Moral Perception and Particularity*

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Iris Murdoch's series of essays *The Sovereignty of Good* and her novels call our attention to the important role of moral perception in the moral life.[1] How do agents come to perceive situations in the way they do? How does a situation come to have a particular character for a particular moral agent? What is the relation between our moral-perceptual capacities and other psychological capacities essential to the moral life? These questions have drawn scant attention in contemporary ethical theory.[2] Moral philosophy's customary focus on action-guiding rules and principles, on choice and decision, on universality and impartiality, and on obligation and right action have masked the importance of moral perception to a full and adequate depiction of moral agency. An agent may reason well in moral situations, uphold the strictest standards of impartiality for testing her maxims and moral principles, and be adept at deliberation. Yet unless she perceives moral situations as moral situations, and unless she perceives their moral character accurately, her moral principles and skill at deliberation will be for nought and may even lead her astray. In fact one of the most important moral differences between people is between those who miss and those who see various moral features of situations confronting them.

I will relate moral perception (in particular situations) to the phenomenon of *moral judgment,* understood here as the faculty which bridges

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1. Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).

2. Important exceptions to this claim—and works to which I am indebted—are Martha Nussbaum, "The Discernment of Perception," in *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium on Ancient Philosophy,* ed. J. Cleary (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1985), and *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 298–306; Charles Larmore, *Patterns of Moral Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chap. 1; Nancy Sherman, *The Fabric of Character* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), esp. chap. 2; John Kekes, *Moral Tradition and Individuality* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), chap. 7.

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the gap between moral rules (and principles) and particular situations. I will show that the phenomenon of moral judgment does speak to an important lacuna in principle-based theories of morality. Yet I will also explore the limitations—as a way of capturing what is missing in theories which focus only on the general or the universal—of the metaphor of "bridging the gap between the general and the particular."

Thus moral perception, I will argue, cannot be identified with moral judgment. In a given situation moral perception comes on the scene prior to moral judgment; moral perception can lead to moral action outside the operation of judgment entirely; and, more generally, perception involves moral capacities not encompassed by moral judgment. I will also argue that moral perception should not be conceived of as a unified capacity, but that it involves multifarious moral and psychological processes.

Finally, while I will be criticizing principle-based theories for failing to recognize the importance of the operation of moral perception and moral judgment, the boundaries are not sharp between those capacities involved in moral perception and judgment and those more commonly associated with the moral agent portrayed in principle-based theories (rationality, commitment to principles, sense of duty, testing maxims for moral acceptability, and the like). Moral perception is formed and informed by our general values and principles, and the converse is true as well.

I will not be discussing impartiality per se but, rather, a feature often (though perhaps not necessarily) connected with it—namely, action-guiding principle as the heart of morality. Principle-based ethical views need not be "impartialist"; W. D. Ross (*The Right and the Good*) is an example. However, at the end I will make some brief remarks connecting my critique with other familiar critiques of impartialist views.

I will begin with three examples of the operation of moral perception in particular situations and will draw on these in the subsequent discussion.

I

Example 1.—John and Joan are sitting riding on a subway train. There are no empty seats and some people are standing; yet the subway car is not packed so tightly as to be uncomfortable for everyone. One of the passengers standing is a woman in her thirties holding two relatively full shopping bags. John is not particularly paying attention to the woman, but he is cognizant of her.

Joan, by contrast, is distinctly aware that the woman is uncomfortable. Thus different aspects of the situation are "salient" for John and Joan. That is, what is fully and explicitly present to John's consciousness about the woman is that she is standing holding some bags; but what is in that sense salient for Joan is the woman's discomfort. That an aspect of a situation is not salient for an agent does not mean she is entirely unaware of it. She could be aware of it in a less than fully explicit way. One can imagine, for example, that Joan asks John, "Does that woman seem uncomfortable to you?" This question might have the effect of making

John realize that at some level he had been aware of the woman's discomfort all along but that he had failed fully to take it in. This might be because he simply was not paying more attention to the situation.

It seems natural here to talk of awareness of a situation, or of an aspect of it, existing "at different levels." An aspect or feature can be more or less salient for, or "taken in" by, an agent. This notion of salience, admitting of degrees, preserves this idea; by contrast, that of "perceiving situations under different descriptions"—sometimes used to express the way the same situation can be seen differently by different perceivers—does not readily do so. (This is not meant to deny that some aspect of a situation not encompassed in an agent's salience-consciousness could be totally outside of the perceiver's awareness.)[3]

In this situation, the difference between what is salient for John and for Joan is of moral significance. Joan saliently perceives (hereafter I will just say "perceives") the woman's good (i.e., her comfort) as at stake in a way that John does not. Joan perceives a morally relevant value at stake, while John does not.

One morally significant aspect of this difference is the way that perception is the setting for action. John's perception provides him with no reason to offer to help the woman.[4] Whereas, in involving the woman's good, Joan's perception of the situation already provides her with a reason for action not based in her self-interest or projects.

But the moral significance of the difference between John's and Joan's perception of the situation lies not only in the relation between that perception and the taking of beneficent action. It lies in the fact of perception itself. We can see this more clearly if we imagine John's and Joan's perceptions to be fairly typical of each of them. John, let us say, often fails to take in people's discomfort, while Joan is characteristically sensitive to such discomfort. It is thus in character for the discomfort to be salient for Joan but not for John. That is to say, a morally significant aspect of situations facing John fails to be salient for him, and this is a

3. Note that to speak of a feature of a situation as "salient" for an agent does not (necessarily) mean that the agent takes that feature to be action-warranting. It only means that the given feature occupies the agent's most explicit level of consciousness concerning the situation. I mean for perceptual salience to provide the setting in which an agent decides to act but not to be definitionally tied to action or reasons for action. A salient perception of some morally significant aspect of a situation could in some situations inform sympathy, indignation, or regret yet not action. In fact it might be misleading here to refer to the "agent" the way I am doing (but I can think of no better single term). For the aspect of the individual as a full moral person with which I am concerned here is not so much her agency but something which takes place prior to her taking herself to be called upon to exercise that agency. Unless she already perceives her situation in a certain way in the first place, she will not engage her agency. See n. 8 below.

4. This may be overstated. John might believe that out of politeness he as a male should give up his seat for a female, or for an older female, and he might offer her his seat for this reason. One might or might not call such an act of politeness morally significant, but in any case it would be a different moral significance than to offer her the seat out of a perception of her discomfort.

defect in his character— perhaps not a very serious moral defect, but a defect nevertheless.[5] He misses something of the moral reality confronting him.

Again, the deficiency lies not only in his failure to act. For we can contrast with John someone who does perfectly clearly perceive other people's discomfort but is totally unmoved by it; he simply does not care, and this is why he does not offer to help. John, as I am envisioning him, is not callous and uncaring in this way. We can imagine him as someone who, when others' discomfort is brought to his attention, is as sympathetic and willing to offer help as a person of average moral sensitivities. His failure to act stems from his failure to see (with the appropriate salience), not from callousness about other people's discomfort. His deficiency is a situational self-absorption or attentional laziness.[6] So there is a different moral significance to "failing to act" depending on the character or explanation of that failure. (To say that moral perception is of significance in its own right is not to take a stand on whether it is better to perceive and not to act than not to perceive in the first place. Accurate moral perception is a good in its own right, but like other moral goods it is so only ceteris paribus.)

