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Are moral intuitions intellectual perceptions?

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Abstract This paper discusses an influential view of moral intuition, according to which moral intuition is a kind of intellectual perception. The core claim of this *quasi-perceptualist* theory is that intuitions are like perceptual experiences in presenting propositions as true. In this work, it is argued that quasi-perceptualism is explanatorily superfluous in the moral domain: there is no need to postulate a sui generis quasi-perceptual mental state to account for moral intuition since rival theories can explain the salient mental features of moral intuition. The essay is structured into three main sections. In a first one, I introduce the quasi-perceptualist view of moral intuition. In the second, I show that ordinary accounts can explain the salient psychological features of moral intuition without referring to intellectual perceptions. Finally, in the third section, I discuss whether moral intuitions have presentational phenomenology like perceptual experiences.
KEYWORDS: Moral Intuition; Quasi-perceptualism; Moral Intuitionism; Perceptual Experiences; Psychological Plausibility

Riassunto *Le intuizioni morali sono percezioni intellettuali?* – Questo articolo tratta di un'importante prospettiva sull'intuizione morale, secondo la quale l'intuizione morale stessa sarebbe un tipo di percezione intellettuale. La tesi centrale di questa teoria quasi-percettualista afferma che le intuizioni sono simili a esperienze percettive in relazione al fatto che esse presentano proposizioni come vere. In questo lavoro si sostiene che il quasi-percettualismo sia esplicativamente superfluo in ambito morale: non c'è bisogno di postulare uno stato mentale sui generis di tipo quasi-percettivo per rendere ragione dell'intuizione morale, dal momento che le teorie rivali sono in condizione di spiegare le proprietà mentali salienti dell'intuizione morale. Questo articolo è organizzato in tre sezioni principali in una prima introdurrò la prospettiva quasi-percettualista sull'intuizione morale. Nella seconda mostrerò che le descrizioni ordinarie possono spiegare le proprietà psicologiche salienti dell'intuizione morale senza far riferimento alle percezioni intellettuali. Infine, in una terza sezione, discuterò se le intuizioni morali possiedano una fenomenologia presentativa come le esperienze percettive.
PAROLE CHIAVE: Intuizione morale; Quasi-percettivismo; Intuizionismo morale; Esperienze percettive; Plausibilità psicologica

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1 Introduction

THE CONCEPT OF MORAL INTUITION is central in moral philosophy and psychology. However, authors disagree on what kind of mental state moral intuition is. This paper discusses an influential view of moral intuition, according to which moral intuition is a kind of intellectual perception.[1] The core claim of this theory is that intuitions are like perceptual experiences in presenting propositions as true. I will define this view as quasi-perceptualism.

This paper will not discuss the epistemological or ontological implications of quasi-perceptualism. Rather, the psychological plausibility of this account will be assessed. Specifically, I will argue that quasi-perceptualism is explanatorily superfluous in the moral domain, as there is no need to postulate a sui generis quasi-perceptual mental state to account for moral intuition since rival theories can explain the salient mental features of moral intuition.[2]

The essay is structured into three sections. In Section 2, I introduce the quasi-perceptualist view of moral intuition. In Section 3, I show that ordinary accounts can explain the salient psychological features of moral intuition without referring to intellectual perceptions. Finally, in Section 4, I discuss whether moral intuitions have presentational phenomenology like perceptual experiences.

2 The quasi-perceptualist view of moral intuition

Moral intuition is generally understood as an immediate representation of a moral fact or proposition. Many authors agree that intuitions are experienced as spontaneous moral evaluations that *suddenly appear in consciousness*.[3] A subject who has the moral intuition that p does not need to conclude that p by reflection, but rather noticing some salient features of a situation suffices to represent that p.

As a paradigmatic example of moral intuition, consider a subject who hears the story of Giulio Regeni, the Italian Ph.D. student who was murdered in Cairo in 2016 while he was researching Egypt's independent trade unions. Giulio's body was found with physical signs of extreme torture (abrasions, contusions, fractures, and cuts) all over his body. It is likely that the subject who hears this story does not need to conclude that what happened to Giulio is wrong from the belief that torture is wrong; it is probably sufficient for her to listen to the vivid details of the case to represent the act as morally wrong.

