives are cognitive tools. And how good a tool is for someone depends not just on facts about the tool but also on facts about the agent. A hammer that is too heavy for me to lift will not be a good hammer for me, even if it works great for my bodybuilding friend with her massive biceps. This gives us two further dimensions of evaluation.

We have already seen that *congruence* matters to whether a perspective can be taken up and sustained by an agent. Congruence here is a matter of a match between the dispositional profile of the perspective and the psychological profile of the agent. Congruence matters because it is part of what determines whether a perspective is one that the agent can in fact stably take up and make her own.

Congruence refers to the overlap between the attentional, affective, and evaluative dispositions that constitute the perspective and what the agent is inclined to notice, her sense of moral significance, and her feelings about her experience. These inclinations may be inchoate and may not amount to something like a coherent outlook – still they can preclude taking up certain perspectives and making them one’s own. Thus, Kristen may find it difficult to downplay the fact that sex was a central and that it gives the wrong she suffered special significance. This part tugs at her attention, as do her feelings about the situation.

Congruence is a graded notion. Even with the perspective of “rape”, Kristen might find herself with some degree of felt mismatch. The experiences she now thinks of as rape may not fit the stereotypical rape narratives – a stranger lurking in the bushes on the look out for a solitary jogger – and the boys she now thinks of as rapists (“nice and respectable” middle-class college boys) do not

²³ An alternative way of thinking about the epistemic evaluation of perspectives is to focus on the epistemic evolution of the *questions* they lead us to ask. See Perez Carballo (2018) for a development of this approach.

fit the rapist-stereotypes (aggressive thug).²⁴ But rather than preventing Kristen from maintaining the perspective of “rape”, Kristen may respond to the felt mismatch by broadening the intuitive associations she has with rape. When initially thoughts of stranger attacks most readily came to mind, Kristen may now also think of domestic abuse, marital rape, date rape. In other cases, taking up a perspective may result in changing our associations with and feelings about a situation.

Congruence is not fixed once and for all. The fact that an agent is unable to take on the perspective of “rape” on what happened to her right now, does not mean that this perspective is permanently inaccessible to her. What is salient to us, how we feel about it – these features can evolve or be changed over time. One way they can be changed is by taking on a perspective and trying to make its dispositional profile one's own. Even if this is a perspective that you end up jettisoning, it may leave your dispositional profile somewhat altered in ways that will affect which other perspective you can make your own. Thus, even if Kristen comes to reject thinking of what happened to her as “dealing with an asshole”, trying on that perspective can subtly shape and alter which features she attends to and which ones strike her as relevant and thereby pave the way for her acceptance of the perspective of “rape”.

Hermeneutical inquiry is, hence, a process that can unfold in stages. Moving through a series of perspectives that are epistemically suboptimal can be psychologically necessary for arriving at one that is epistemically apt. In this way, even perspectives that are less than ideal from the epistemic point of view can still play a crucial role in inquiry. This has important implications for how we think about moral advice. A good moral advisor needs to be sensitive to which perspective the advisee is – at this moment in time – able to take on. Good advice may be a matter of orienting the advisee towards a perspective that constitutes an epistemic improvement on her situation. This may not always be the same as transmitting the epistemically optimal perspective.²⁵

Finally, there is a third, distinctly practical dimension of evaluation: we can evaluate whether a given perspective is conducive to promoting the agent's morally significant interests.²⁶ This is because perspectives have practical upshots. They determine which possibilities for action agents consider as open to them. It is only in the context of thinking of what happened to Kristen as rape that the question whether to report arises. It is only in the context of thinking of an uncomfortable interaction at work as sexual harassment that we can wonder whether to pursue disciplinary action. This practical dimension is particularly important when there are multiple perspectives that are all epistemically on a par – they highlight different but complementary features of the situation, thus putting the agent in a position to gain moral knowledge about different aspects of it. It is here that the agent's interest may be decisive in which of these perspectives is apt for the agent.

In Kristen's case all three dimensions of evaluating perspectives for aptness pull in the same direction: compared to the perspective of “dealing with an asshole”, the perspective of “rape” is more congruent with what, however inchoately, already tugs at Kristen's attention. By locating what happened to her within a particular region of the moral landscape, it allows Kristen to acquire a great deal of moral knowledge that the alternatives put out of her reach: including the nature and

²⁴ See Jenkins (2017) for a discussion of rape myths and their epistemic consequences.

²⁵ I develop an account of hermeneutical advice in my (forthcoming).

²⁶ See also Fraser (2018, p. 734), who draws a distinction between “avowal-ready” and “avowal-worthy interests”.

gravity of the wrong she suffered, its moral significance, its continuity with other experiences both by Kristen and her friends. Third, it makes salient possibilities for action – the possibility to speak up, to report, to contact a rape crisis center – that are conducive to a variety of Kristen’s morally significant concerns: for emotional closure, for understanding, as well as for her and her friend’s safety.

But we can easily imagine cases where the three dimensions of aptness pull apart – even tragically so. The perspective that is most congruent with our experience of a situation may be one that is epistemically pernicious. The perspective that fares best on facilitating moral understanding may be one that is at odds with our morally significant interests and concerns.

I want to return to the question that formed the starting point of this paper: what is it to make sense of a moral situation? We make sense of a moral situation by taking up a moral perspective on it. Not every way of making sense of a moral situation is a good way of making sense of a moral situation. Only some ways of making sense of a moral situation will correspond to moral perspectives that are apt.