Example 2.—Theresa is the administrator of a department. One of her subordinates, Julio, has been stricken with a debilitating condition in his leg causing him frequent pain. He approaches Theresa to help work out a plan by which the company and in particular she and his division can accommodate his disability. Theresa is unable to appreciate Julio's disability and the impact it is having on his work. While in principle Theresa accepts the company's legal obligation requirement to accommodate to Julio's disability, in fact she continually offers Julio less than he needs and is entitled to.

More generally, Theresa makes Julio feel uncomfortable in approaching her and gives him the impression that she thinks he is perhaps too self-pitying and should just "pull himself together." It is not that Theresa fails entirely to see Julio as "disabled" and as "in pain," but she does fail fully to grasp what this means for him and fails fully to take in

5. This is not to imply that a failure of perception is morally significant only as a revelation of a larger defect of character. The failure of perception can be significant in its own right within the given situation, just as a motive can be bad in itself on a given occasion, as well as in its revealing of a general defect of character. Instances of perception and motives in specific situations can be morally criticizable even when they are out of character for the agent. Regarding the subway example, however, it may be misleading to say that it is morally criticizable for a passenger to fail to perceive the discomfort of a passenger on a particular occasion; the failure may be too insignificant, and the moral relationship between the seated and the standing passenger too attenuated, for it to count as a moral failure. It may, however, be criticizable insofar as this failure is expressive of a general failure to perceive discomfort.

6. Another case would be someone who "tunes out" in crowded, overstimulated environments like subways but is quite sensitive in one-on-one interactions.

or acknowledge that pain. The level of his pain and its impact on his mental state is insufficiently salient for Theresa.

Theresa is failing to perceive or acknowledge something morally significant—namely, Julio's physical pain and his distress at the impact of his condition on his work situation. Yet (let us imagine) Theresa has a distinct personal resistance to acknowledging Julio's pain. It is not simply a matter, as it is for John (as I am envisioning him), of situational self-absorption, or something which could be corrected simply by calling Theresa's attention to it. (For Julio has repeatedly tried to do precisely this.) Perhaps Theresa unconsciously identifies pain with weakness. When people evince pain in her presence, or describe pain which they have had, Theresa becomes uncomfortable. She is inclined to think they are overdoing it; she finds herself having feelings of contempt toward such persons, though perhaps she is not aware of this. (One can imagine various psychodynamic accounts of this: Theresa may have an irrational fear of pain herself and may have developed a defense against this fear by not wanting to acknowledge pain in others.)

The failure to be in touch with part of the moral reality which confronts her is a deficiency in Theresa's response to this situation (bound up with a deficiency of character as well).[7] Note that in this situation adequate moral perception is not only a matter of making "moral discriminations"—noting morally distinct elements in the situation. It is also a matter of the moral aspect of the situation—here, Julio's disability—weighing adequately within one's (Theresa's) view of the situation. Theresa must have a certain degree of empathy for Julio in his situation in order for her to perceive his pain with an appropriate degree of salience. The notion of "moral discrimination" overintellectualizes Theresa's task (and failure) in the situation and omits the necessarily affective dimension to the empathic understanding which is often (though by no means always) required for fully adequate moral perception.[8]

Theresa's deficiency is bound up with, but not exhausted by, her failure to take adequate steps to provide accommodation to Julio's disability. Theresa and Julio have a role relationship which grounds her obligation under the law or company policy to provide accommodation to Julio. But I think we regard this role relationship as doing more than this. It grounds the thought that Theresa ought to appreciate Julio's situation

7. I mean to be using the notion of "moral reality" pre-theoretically, without taking any stand on the current debates on "moral realism." My notion of "moral reality" is, however, in some degree inspired by Iris Murdoch's work. So I want to make clear that I am not accepting the Platonic cast of her view of moral reality. I would argue that there are two somewhat distinct pictures of "moral reality" in Murdoch—the first quite Platonic and the second meaning something like "other persons and their situations." My own sense of the term is closer to the latter Murdochian notion, though perhaps somewhat broader.

8. On the role of emotion in understanding the situation of others, see Nussbaum, "Discernment of Perception"; Sherman, *Fabric of Character;* and Lawrence Blum, "Emotion and Reality" (Boston University Colloquium for the Philosophy of Science, 1986, typescript).

and explains why her not appreciating (with the appropriate salience) his disability is a morally criticizable failure on her part. Because of their work relationship, his state of being is very much part of her moral reality.

Can it be replied to the claim that perception of morally significant aspects of situations is of moral value in its own right that in fact this perception is morally neutral, since a person could have accurate moral perception, yet misuse what she perceives to harm the other person, or otherwise to commit a wrong act? But even if the premise of this argument is true, the conclusion does not follow. Any psychological phenomenon can be put to bad use, including devotion to duty or principle (the principles might be bad ones), compassion or sympathy (which may lead someone to neglect moral requirements). But we do not say that devotion to duty or principle are morally neutral just because they can be put to bad use.

What it would take for Theresa to allow others' pain to be salient for her in the appropriate way (and circumstances) would involve coming to grips with and working through her resistances. Why does she identify pain with weakness? She would have to come to understand herself better in these areas. Self-knowledge would be integral to her moral improvement. Note that this self-reflection would have little to do with "impartiality" or principle. Though it involves thinking about oneself in relation to others, it is not a form of thought characterized by impartiality (on this point, see Margaret Walker's paper, in this issue), or by the attempt to arrive at principles. It is rather reflection that tries to understand a particular individual (oneself) with regard to her moral character. This point may seem obvious but is worth mentioning, as one sometimes finds the acknowledgment of a need for moral reflection cited as an argument in favor of principle-based or impartialist views of ethics as against one more strongly centered in virtue or emotion. In fact, moral reflection by itself is neutral as between such theories.

Example 3.—Tim, a white male, is waiting for a taxi at a train station. Waiting near him are a black woman and her daughter. A cab comes by, past the woman and her daughter, and stops in front of him. Tim, with relief, gets in the cab.

Tim's relief at having gotten a cab might block from his full awareness the cab driver's having passed up the black mother and child in favor of him. What is salient in Tim's perception might simply be the presence of the cab.

But suppose that once in the cab Tim, idly ruminating, puts the pieces of the situation together and comes to see it now (in retrospect) in a different way. He sees the driver as having intentionally passed up the woman and child. Suppose he also infers that the driver did this out of racism (e.g., because he just prefers not to have blacks in his cab or does not want to go into neighborhoods where he imagines the woman will ask him to go [though these are morally distinct reasons they are, perhaps in different ways, both racist or involve racism]). Whether Tim is correct in this inference is not so important as whether the inference

is a plausible one, which I am assuming it to be. This perception of racism becomes his "take" on the situation. He now sees an issue of injustice in the situation in a way he did not at first. He gains moral insight regarding the situation. He thinks about why he did not recognize the injustice in the situation before getting in the cab. Prior to any action Tim might take in the situation, it is (ceteris paribus) a (morally) better thing for him to have recognized the racial injustice than to not have done so.

Note some features of moral perception in this situation, in contrast to examples 1 and 2. First, Tim's (ultimate, not initial) take on the situation involves both construal and inference in the way that the other agents' do not. Tim has to construe the situation in a certain way in order to see it as "the cab driver passing up the woman and her child." And he has to infer the racist motive. Both these processes involve some degree of imagination, not necessarily required in the other two cases, though the difference may well be only one of degree.