The phenomenon of moral intuition has been widely investigated in recent decades. Scholars in the fields of moral philosophy and psychology provide different accounts of what type of mental state moral intuition is. According to some authors, moral intuition is a non-inferential judgment or belief.[4] In contrast, other authors understand moral intuition as a mental state that precedes and motivates judgment, such as an emotion,[5] an intellectual seeming,[6] or an inclination to believe.[7]

In recent years, some authors[8] have defended an original and sophisticated theory of intuition, which includes mathematical, philosophical, and moral intuitions. This account rests on an analogy between intuitions and sensory experiences: intuition is an "intellectual given" that performs the same epistemic role that sensory perceptions perform for perceptual beliefs. This is the case, these authors argue, because perception and intuition are similar experiences: they are *presentations* of propositions or states of affairs. In Section 4, I will discuss in more detail what having a presentational phenomenology means. For now, it is sufficient to say that presentational states are more than mere representational states (e.g., beliefs, acceptances), whose purpose is to represent the world *as being in a certain way*. If one is in a presentational state, one *has the impression* that the world is how it is presented and is inclined to believe that the world is that way. For instance, if one sees that a red apple is on the table, one has the impression that a red apple is on the table and is inclined to think that it is so. For these reasons, presentational experiences supposedly provide prima facie justification for beliefs.

Following Bengson, I call *quasi-perceptualism* the view of moral intuition as presentational states:

> *Quasi-perceptualism*: moral intuitions are like perceptual experiences in being presentations

According to quasi-perceptualism, having the intuition that p means having the impression that p. On this basis, proponents of quasi-perceptualism argue that one is inclined, and prima facie justified, to endorse the content of an intuition. Therefore, quasi-perceptualism understands moral intuition as an experience antecedent to judgment. For example, in the case of the torture of Regeni, quasi-perceptualists distinguish two mental states: the belief that the torture of Regeni is wrong and the presentational experience of wrongness that motivates and justifies the belief. The latter, according to quasi-perceptualism, is the intuition properly understood. Moreover, quasi-perceptualists argue that moral intuition is not reducible to ordinary mental states, such as emotion or inclination to believe. Rather, moral intuition is a *sui-generis* mental state, an intellectual perception.[9]

Finally, it is important to note that quasi-perceptualists are fallibilists: it is possible to have the intuition that p while p is false. Indeed, sensory perceptions can be more or less accurate, i.e., more or less veridical. In a similar vein, quasi-perceptualists argue that intuitions can be veridical or falsidical.

Proponents of quasi-perceptualism state that analogy with perception explains the most salient features of intuition. In the rest of this essay, I shall argue that quasi-perceptualism is explanatorily superfluous in the moral domain, as there is no need to postulate a sui-generis quasi-perceptual mental state to explain moral intuition. I shall defend this thesis first by showing that ordinary accounts of moral intuition can meet the main psychological explananda and, second, by arguing that the claim that moral intuition has presentational phenomenology is insufficiently grounded.

3 Psychological explananda

Any account of moral intuition should meet different explananda to provide a satisfying psychological characterization of moral intuition. In this section, I will consider three explananda typically associated with moral intuitions in the literature: first, the *automaticity* of moral intuition (3.1); second, intuitive *strength*, which distinguishes moral intuitions from other automatic mental states (3.2); third, the fact that moral intuitions can conflict with moral beliefs (3.3). I will discuss whether quasi-perceptualism has some theoretical advantage over ordinary views in satisfying these three explananda.

3.1 Automaticity

Moral intuitions are said to be *immediate spontaneous* mental states.[10] Moral intuitions contrast reflective judgments, which are slower and require effort. Arguably, the spontaneous aspect of moral intuition is captured by the concept of *automaticity*.[11] Automaticity is a well-studied mental phenomenon beyond the moral domain. Recent reviews point out that automaticity should not be considered as a monolithic concept but as an umbrella term comprising different related mental properties such as unconsciousness, lack of control, efficiency, and quickness.[12] Moreover, the evidence suggests that automaticity is not an absolute property but gradable and context-sensitive. However, it is largely accepted that intuitions are more automatic than paradigmatic reflective moral judgments.