This means that making sense of a moral situation is not sufficient for a successful closure of one’s hermeneutical inquiry. The way we make sense of our moral situation must be a good way of making sense of it. Not just any moral perspective will do. It must be one that is apt. We have successfully concluded our hermeneutical inquiry into our moral situation, when we settle on an apt moral perspective.

In this way, hermeneutical inquiry is exactly parallel to verdictive inquiry. We engage in verdictive inquiry when we try to settle whether *p*. But not just any way of making up our mind as to whether *p* will bring our verdictive inquiry to a successful conclusion. The answer we arrive at and come to believe must be true.

And in both cases there can be progress without successful conclusion. I may not settle whether *p* but I may arrive at a partial answer, ruling out some possibilities. Similarly, I may not arrive at the epistemically optimal moral perspective on a situation but I may adopt one that improves my epistemic position.

Neither the successful conclusion of a hermeneutical nor that of a verdictive inquiry is always transparent to us. An answer may seem compelling but be false. A perspective may feel right but be epistemically pernicious. Not every hermeneutical inquiry has a happy ending, nor can we always tell a happy ending from an unhappy one.

7. Apt Perspectives and Hermeneutical Injustice

I will end this paper by sketching some ways in which thinking about hermeneutical injustice in terms of perspectives enriches the picture derived from Fricker. This is in the spirit of a promissory note, to be worked out in detail in future work. But it illustrates that thinking through the role of perspectives in moral epistemology is theoretically fruitful. I suggest that the fact that someone’s hermeneutical inquiry has no happy ending can constitute a form of hermeneutical injustice. And this, in turn, complicates the story Fricker tells about both the costs and difficulties of overcoming hermeneutical injustice and the process by which this can be done.

According to Fricker, hermeneutical injustice arises when members of an oppressed group are systematically unable to communicate their experiences. These communicative impasses drive because “extant collective hermeneutical resources...have a lacuna where the name of a distinctive social experience should be” (Fricker 2007, p. 155).²⁷ Of course, not any communicative impasse gives rise to a hermeneutical injustice – the experience must be one, for which it is in the agent’s interest to make herself understood. As Fricker writes about Carmita Wood:

The cognitive disablement prevents her from understanding a significant patch of her own experience: that is, a patch of experience which it is strongly in her interests to understand, for without that understanding she is left deeply troubled, confused, and isolated, not to mention vulnerable to continued harassment. (Fricker, 2007, p. 151)

The argument in this paper suggests that it would be a mistake to think of the lacuna as simply a lack of a *name* for an experience. Rather, we should think of the lacuna as a lack of perspective on a situation. To overcome hermeneutical injustice then does not take an act of baptism but one of creation: a process of *constructing* a perspective that will locate it in the moral landscape. This is the work of cultivating attentional, cognitive, and affective dispositions and coining metaphors and expressions that will allow them to be shared and communicated.

At the same time, the argument of this paper suggests that taking up a perspective on one’s situation that allows for moral knowledge – a perspective that fares very well on the epistemic dimension – may come at a high prudential cost to the agent. It is not always straightforwardly true that when someone suffers a hermeneutical injustice one is prevented from “understanding a significant patch of her own experience [...] which it is *strongly in her interests* to understand” (Fricker, *ibid*, highlighting mine). Coming to see your relationship as abusive, your boyfriend as a rapist, your party mishap as an instance of rape can be as personally devastating and costly as it is epistemically shrewd. And the associated prudential costs need not stem from the unpleasantness of having let go of cherished illusions but from stark economic and political realities: the stigma of having been raped, the fact that boyfriend helps paying rent. The world may be such that epistemic and prudential interests – including prudential interests of great moral significance – pull in opposite directions.

If this is right, then hermeneutical injustice may not just consist in the lack of epistemic resources – whether it is concepts or perspectives – but in the cost of their deployment. The problem is not that agents are, in principle, unable to make sense of their situation but that the sense-making comes at a prohibitive price.

8. Conclusion

I have argued that to do justice to our moral experience of moral inquiry – to what we do when we try to figure out a moral experience or a puzzling moral situation – we need an account of hermeneutical inquiry. This form of inquiry does not aim at settling questions about whether an action is right or wrong, whether a particular moral concept applies, or whether the balance of reasons is this or that. Rather it aims at answering questions about how to think about an

²⁷ *ibid*. For criticism see Medina (2012, p. 99) and (2017). Strikingly, Murdoch (1956) described a similar phenomenon: “There are situations which are obscure and people who are incomprehensible, and the moral agent, as well as the artist, may find himself unable to describe something which in some sense he apprehends. [...] From here we may see that the task of moral philosophers has been to extend, as poets may extend, the limits of the language, and enable it to illuminate regions of reality which were formerly dark. “(Murdoch, 1956, p. 45)

experience. Drawing on Elizabeth Camp's work, I have argued that the aim of this inquiry is a perspective: a package of intuitive dispositions to notice, explain, and cognitively and affectively respond to a situation. I have argued that hermeneutical inquiry aims at apt perspectives. Evaluations of aptness are complex affairs that need to take into account whether the perspective is congruent with the agent's experience, what knowledge it makes accessible to the agent, and how well it serves the agent's goals and concerns.

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