The example also brings out the way that perception depends on the agent's already possessing certain moral categories. Let us imagine (though this seems very implausible) that Tim has never heard of nor experienced racial discrimination before, so that while he might come to think it unfair of the driver to have passed up a prospective passenger, he (Tim) would nevertheless fail to grasp the further wrongness involved in racial injustice. Lacking the moral concept of "racism" (or "racial discrimination") he would then not have been able to perceive the racism in the situation. (Of course, the agents in examples 1 and 2 must have the concepts of "discomfort," "pain," and "disability" to gain an adequate moral perception of their situations too.)

I count Tim's construal of the driver passing up the prospective passenger, and his inference of racism, within the rubric of "perception," for I am including within "perception" anything contributing to or encompassed within the agent's take on the situation—his salience-perception—prior to his deliberating about what to do. Tim is not led to suppose the racist motive as a result of deliberating about how to act in the situation; he is merely idly focusing on the situation, not necessarily intentionally or even fully conscious that he is doing so. The point is (and this will be discussed in more detail below) that perception occurs prior to deliberation and prior to taking the situation to be one in which one needs to deliberate. It is precisely because the situation is seen in a certain way that the agent takes it as one in which she feels pulled to deliberate.[9]

9. Note that this definition of situational perception is relative to a deliberative event. Once an agent begins deliberating in a situation, the process of deliberation can further affect her perception of the situation. (If I am remembering accurately, I am indebted for this point to Michael Slote and Margaret Walker at the Hollins conference.) It can lead her to see different aspects, to see as applicable moral concepts which she initially did not, and to see previous aspects with a different degree of salience. That perception will then

II

One familiar line of criticism of impartialism or of any principle- (or rule-) based ethic emphasizes the particularity of (moral) situations. It is not the rule but some other moral capacity of the agent which tells her that the particular situation she faces falls under a given rule. The accurate or adequate assessment of particular situations—a knowledge or perception of particulars—is not accounted for by the mere possession of rules themselves.

This perception of particular situations is taken up by Charles Larmore in his book *Patterns of Moral Complexity,*[10] in which he points out that Kant recognized the need for something to bridge rule and particular situation, and Kant called this the power of "judgment": "Judgment will be the faculty of subsuming under rules; that is, of distinguishing whether something does or does not stand under a given rule. . . . Judgment is a peculiar talent which can be practiced only, and can not be taught. . . . Although admirable in understanding [an individual] may be wanting in natural power of judgment. He may comprehend the universal in abstracto, and yet not be able to distinguish whether a case in concreto comes under it."[11] Larmore rightly credits Aristotle with having more to say than Kant about the need for such judgment, for emphasizing the particularity involved in exercising it, and for delineating its place in ethical deliberation and conduct.

I will discuss further the nature of such "judgment" as a moral operation required by but often omitted in the account of agency in principle-based ethical theories. Then I will argue that what I have called "moral perception" incorporates moral operations and capacities that are not captured by this notion of "judgment." This discussion will yield a more complex and multifaceted understanding of the role of "particularity" in ethics. Moreover, some aspects of moral perception—and of the par-

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provide the context for the next level of deliberation. Note that seeing a situation in moral categories does not entail seeing one's moral agency as engaged by that situation. People often see a situation as involving a wrong but not regard themselves as morally pulled to do anything about it. For example, even when Tim comes to see an injustice as having taken place, he may think of that injustice as over and done with and not implying anything for him to do about it. The issue of what makes a moral being see her sense of agency as engaged by a situation—and how perception fits into this—deserves further exploration than I can undertake here. It is striking, I think, how unproblematic this issue has typically been taken to be within contemporary moral theory. For a very interesting empirical study raising important issues on this matter, see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), chap. 3.

10. See n. 2 above.

11. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. L. W. Beck (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), p. 177:A133–A134. See also Kant in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* trans. L. W. Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), p. 5:389: "No doubt these laws require a power of judgment sharpened by experience, partly in order to decide in what cases they apply."

ticularity connected with them—become invisible if we think that an adequate ethical theory consists of rules and principles supplemented by the moral capacities which allow us to bring those rules to bear on particular situations.

There are two distinct features of "judgment" conceived as Larmore (following Kant) does, as linking rules and particular situations. One is to know what a given rule calls upon one to do in a given situation. Many rules or principles are formulated in too coarse-grained a fashion to capture the relevant moral detail in particular situations and thus require something beyond the rule itself to apply them adequately to the particular situation. Larmore rightly points out that some principles require a greater role for the exercise of this function of judgment than do others.[12] For example, in the example of the purportedly racist cab driver (example 3), suppose Tim, the rider, holds the principle that one should take a stand against racism. How best to do this—or even discerning which of the actions he can think of (e.g., making the driver go back to the train station on the off chance that the woman and her child have not yet gotten a cab, telling the driver he disapproves of what he assumes to be the driver's racism, making the driver stop so he can get out of the cab, engaging the driver in conversation about why he passed up the woman and child) would count as taking a stand against racism—is no simple matter. It requires judgment about the particularities of the situation.[13] So this capacity presents at least a necessary supplement to traditional principle-based ethics. For knowing how to apply the principle—knowing how to think about the issues involved and to pick the best among the possible actions instantiating the principle—involves a moral capacity (or capacities) beyond commitment or adherence to, or recognition of the validity of, the principle itself (e.g., the principle of trying to counter racism or injustice). Tim could be entirely and sincerely committed to opposing racism and injustice (and for the right reasons), yet be a poor judge of what doing this actually involves in this or other particular situations.[14]

One can see the need for this aspect of judgment to fill out the conception of moral agency in a principle-based ethic by considering

12. Larmore, p. 5.

13. Discussing Aristotle's account of deliberation, David Wiggins points out that much deliberation is not an attempt to find the best means to a given end, but a search for the "best specification" of that end. David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," in *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics,* ed. A. Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 228. My point here is that knowing how best to apply a principle (which one already sees as applicable to a given situation) to the situation requires a kind of moral judgment neither encompassed nor guaranteed by the possession of the principle itself. It is a form of judgment involved with grasping the morally significant particulars of a given situation.

14. For a more detailed argument for the view that different moral capacities may be brought into play in applying a principle than in coming to hold the principle, see Lawrence Blum, "Gilligan and Kohlberg: Issues for Moral Theory," *Ethics* 98 (1988): 485–86.

Kant's notion of "imperfect duties."[15] In contrast to "perfect" duties, imperfect duties (such as beneficence) do not prescribe a specific action in a specific situation; they prescribe the adoption of a general end or maxim (e.g., the happiness of others) but do not specify exactly how or toward whom the beneficent actions are to be carried out. On one interpretation, it is morally indifferent when and how one carries out the duty—for example, helping others—as long as one does so on some (appropriate) occasions.[16] Such a view would appear to imply that there is no distinctively moral work to be done in choosing when to act from imperfect duty and in knowing how to do so. Since the scope of imperfect duties is very great, this could be taken as a defense of the view that an ethic of principle is adequate to cover virtually the entire domain of the moral life.

But this view of duty neglects that it is in fact a moral matter, and not merely one of personal preference or moral indifference, how one carries out a duty or precept. It takes moral sensitivity (*a*) to know what counts as exemplifying particular moral principles, (*b*) to know when it is and is not appropriate to instantiate given principles, and (*c*) to be able oneself to carry out the action in question (e.g., of being beneficent). This sensitivity goes beyond possessing the principle (plus the strength of will to act on it); it is neither guaranteed nor encompassed by the commitment to the principle (plus strength of will) itself.