Moral intuition can be classified as an *automatic* mental state insofar as it derives from processes that are to a large extent *autonomous* – that is, not requiring conscious guidance once triggered.[13] An intuitive response is typically generated by a morally salient stimulus (e.g., two hoodlums torturing a cat) that triggers a series of unconscious mental associations leading to the moral response (e.g., the representation of the act as wrong).[14] This mental process tends to be fast and not controlled by the subject. Moreover, the formation of a moral intuition requires little cognitive effort since the mental process does not need conscious guidance.

The automatic information processing behind an intuition is not always retrospectively accessible to the subject. This is attested by some studies on moral judgment of taboo violations[15] and studies testing the doctrine of double effect.[16] A popular and commonly discussed example of inarticulate moral intuition concerns the story of two siblings (Julie and Mark) that decide to have sex for fun, just once in their life, and without any apparent biological or psychological consequences.[17] In Haidt and colleagues' study, many of the interviewed subjects had the intuition that Julie and Mark's behavior is wrong, but they were not able to explain why they believed that it is wrong.[18] This opacity to introspection has led some authors to define an intuition as «a sense of knowing without knowing».[19]

With this framework in mind, it is hard to see how the quasi-perceptualist view of intuition can have a theoretical advantage over the rival views in explaining the automaticity of moral intuition. It is true that perceptual states are typically automatic, but there are other automatic mental states that fit the features of moral intuitions described above. For instance, emotions are typically automatic mental episodes: an emotion quickly arises in the mind of a subject by the recognition of a salient stimulus, without control or mental effort. It is possible that the intuition that Julie and Mark's behavior is wrong, for instance, is a case of disgust, triggered by the emotional salience of incest.

Another plausible alternative explanation of automaticity is the dual-process theory of moral belief.[20] According to dual-process theories of the mind, there are two distinct types of information processing: type 2 processing, which is a slow and controlled cognition that engages working memory, and type 1 processing, which is a fast and automatic cognition that does not require working memory or controlled attention.[21] If applied to the moral domain, this framework distinguishes two fundamental kinds of moral beliefs: type 1 moral beliefs, derived from type 1 processes, and type 2 moral beliefs, derived from type 2 processes. Possibly, moral intuitions are type 1 moral beliefs. This theory can account for the automaticity of moral intuition.

In sum, the automatic nature of moral intuition per se does not seem to favor quasi-perceptualism. The concept of automaticity, which captures the spontaneous aspect of moral intuition, is broad enough to support different theories. Among the mentioned theories ordinary accounts are simpler because they do not need to postulate the existence of sui generis intellectual perceptions.

3.2 Intuitive strength

Stating that moral intuition stems from automatic mental processes is not enough to capture

its psychological features. Paradigmatic cases of moral intuitions are also "compelling": intuitions capture the subject's attention such that their content is hard to ignore; as a result, the subject is inclined to assent to the content of the intuitions, sometimes even in the face of contrary reflective considerations.[22] Call this felt "compellingness" *intuitive strength*.

Intuitive strength is a gradable property. This means that a subject can have intuitions that vary in strength along a continuum.[23] For example, a subject can have a very strong intuition that killing babies is wrong and a weaker intuition that turning the switch in the trolley dilemma is permissible. Regardless, what is conventionally called intuition must possess some degree of strength. Arguably, a moral intuition is experienced as stronger than "shallow" automatic responses, such as guesses or quickly generated hypotheses.[24] By definition, if one responds to a problem by guessing, one does not find one's own answer particularly convincing. Similarly, if one formulates a quick hypothesis, one will be very disposed to revise it in case of counterevidence. Compared with these experiences, intuitive representations appear more insightful and convincing; for this reason, the subject is more inclined to assent to them and more reluctant to abandon them in case of counterevidence.