My argument here is meant not as a critique of the notion of an "imperfect duty" but only to show that a distinct capacity for moral judgment, as the ability to bring principle to bear on particular situations, is needed for moral agents to produce action in accord with imperfect duties. While Kant recognized the need for such moral judgment, he did not appear to regard this capacity as a distinctly moral one, and, at least in his major ethical writings, seemed to think his moral theory complete without an account of what is specifically involved in (moral) judgment.

A second feature of moral judgment not generally taken up by philosophers in the principle-based traditions is the recognition of features of a situation as having moral significance and thus as being features which must be taken into account in constructing a principle fully adequate

15. My account of imperfect duties is drawn from Thomas Hill's often-cited account in "Kant on Imperfect Duty and Supererogation," *Kant-Studien* 62. Jahrgang, Heft 1 (1971): 55–76. This account is followed in Marcia Baron, "Kantian Ethics and Supererogation," *Journal of Philosophy* 84 (1987): 237–62.

16. See Hill, p. 64. In the same spirit, Onora O'Neill says, "What is left optional by fundamental imperfect obligation is selection not merely of a specific way of enacting the obligation but of those for whom the obligation is to be performed" ("Children's Right and Children's Lives," in *Constructions of Reason: Explorations of Kant's Practical Philosophy* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989]). In a brief footnote giving a provisional definition of perfect and imperfect duties, Kant says that perfect duties allow no exceptions "in the interest of inclination," thus implying that imperfect duties do allow for such exceptions (*Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals,* 39:422).

to handle the situation. If I am presented with a specific situation I must know, for example, that the fact that it involves promise keeping and harm to an individual are morally relevant features, while the fact that it involves taking a walk or eating cereal does not. This component of moral judgment is antecedent to the one just discussed. For before the issue of implementing a principle comes to the fore for the agent, she must know that specific features of the situation before her (as she characterizes that situation to herself) are morally significant ones and, hence, "pull for" specific moral principles.

This feature of moral judgment, as an issue for Kantian ethics in particular, has been explored by Barbara Herman in "The Practice of Moral Judgment." Herman says that if the categorical imperative is regarded as a testing procedure for already-formed maxims of action, then (given that a proposed action may fall under several descriptions), how an agent knows which features of a situation are relevant and which irrelevant in constructing the to-be-tested maxim of her action is itself a moral matter. The moral knowledge involved in a commitment to the categorical imperative cannot by itself account for nor guarantee this prior knowledge. For this feature of moral agency, Herman posits a different kind of moral knowledge, captured in what she calls "rules of moral salience."[17]

Principle-based traditions have generally failed to attend to or note the specific moral character of either of these aspects of moral judgment of particular situations: (1) knowing how to apply rules or principles and (2) recognizing given features of a situation as morally significant ones.

III

I now want to suggest that the phenomenon of moral perception encompasses something beyond these two features of moral judgment and that discussions of judgment have often tended either to conflate these different operations or to neglect those connected with moral perception entirely. (I am not meaning to rest much on my use of the terms 'judgment' and 'perception' here. Either term can be used to refer to some of the operations I have included within the other. What is important is to recognize the range of distinct moral operations and capacities involved.)

To know what to do about the cab driver's presumed racism, Tim must know that racism is a morally significant feature of the situation that he must take into account in figuring out how best to act. (This is Barbara Herman's point.) But such knowledge does not guarantee that Tim perceives the racism in the driver's behavior in the first place. Such perceiving involves a different kind of, or aspect of, moral sensibility or understanding. It means, as we have seen, that Tim must see the situation in terms other than personal relief at finding a cab. He must see the

17. Barbara Herman, "The Practice of Moral Judgment," *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1985): 414–36.

driver as having passed over the woman and child. He must use his knowledge and imagination to suppose a racist motive. Tim must recognize that what has transpired is in fact racism before he can get to the point of using his knowledge that racism is a morally significant feature of a situation to help him figure out what to do, or how to construct a principle to guide his action, and then to determine what action best instantiates that principle.[18]

It is moral perception which constructs what an agent is faced with as "a (moral) situation" in the first place. The idea of moral judgment as bridging general rule and particular situation depends on a prior individuating of "the situation." It is moral perception which does that individuating, thus providing a setting in which moral judgment carries out its task.

A second way in which moral perception goes beyond moral judgment is that some morally significant perception takes place outside the context of rules and rule-application altogether. In the subway example (1), when Joan perceives the standing woman's discomfort, her offer to help need not be mediated by a rule, principle, or precept; she may be acting out of direct compassion, an emotion-based sentiment in which the woman's discomfort is directly taken as a reason for helping. So the role of moral perception here in tuning in to a morally significant feature of the situation is not to help the agent select the relevant rule (or construct an appropriate maxim) and then to (test it and) apply it. Rather, the morally charged description of the situation which is salient for that moral agent (e.g., that the woman is uncomfortable) itself already contains her reason for action, a reason which draws her to act without mediation by principle.[19]

A third and more encompassing way that moral judgment understood as the bridge between principle and action narrows the scope of morality is in its confinement to the task of generating moral action. Moral perception and moral understanding of particular situations are significant not only for their role in generating (right) action. Right action not informed by understanding of the moral realities confronting one (even when done from a morally good motive) loses some, and sometimes all, of its moral value. Suppose, for example, that Theresa (in example 2) is prevailed upon by her superiors to grant Julio the accommodation to his disability that he requests. Perhaps she even becomes convinced that this is the

18. On pp. 423–24 of her article, Herman refers indifferently to the perception of distress and the recognition of distress as being morally significant. Thus she appears to recognize what I am calling moral perception, but she fails to appreciate its distinctness from the operation of moral judgment.

19. I cannot here join the complex question whether reasons of compassion such as Joan operates from here can be derived from, are in some strong sense grounded in, or are required to be restricted by (impartialist) moral principles. I take up some of these issues in "Iris Murdoch and the Domain of the Moral," *Philosophical Studies* 50 (1986): 343–67. For a critique of the argument of that piece, see Jonathan Adler, "Particularity, Gilligan, and the Two-Levels View: A Reply," *Ethics* 100 (1989): 149–56.

right thing to do yet is still unable really to appreciate Julio's condition with the appropriate salience. Even though she does the right thing (and may even do it for a moral reason, in coming to believe that it is her duty), her action is diminished from a moral point of view by lacking the appropriate moral understanding of Julio's condition. As argued earlier, Theresa ought to perceive and understand Julio's disability with the appropriate salience, as part of her work relationship with him; and this does not mean only (though it does entail) that she should engage in the correct behavior from the appropriate motive.