The strength of moral intuitions has an important cognitive function: it helps subjects assign credibility to certain moral contents. Through the perceived strength, a subject can assess the likelihood of certain moral representations and filter her beliefs accordingly. The stronger an intuition, the more the subject will be disposed to consider its content as true and endorse it. Thus, strong intuitions, such as the intuition that torturing is wrong, tend to be *stable* – that is, resistant to situational factors or counterevidence.[25]

According to advocates of quasi-perceptualism, the strength of moral intuitions constitutes a strong case for the claim that intuitions are *presentational* states. As mentioned, presentational states provide the impression that things stand in the way in which they are represented. Accordingly, if one is in the presentational state that p, one is strongly disposed to believe that p is true. Moreover, the evidence provided by a presentational state is likely compelling and resistant to counterevidence. This explanation accounts for the distinction between moral intuitions and shallow automatic responses.

I think that ordinary accounts of moral intuition can resist the quasi-perceptualist explanation. According to the strategy I suggest, one could argue that the difference between intuitions and shallow automatic responses is not qualitative but one of degree. For instance, if one adopts a sentimentalist account of moral intuition, one could argue that moral intuitions come with more *emotional arousal* than other automatic moral representations. In support of this hypothesis, sentimentalists can appeal to the peculiar relation between emotion and attention. An acknowledged function of emotion, indeed, is to alert us to the presence of significant objects or events according to our goals and concerns. Moreover, emotions consume and capture our attention: it is typically very difficult to disengage attention from an emotional object and shift the focus elsewhere.[26] Thus, if a certain degree of emotion is constitutive of moral intuition, this explains why the content of intuitions is felt as compelling and resistant to defeaters.

Another option for ordinary accounts of moral intuition is to appeal to *confidence*. Specifically, one could argue that moral intuitions are automatic moral beliefs that are accompanied by a sufficient degree of confidence. In contrast, representations deriving from guessing or forced responses are typically accompanied by some degree of uncertainty and lack of conviction, by definition. Therefore, the different degrees of perceived confidence might distinguish moral intuitions from mere automatic responses.[27]

The explanations sketched above are rejected by Bengson,[28] as he argues that there is a substantial phenomenological distinction between confident beliefs or inclinations to believe, on the one hand, and intuitions, on the other hand. To support such distinction, he describes a case in which a subject confidently believes that $\neg p$, even though also having the intuition that p (*The ardent physicalist*)[29] and a case in which a subject is emotionally inclined to believe that p, though not having the intuition that p (*The impassioned scientist*).[30] *The ardent physicalist* is the vignette of a professor who, consistent with physicalism, strongly believes that "zombies" (i.e., nonconscious duplicates of conscious beings) are not possible but still has the intuition that zombies are possible; that is, when he considers it, the hypothesis "strikes her" as true. In *The impassioned scientist*, a professor (Dr. Jones) continues to feel inclined to believe his theory of the disappearance of the Rocky Mountain Locust, although the theory has been convincingly disproven by the evidence. Dr. Jones is disposed to believe his theory not because it strikes him as true but because he is too attached to it and has an unconscious desire that it be correct. Both examples are nonmoral. I will not discuss whether these specific cases work. For the aims of this paper, it is important to assess whether Bengson's distinctions are plausible in the moral domain.

I will discuss the case of the ardent physicalist in the next section. For now, consider the story of the impassioned scientist. We can imagine a moral scenario similar to this case in which a moral belief is defeated by the evidence, but the subject is reluctant to abandon the belief for *nonmoral reasons*. For example, suppose Clark thinks that veganism is wrong. After discussing with some friends of his,

Clark accepts that there are compelling reasons to believe that veganism is permissible. However, Clark is still disposed to believe that veganism is wrong, not because he has the intuition that it is morally wrong but because he is deeply attached to his carnivorous habits, and he unconsciously believes that one could not live without eating meat. Therefore, Clark is inclined to believe that veganism is wrong, although he does not have the moral intuition that this is the case. This case parallels that of the impassioned scientist, in which Dr. Jones is inclined to believe his theory, although not for valid epistemic reasons.