Moreover, as argued earlier, just or accurate moral perception is of value in its own right. We praise, admire, and encourage correct perception and moral insight prior to and partly independent of its issuing in right action. In the cab example, let us envision an observer of the scene, Yasuko, who sees the cab driver pass up the black woman and her child. Yasuko senses that the woman is not only irritated and angry at having not gotten the cab which she had reason to expect would be available to her but also experiences an affront to her dignity and a sense of being shamed because she too thinks the driver passed her up for racist reasons. Thus Yasuko sees—perceives—a violation of dignity which escapes Tim. Let us imagine that Yasuko's seeing the violation of dignity in this particular case is connected to a more pervasive characteristic of her moral sensitivities—namely, that she is more deeply concerned about and tuned in to issues of dignity in people's lives than are most persons. She has a deeper understanding of and insight into injustice and dignity and why they are important. This sensitivity cannot be understood simply as a disposition to perform certain actions. It is more pervasive than that, informing her emotional reactions to things, what she notices, what is salient for her, and the like, and particular actions and emotions can be seen as stemming from this sensitivity.[20]

20. The collapsing of the significance of moral perception into judgment of right action—and a consequent masking of its full value—is particularly striking in John McDowell's influential article "Virtue and Reason" (*Monist* 62 [1979]: 331–50). For McDowell, citing Iris Murdoch, gives a central role to perception in ethics. He rightly connects the importance of perception to the limitations of an ethic of articulatable rules or procedures, arguing (following Aristotle) that rules cannot capture the full moral sensibility of a person of good character. McDowell speaks of sensitivities to aspects of moral reality as (in a given situation) being "salient" for the agent. In doing so he points toward the Murdochian view that awareness of moral reality is a moral task and accomplishment in its own right and action is only one part of the appropriate response to the perceiving of moral reality. However, as McDowell develops his argument, the notions of perception, salience, and sensitivity become defined solely in terms of the generating of right actions. What is to be perceived becomes, for McDowell, that consideration in a situation the acting on which will produce right action (cf. p. 331 and elsewhere). The notion of salience is cashed out as that moral consideration among all those present which would be picked out as the one to act on if the agent is to engage in right action. Lost is the idea of moral reality the accurate perception of which is both morally good in its own right and also provides the setting in which moral response in its broadest sense takes place. Early in the article (p. 332) McDowell speaks of "specialized sensitivities" to different aspects of moral reality. (I discuss this issue below in

To summarize: There are three importantly distinct moral operations omitted from traditional principle-based accounts of ethics and needed at least to supplement it: (1) perceiving (what are in fact the morally significant) features of a situation confronting one (including herein the perceptual individuating of the 'situation' as a morally significant one in the first place); (2) recognizing those features as morally significant ones, to be taken into account in deliberating about what to do—specifically about which principles govern the situation; (3) knowing how to implement the principles one takes to be conclusive in determining what to do—discerning what actions constitute the best specification of those principles. And there are two ways that moral perception reveals a limit to principles themselves: (1) moral perception, and action stemming from it, can go on outside the context of principles entirely; (2) accurate moral perception is good in its own right.

IV

Let us return to something that Charles Larmore says about "judgment." Larmore says that Aristotle himself had little to say about the way in which such judgment is exercised—only that it is acquired by experience and practice. Yet Larmore does not regard this absence as a defect in Aristotle's view. For he agrees that, "although we can understand what kinds of situations call for moral judgment, the kinds of tasks that moral judgment is to accomplish, and the preconditions for its acquisition, there

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more detail.) This conception promises a vision of a complex moral reality, sensitivity to different aspects of which (e.g., injustice, discomfort, physical pain, racism, dignity) is the setting for but is not definitionally tied to the production of right action. But McDowell does not deliver on this promise, for his idea that there is unity in the virtues is taken to imply that each "sensitivity" entails all the others (p. 333). A consequence of this is to undermine the idea of a complex of sensitivities, reducing this simply to a unified awareness of the single rightness-generating characteristic in the situation. McDowell's defense of Aristotle's view that only judgment or discernment (perhaps guided by the idea of the mean) can tell us the right or noble thing to do in the particular situation confronting the agent is an important alternative picture, or at least a corrective, to a principle-centered views of ethics. Yet McDowell's notion of judgment is still confined to the discernment of right action rather than to the broader compass of right or good emotional, perceptual, and imaginative response to a situation. Aristotle does not of course confine himself to right action; for him emotions are an integral part of virtue, as has been emphasized by both Nussbaum, "Discernment of Perception"; and Sherman, *Fabric of Character*. Nevertheless, the sensitivity to moral features—to moral reality—which I have argued to be of moral significance in its own right is still not fully captured by supplementing the notion of right action with right emotion. It is not only a matter of having the right amount of anger (for example) toward the right person on the (appropriate) occasion in question, either by itself or accompanying a right or noble action. Such a view still confines moral life too much to specific occasions (calling for action or emotion) and fails to bring out (as discussed above) that both the action and the emotion appropriate on specific occasions are expressions of sensitivities and forms of moral perception which pervade the agent's view of the world. Sherman's account, and Nussbaum's to a slightly lesser extent, do in fact attempt to attribute to Aristotle the broader view of moral perception which I am developing here.

is very little positive we can say in general about the nature of moral judgment itself."[21]

Perhaps one reason Larmore thinks little can be said about moral judgment is connected with the way he construes the 'particularity' of moral judgment. He appears to be thinking that because judgment is particularistic, therefore nothing general can be said about it.[22] Particularity here seems to be taken implicitly as the inexpressible counterpart of general rules (as the earlier quote from Kant also suggests). Such a picture contributes to mystifying the operation of situational perception and judgment.

Our previous discussion suggests that the way people perceive particular situations, and their ability to discern the morally significant character of particular situations, is not mysterious and ineffable but is bound up with general features of people's character and their moral makeup. This is partly because (as will be discussed in greater detail below) the perception of particularities is often a sensitivity to particular sorts of moral features—injustice, racism, physical pain, discomfort—and general things can be said about what promotes those sensitivities, about the obstacles to such sensitivities, and about how such sensitivities develop. Once particularity is broken down into particular sorts of moral features and sensitivity to their presence, the door is open to exploring the ways that imagination, attention, empathy, critical reason, habit, exposure to new moral categories, and the like contribute to the formation of those sensitivities.

Besides the implication of ineffability, a further way that Larmore's (and others') conception of moral judgment blocks inquiry into its operations—and the operation of moral perception as well—is the idea of "moral judgment" (or "practical judgment," "situational intuition," "judgment of particulars") as a unitary faculty. This conception has been preserved, in fact, in the way I have up to now been talking about perception—as if "perceiving the particularities of situations" was one single kind of psychological/moral process.[23]

But situational perception is not a unified capacity. Different parts of one's moral makeup are brought to bear in "seeing" (and not seeing) different features of situations, of moral reality. Different aspects of moral reality can draw on different sorts of sensitivities or forms of awareness.

21. Larmore, p. 19.

22. Ibid., p. 15.

23. Note the way Nussbaum refers to moral perception, in a discussion of the importance of such perception to an ethical life: "The subtleties of a complex ethical situation must be seized in a confrontation with the situation itself, by a faculty that is suited to address it as a complex whole" ("Discernment of Perception," pp. 172–73); see also Nussbaum, *Fragility*, p. 301 (top of page). The idea of such perception as "*a* faculty" is precisely what I want to criticize here, though as I mention I have been guilty of this mode of expression and conceptualization as well. (In fact Nussbaum's excellent discussion of perception has been formative in my own thinking on these matters.)

In a way it is misleading to speak of someone as "sensitive to particulars" (or "good at perceiving the moral character of particulars") *tout court.* Some people are better at perceiving some sorts of particulars than other sorts.

Here are some morally distinct features of situations which some persons may be better at perceiving than others: temptations to compromise one's moral integrity, suffering, racism, dishonesty, violations of someone's rights. Even the subcategory of moral considerations having to do with other persons' well-being is not really a unified one. For example, Theresa's being "blocked" in her perceptions of physical pain would not preclude her from being sensitive to and understanding about other sorts of needs or concerns, even in the same other persons. Another example: the hurt of being treated unjustly (as in the example of Yasuko's perception of the black woman) is (in part) a different kind of injury than a hurt not necessarily connected with injustice (e.g., disappointment due to failure in a fair competition, or personal rejection where no one is to blame).