I think that rival theories of quasi-perceptualism can offer a simple explanation of the Clark case: Clark's inclination to believe that veganism is wrong does not count as moral intuition because it does not depend on a *moral* sentiment. Clark's disposition seems to depend on a personal resentment for questioning his food habits rather than the genuine violation of a moral norm. This nonmoral sentiment *influences* his moral beliefs, but it does not have a moral fact as a direct object. Rather, genuine cases of moral intuitions must have promotions or violations of moral norms as objects. Therefore, there is no need to establish a phenomenological distinction between moral intuitions and other inclinations to believe; the fundamental difference between them might depend on the different objects (moral and nonmoral).

3.3 Moral illusions?

In the vignette of the ardent physicalist, a professor has the intuition that p is true but confidently believes that p is false. In the moral domain, this might be a typical case of overridden intuition. For example, suppose that, after reading the vignette of Julie and Mark, one is convinced upon reflection that, in this case, incest is permissible. However, the intuition that the behavior of the siblings is wrong may persist. In this case, one has the confident moral belief that ¬p, but an intuition in tension with it at the same time.

Quasi-perceptualists explain cases like the one just described by the analogy with visual illusions. A popular example of a visual illusion is the Müller-Lyer illusion, in which two parallel straight lines of the same length are shown, but the top line looks longer (*figure 1*). Importantly, the illusion persists even though one knows that it is an illusion. This means that the observer has the belief that ¬*p* but still visually represents things as *p*. Quasi-perceptualist accounts of moral intuition argue that, similar to visual illusions, there are *moral illusions*. In a moral illusion, a fact seems right or wrong, despite the presence of a contrary belief. Like in the visual illusion, the impression persists although one believes or knows that it is falsidical. For instance, a subject can believe that Julie and Mark's behavior is permissible but still has the impression that is wrong. Another influential example is the conduct of Huckleberry Finn in Mark Twain's novel.[31] At a key point in the novel, Huck helps his friend Jim escape from slavery, even though he does not think that this is the right thing to do from a deliberative standpoint. Therefore, according to Arpaly's interpretation, Huck has the intuition that helping Jim is the right thing to do, despite a moral judgment that is in tension with it. These cases are possible, proponents of quasi-perceptualism argue, because moral intuitions are presentational states.

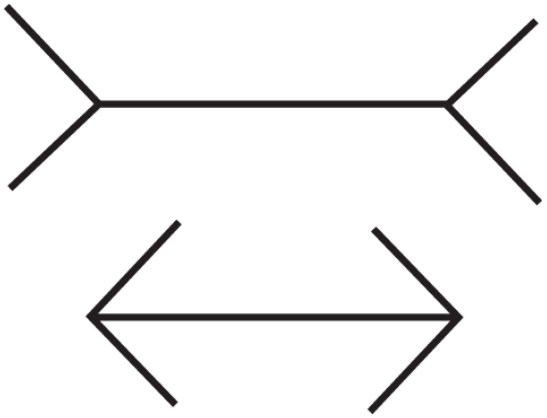

Figure 1. The Müller-Lyer illusion

The analogy with visual illusion is not the only plausible explanation of overridden moral intuitions. Sentimentalist accounts of moral intuition can refer to the concept of "recalcitrant emotion" to meet the explanandum. A recalcitrant emotion is an emotion that conflicts with evaluative judgment.[32] Such emotion persists despite a contrary judgment. For example, one can be afraid of bungee jumping, although one knows that it is safe; the fear of bungee jumping is still present despite the reflective judgment that bungee jumping is not dangerous. On this basis, sentimentalists can argue that moral intuitions in tension with moral beliefs are species of recalcitrant emotions.