In the same, restricted area of moral considerations having to do with others' well-being, a moral agent's sensitivities can also fail to be unified across different types of persons. Some people are generally sensitive to the feelings of adults but not of children, and others the opposite. More generally, person A may be sensitive to the plight of members of certain groups or people sharing a certain condition (e.g., blacks, Jews, the socially excluded) but less so, or not at all, to that of others.[24]

The complexity of the way that moral sensitivity and perception operate within persons—and the variety of processes involved in an individual's coming to have the multifarious sensitivities—can also be seen in the variety of obstacles to accurate moral perception. For example, what it would take for John to see the subway woman's discomfort might be simply for him to attend to her without his usual self-absorbed distractions. What it would take for Theresa to acknowledge Julio's pain would require her coming to terms with herself—working through her resistances. This would involve self-knowledge and self-exploration in a way perhaps not essential in John's case.

My view is not that there is some absolute number of distinct moral sensitivities. After all, the ones I have already mentioned could be broken down even further. I mean only to point to an oversimplification in the way sensitivity to particularity is portrayed when seen on the model of a unitary faculty. Such a view fails to reveal—and thus blocks further scrutiny into—the multiplicity of psychic processes and capacities involved in moral perception and moral judgment.

24. The character of Mrs. Hoffman in Carol Ascher's *The Flood* (Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press, 1987) is a wonderful example of someone compassionate toward anyone she is able to see as a victim of discrimination, or as a kind of refugee (e.g., due to the flood), but often uncompassionate, insensitive, and harsh to others.

This oversimplification and overunification of moral/psychic phenomena is not confined to discussions of the limitations of an ethic of rule and principle. One can see it also in philosophies which center on emotion-based phenomena such as sympathy or empathy. My discussion suggests that sympathy and empathy are in a sense themselves not unitary phenomena but, rather, collections of at least somewhat distinct sensitivities to different aspects of other people's well-being (discomfort, physical pain, the hurt of injustice, the hurt of disappointment, etc.). One implication of this is that when moral philosophers and educators talk about cultivating sympathy and empathy, accomplishing this will involve nurturing or developing some distinct sensitivities and will involve different tasks and processes for different persons with respect to different objects of sympathy or empathy.[25]

Larmore's idea that "practical judgment" is a unitary faculty about which little can be said (since it depends on intuiting particulars) accompanies the idea that the only way one can improve one's capacity for such judgment is through practice and habit. There is nothing to tell people about how to exercise judgment; one simply has to "do it." But seeing the multifarious nature of practical judgment as perception of particulars both throws light on the ways and extent to which practice and habit do teach practical judgment and also broadens the methods by which people can learn to perceive particulars.

Iris Murdoch's notion of an "obstacle" (discussed above), which distorts or blocks accurate perception of moral reality, is helpful here. Such obstacles may prevent an individual from being able to learn from experience and practice how to perceive and judge well in some area of life. For example, Theresa may deal with many people who have physical pain yet may never get any better at grasping what is going on with them and judging what to do about it. Her own unconscious resistance to opening herself to others' physical pain may constitute an obstacle not only to accurate perception but also to learning in the way suggested in

25. E. V. Spelman, "The Virtue of Feeling and the Feeling of Virtue," in *Feminist Ethics: New Essays,* ed. C. Card (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), develops this point in connection with race and class differences within the same gender. She argues that persons (and in particular women) who are caring and concerned toward others of their own race and class may yet not be so toward women of other races and classes. Owen Flanagan and Kathryn Jackson, "Justice, Care, and Gender: The Kohlberg-Gilligan Debate Revisited," *Ethics* 97 (1987): 622–37, make the point that several distinct moral capacities might well be part of what Gilligan calls the morality of care. See also Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality: Ethics and Psychological Realism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), chaps. 9–11, for an important assessment of Gilligan's work. In "Three Myths of Moral Theory" (in Rorty, *Mind in Action* [Boston: Beacon, 1988], p. 291), Amelie Rorty notes the diversity of attitudes covered by concepts like "respect" and "love." In general, Rorty's work (in the above volume and elsewhere) is an important source of insight into the multifarious nature of moral sentiments, attitudes, and virtues, and a caution against the oversimplification of the realm of moral psychology found in much moral theory.

Aristotle's idea of habit, practice, and experience.[26] Coming directly to grip with one's obstacles may in some cases be necessary for opening oneself to certain aspects of one's moral reality, as well as to being able to learn from experience and practice. Theresa may need to work through—perhaps in some form of therapy—her deep and partly unconscious association of physical pain with weakness, though Murdoch herself would be suspicious of such therapy, and, more generally, of any attempt to come to grips with one's moral obstacles by focusing explicitly on them.[27] Yet Murdoch's pessimism about moral change in the face of such obstacles, though insightful about the dangers of self-absorption in the attempt to rid oneself of that very self-absorption, seems overdone. Progress in working through and mitigating these moral obstacles can be made.[28]

V

I want briefly to situate the criticisms (developed through considering moral perception and particularity) that I have made of principle-based ethical theories in relation to some other important and influential criticisms also made of impartialist or principle-based views: (1) Those which challenge the (impartialist) form of moral principles—for example, by claiming that some principles require greater moral concern toward persons related to us.[29] (2) Those addressing the relative force of moral and nonmoral considerations (e.g., connected with the notion of a "personal point of view"), criticizing impartialism for the assumption that impartial morality necessarily takes precedence over all other practical standpoints.[30] (3)

26. Sherman interprets Aristotle's notion of "habit" to include the kind of self-knowledge and redirection of emotion and perception that I am contrasting with a more mechanical conception of habit (see *Fabric of Character,* chap. 5).

27. I cannot find a citation for this wariness about therapy in Murdoch's *Sovereignty of Good* and suspect I may be remembering something said by a character in one of her novels. In any case, many of her novels do exemplify this wariness or suspicion of psychotherapy as involving yet another form of diversion from the task of confronting the moral reality external to oneself.

28. In the section from which the passage from Kant cited earlier is taken—"Introduction to 'Transcendental Judgment in General'"—Kant seems somewhat contradictory in his views concerning the prospects for improving one's capacity for judgment of particulars. On the one hand, he agrees with Aristotle about the necessity for practice and adds that lack of exposure to examples of particular kinds of situations is a remediable source of poor practical judgment. But in a footnote on the same page (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. N. Kemp Smith, unabridged ed. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965], p. 178) he says, "Deficiency in judgment is what is ordinarily called stupidity and for such a failing there is no remedy."

29. See, e.g., John Cottingham, "Ethics and Impartiality," *Philosophical Studies* 43 (1983): 83–99; Christina Hoff Sommers, "Filial Morality," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 439–58.

30. See, e.g., Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in *Utilitarianism: Pro and Con,* ed. J. J. C. Smart and B. Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap.

Those claiming that impartialism or principle-based theories deny, or at least cannot account for, the unique and irreplaceable worth of each individual (either within the context of personal relationships or in general).[31] (4) Those claiming that 'the particular'— for example, particular judgment—is prior to and more significant in the ethical life than general principle.[32]

I mention these familiar alternative criticisms of impartialism and/or principle-based ethics partly because they are often insufficiently distinguished from the criticism I am mounting in this article (and from each other as well). I want to make clear that I do not take myself to be making any of these criticisms. My view neither entails nor is entailed by any of them, though I believe that my criticisms are consistent with all of them. I can only very briefly attempt to support these claims: Regarding 1, issues of perception and particularity arise no matter what the form ("partialist" or "impartialist") of moral principles. Claim 2 deals with issues entirely distinct from perception and particularity (which apply in both moral and nonmoral domains). The issue of unique worth in 3 is not engaged by my notions of perception and judgment. Issues of moral perception and judgment obtain whether or not each individual has a unique worth. Regarding 4, I do not claim a priority for perception and particularity over principles. I am saying only that, even if the latter is taken as an essential feature of moral agency, the former are nevertheless both (partly) independent from it and no less essential to moral agency.

I do want, however, to focus on one further criticism of impartialist, principle-based theories, associated with the work of Carol Gilligan and others.[33] This view alleges that impartialism is defective because it represents only one domain or "voice" within morality, the other being captured by the "morality of care." Some elaborations of this view bring in notions of perception and particularity as integral to the morality of care. For care involves attention to and sensitivity to particular persons and their situations in a way (it is alleged) not fully recognized by impartialist, principle-based moralities.

This criticism is partially valid, I want to argue, but partially incomplete. We need to distinguish three types—or perhaps aspects—of 'particularity'. The first and second are involved in every situation—ones involving

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10; David Brink, "Utilitarian Morality and the Personal Point of View," *Journal of Philosophy* 83 (1986): 417–38.

31. See, e.g., Nussbaum, "Discernment of Perception," p. 178; Stuart Hampshire, "Morality and Convention," in *Morality and Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 135–36.

32. See, e.g., Nussbaum, "Discernment of Perception"; Kekes, chap. 7; and John Hardwig, "In Search of an Ethics of Personal Relationships," in *Person to Person,* ed. G. Graham and H. LaFollette (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

33. Gilligan, *In a Different Voice;* and Carol Gilligan, J. V. Ward, and J. McL. Taylor, eds., *Mapping the Moral Domain* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of Gender, Education, and Human Development, 1988).

justice as well as care, impersonal ones as well as those within personal relationships. By contrast, the third aspect of particularity is more significant in some moral situations than others.[34]

The first aspect of particularity—the one I have been most concerned with here—is the perception of particular situations. This is an issue for any moral principle or concept. There is a gap between an intellectual adherence to and grasp of principles of justice on the one hand, and the recognition of particular situations confronting one as violating (or otherwise implicating) those principles—just as there is a gap between holding the value of 'caring for individuals' and recognizing a given situation as one in which that value is called for. In our cab driver example Tim may well be a strong proponent of justice, but he initially fails to see that his own situation involves an injustice. What it takes to be sensitive to actual injustice as it is implicated in particular situations in one's life is not the same as what it takes to see the character and validity of principles of justice. These involve different (though of course related) aspects of one's moral being. It is not as if the principles themselves already fully contain the sensitivity needed to recognize their applicability, violation, and the like. This is true of any moral virtue or principle, not only ones involving care or compassion for particular persons. Hence proponents of a morality of care are wrong if they claim that 'particularity' is involved only in a morality of care and not in an impartialist, principle-based domain or "voice."

While perceptual particularity is involved in every situation, I have argued that what allows an agent to perceive appropriately and well are a variety of related psychic capacities—not a single monolithic faculty. To put it crudely, different 'particularities' are governed by different sensitivities.

A second aspect of particularity is what might be called the "particularistic attitude," one which the responsible moral agent brings to every situation. It involves being alive to the ways that a given situation might differ from others (to which it might be superficially similar), not being quick to assume that a noted feature of a situation correlates with others with which it has been correlated (within one's experience) in the past, not being quick to assume that a principle which has been conclusive in similar situations will be conclusive in the current one, and the like. This attitude corresponds to an injunction to "keep in mind the particularity of situations." This attitude cannot guarantee accurate, good, or just situational perception. If a person is simply insensitive to certain types of moral features of situations, she may just not perceive them, even when keeping the particularistic injunction in mind. Nevertheless, this

34. Margaret Walker's "What Does the Different Voice Say? Gilligan's Women and Moral Philosophy," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 23 (1989): 123–34, credits Gilligan with at least a confused recognition of the broader scope of particularity for which I am arguing here. My discussion of different aspects of particularity in relation to care ethics is indebted to Walker's excellent account of different strands in Gilligan's thought.

attitude is certainly an aid to good perception and can become deeply rooted in a moral sensibility so that it does not have to be appealed explicitly to in each situation.

In contrast to perceptual particularity and the particularistic attitude, there is a third aspect of particularity which (for a given, situated agent) some situations involve more than others. I will call this "detail" particularity. It is here that Gilligan's view of the specific connection of particularity with an ethics of care has merit. In general (though perhaps not always), adequate moral concern for intimates requires a more detailed understanding and sensitivity to such persons as particular individuals than does moral concern for strangers. One needs to know in more detail the friend's feelings, concerns, and interests and must therefore be more alive to how this might differ from others in the "same" situation, than one does in order to act well toward a stranger.

Detail particularity differs from the particularistic attitude in that the latter bids us to be alive to possibly relevant differences between the situation before us and others to which we might otherwise assimilate it, while the former involves the process of actually gaining more specific and detailed knowledge about a particular situation. While the particularistic attitude is required in every situation, some situations require more detailed understanding of particularities than others.

Detail particularity differs from perceptual particularity in not being bound up so intimately with perception. Detail particularity becomes a factor subsequent to perceptual particularity's having already come into play. Once one perceives a particular situation as a moral one, calling for moral response, there remains an issue of the degree of detailed understanding—a finer-grained as contrasted with a more coarse-grained—that one needs in order to make an adequate moral response. The particular moral issues raised in the situation, and the domain of moral concern, alert one to the degree to which one presses toward a more fine-grained moral understanding.[35]

VI

Let us bring out more explicitly how the phenomena of moral perception and particularity constitute criticisms of principle-based ethical theories. I fear that many theorists of the latter mold will regard what I have discussed here as mildly interesting but as involving nothing inhospitable to a principle-based account of ethics. Let me consider three different positions expressive of the view that a principle-based ethic can incorporate moral perception, judgment, and particularity: (*A*) The conception of moral agency in a principle-based ethic already contains moral perception and particularistic sensitivities. (*B*) The commitment to the primacy of

35. The distinguishing of three aspects of particularity points up a confusion in my notion of particularity in "Particularity and Responsiveness," in *The Emergence of Morality in Young Children* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

principle entails a commitment to develop perceptual and particularistic sensitivities. (*C*) The conceptual resources of principle-based theories can be mustered to express what is involved in moral perception and particularistic sensitivity.

A) The view here is that a moral agent cannot achieve a genuine understanding of and commitment to (universal, valid) moral principles without along the way developing sensitivity to situations in which those principles are to be applied, knowledge of how to apply them, awareness of relevant situational detail, and the like.[36] But unless this is made to be true by definition, it seems entirely implausible. Surely, as argued earlier, the moral capacities necessary to see the validity of moral principles (e.g., to be able to test them for universalizability or for utilitarian validation), to appreciate why they should be adopted, and to sincerely adopt such principles—all this does not guarantee that one will not miss situations in which those principles apply, that one will know the best specification of those principles in a given situation, that one will have the requisite sensitivities to different aspects of one's moral reality. Certainly one would not say of someone that she had fully grasped the validity of a moral principle if she never noticed when the principle applied; so the two sorts of capacities are not entirely distinct. But position *A* requires a much stronger connection than this.

B) This view (that I will consider in its Kantian version, which draws inspiration from Kant's *Doctrine of Virtue*) consists in saying that if Kant wanted people to adhere to their duty or duties, he must have also wanted them to recognize situations in which they had duties; hence he must have wanted moral agents to develop the capacities necessary to master such situational recognition.[37] That is, he must have wanted agents to develop the perceptual sensibilities I have been discussing here. In *Doctrine of Virtue,* Kant says that the cultivation of sympathy can aid in the performance of duty. So it could be said that according to Kant there is a duty to cultivate such capacities and sensibilities.

I have earlier pointed to several problems with this view: (1) Accurate moral perception—seeing injustice, distress, dishonesty where it occurs—has (or anyway can have) moral worth in its own right, not only

36. This position was suggested by Stephen Darwall in his remarks on my presentation at the Hollins conference on impartiality.

37. I take this position to be in the spirit of parts of Herman's "The Practice of Moral Judgment"; see, e.g., p. 424: "Might not the ability to discern distress require the development of affective capacities of response?. . . Then we will have found a Kantian argument for the development of the affective capacities, and Kantian grounds for valuing them. Not, of course, valuing them for themselves, but as morally necessary means." See also Rorty, "Virtues and Their Vicissitudes," in *Mind in Action,* pp. 320–21: "Consistent rationality recognizes that in order for moral intentions to issue in well-formed actions, the will must be supported by the virtues. Since Kantian morality commands the acquisition of the several virtues . . ."

as an (even necessary) means to performance of principled action.[38] (2) Not all morally good action is done from or covered by principle or duty.

But even within the ambit of principle-based action, position *B* is inadequate as a full defense of traditional principle-based ethics as incorporating perception, judgment, and particularity. It would be one thing if principle-based ethics claimed to provide no more than a theory of the determination of adequate moral principles. In practice this is much of what discussions of principle-based ethics does in fact concern itself with. But such a conception of the enterprise of moral philosophy is too limited, for it acknowledges itself to be incomplete as a full conception of moral agency. Perhaps some practitioners of this brand of ethics think that to extend inquiry into the full nature of moral agency is to abandon pure philosophy for something which is too much like "psychology."

Yet if one acknowledges the need for a full picture of moral agency—or moral personhood—then my argument has been that situational perception, judgment, and particularistic sensitivities are as central to that agency as is commitment to principle. One gets a significantly different picture of moral agency if one sees the complexity of these capacities and their central role in good character than if one pictures moral agency on the model of the possession of principle (perhaps plus strength of will to carry them out). So, unless the principle-based theorist can show that these capacities can be accounted for within the conceptual resources of the principle-based theory, it is no defense of that theory to say that the theory is able to recognize the need for these particularistic and perceptual sensitivities.

This leads us to position *C*, which claims just this. This position cannot be evaluated in abstraction from a particular principle-based ethic, so let us consider Kantianism.[39] There are two versions of *C:* (1) The concepts of Kantianism—rationality, universality, ends—can be used to capture the (proper) objects of perception, judgment, and particularity. That is, what one needs to perceive, to judge, and to be sensitive to are themselves Kantian phenomena. (2) The structure of perception, judgment, and particularistic sensitivity as moral/psychological capacities can be accounted for by Kantian concepts.

Even if *C*1 were true (which I do not believe it is), it would not be sufficient to ground the claim that one has accounted for perception (for example) within Kantian categories. Suppose, for example, that treating someone as an end encompassed relieving her distress; that is, the Kantian notion of an "end" would have encompassed the object of situational perception (namely, distress). Still, it would not follow that holding the

38. This point is argued in Nancy Sherman, "The Place of Emotions in Kantian Morality," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology,* ed. Owen Flanagan and Amelie O. Rorty (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990).

39. Position *C* (as well as *B*) can be found in Herman, pp. 426–28.

principle that one should treat others as ends encompasses the psychic capacity which leads the agent to perceive distress when it is present. Hence Kantian notions would not have fully accounted for moral perception.

Yet, if position *A* is abandoned, it is difficult to see the plausibility of the other view, *C*2, either. Rationality in one's maxims, testing for universalizability, and the like do not seem to capture what it is about someone that makes her sensitive to other persons' distress or able to discern the best specification of a principle of justice. These seem distinct (though related) aspects of an individual's moral economy. Perhaps a better candidate would be (again) treating someone as an end. Yet if what one means by this is commitment to the principle of treating others as ends, then such a commitment will guarantee neither seeing when the principle is applicable (i.e., perception), nor knowing exactly the best way to implement that principle even when one sees that it is applicable (i.e., judgment). On the other hand, if one includes the latter capacities within one's very notion of "treating as an end," then one will have made *C*2 true only by definitional fiat, rather than actually demonstrating the Kantian character of the capacities of perception and judgment.

It might be worth exploring in the context of a specific example the idea that sensitivity to an issue of principle guarantees perception of all significant moral features of situations.

In the cab driver case, let us imagine that as Tim thinks about the driver's action he comes to see it as racist, unjust, and wrong. He sees that the action violates principles of justice. Contrast Tim here with Yasuko, who like Tim perceives the wrongness of the cab driver's action, but in addition directly perceives the indignity done to the black woman passed up by the driver. So Tim perceives the injustice—the violation of principle—without perceiving the indignity to the person who suffers the injustice. As this example illustrates, it is possible to grasp the wrongness of an unjust action without actually registering or taking in the affront to dignity sustained by the sufferer of the injustice.

If this is so it calls into question the idea that sensitivity to actions as violating principle (e.g., a principle of injustice) guarantees or can account for sensitivity to the indignity suffered by the victims of the violation of that principle. Thus it calls into question the idea that the Kantian capacity for recognizing violations of principle encompasses or guarantees the perceptual sensitivity to the morally significant feature, the suffering of indignity.[40]

40. What this argument suggests, I think, is that if the Kantian notion of (respect for) dignity is understood as (respect for) rational agency, then this notion is inadequate to the understanding of dignity involved in the thought that the black woman's dignity is affronted by being passed up by the cab driver. On this narrow and over-rationalistic conception of dignity in Kant, see Victor J. Seidler, *Kant, Respect, and Injustice: The Limits of Liberal Moral Theory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

One might reply that the notion of dignity is itself a Kantian one. But it is interesting then that one can be sensitive to violations of Kantian principle (e.g., a principle of racial justice) without that guaranteeing that one be sensitive to issues of dignity in particular situations. In addition to throwing into question whether—or what it means to say that—the universalizability formulation of the categorical imperative is equivalent to its "end" (or "dignity") formulation, this is further encouragement for the view that commitment to principles does not guarantee situational perception.

While I have argued in this section that the phenomena of perception, judgment, and particularistic sensitivities constitute a significant critique of principle-based theories, I want also to emphasize a less combative point. Until recently, the Kantian—and more generally the principle-based, impartialist—traditions have failed to acknowledge and to explore those capacities of perception and emotion that neo-Kantians (and many utilitarians and consequentialists) are now acknowledging as essential to a moral life and to an adequate picture of moral agency. My purpose in this article has been first and foremost to give those capacities their due, to point out something of their complexity, and to indicate the need for further exploration of their nature. If philosophers identifying with Kantianism or with the impartialist tradition share these concerns, then the differences between us seem much less significant than they once did.