Even dual process theories of moral belief can account for "moral illusions". Within a dual process framework, mismatches between type 1 and type 2 beliefs are possible without attributing a formal inconsistency to the subject who holds the beliefs.[33] Implicit biases constitute a common example of mismatch among attitudes. In the case of implicit bias, a subject endorses the normative proposition that *p* (e.g., that racism is wrong) at a reflective level, although her manifest behavior is in contrast with *p*.[34] If moral intuitions are type 1 automatic beliefs, they can conflict with type 2 reflective beliefs; for example, the confident reflective belief that Julie and Mark' behavior is permissible can conflict with the type 1 belief that is wrong; in a similar vein, Huck's type 2 belief that helping Jim is wrong can conflict with his type 1

belief that helping Jim is the right thing to do. Therefore, supposed "moral illusions" can be understood as particular cases of mismatch among types of beliefs.

Arguably, the two rival explanations of "moral illusions" just sketched are not only available but also *preferable* to the perceptualist analogy. On a closer look, the analogy between perceptual illusions and recalcitrant intuitions works only to some extent. While visual illusions are mainly attributable to circumstances *independent of an agent's particular attitudes*, recalcitrant intuitions are typically attributable to the agent's moral attitude. Specifically, recalcitrant intuition reveals a mismatch between an agent's reflective belief and a nondeliberative trait. Indeed, moral intuitions seem to depend on the agent's particular habits, whereas visual illusions are tendentially independent of individual habits and traits. Possibly, this means that moral intuitions, although automatic, are more "active" mental states than mere appearances, which is more deeply connected to an agent's moral view.

The abovementioned contrast between visual illusions and conflicting intuitions is suggested by two observable incongruences between the two phenomena. First, compared with sensory perceptions, intuitions are by large more sensitive to cultural and individual differences. Visual illusions are experienced across a wide variety of cultures and individual traits. I am not saying that sensory perceptions are cognitively impenetrable;[35] however, they are certainly less malleable than intuitions, which are extremely variable according to habits, social norms, and individual traits.[36]

The second dissimilarity, probably related to the first one, is that the strength of intuitions tends to decrease slightly when the intuition is overridden or challenged by reflection.[37] In contrast, the vividness and veridicality of an illusory perception remain unchanged. After learning that in figure 2 the two lines have the same length, the impression that the upper line is longer remains as strong as before learning the illusion. This means that intuitions are more sensitive to reflective considerations than perceptual states are.

To summarize, moral intuitions can occur, albeit in tension with reflective beliefs. This phenomenon by itself does not favor quasi-perceptualism, since there are more convincing alternative explanations such as recalcitrant emotions and mismatches between types of beliefs that do not involve any reference to intellectual perceptions.

4 Moral intuitions and presentational phenomenology

Thus far, I have discussed the main psychological explananda concerning moral intuition. I have shown that quasi-perceptualism does not have any theoretical advantage over ordinary accounts, to the extent that the latter can offer plausible alternative explanations to the perceptual account. Therefore, proponents of quasi-perceptualism should consider a more direct argument to defend their claim. Specifically, they could argue that moral intuitions, unlike emotions or type 1 beliefs, are perceptual states because they have phenomenology similar to perceptual experiences. In this section, I will assess the feasibility of this strategy.

A distinctive feature of a perceptual experience is its *presentational phenomenology*.[38] "*Having a presentational phenomenology*" is a technical concept that Chudnoff introduces to describe the special relationship between a perceptual experience E and its content p. That E has presentational phenomenology means that (i) E makes it seem to you that p, and (ii) E makes it seem to you as if E makes you aware of a truth-maker for p.[39] To put it more bluntly, an experience that possesses presentational phenomenology is an experience that gives you the impression that things stand in a certain way, and at the same time, it gives you the impression that you perceive a portion of the world (i.e., a truth-maker) that makes the impression veridical. For instance, in having the visual experience that there is a red apple on the table, (i) you have the impression that there is a red apple on the table, and (ii) you have the impression that you see a red apple on the ta ble.[40] According to Chudnoff, these phenomenal properties distinguish genuine perceptual experiences from mere representational states or seemings.

In light of this characterization, quasi-perceptualists argue that moral intuitions have presentational phenomenology. For example, the intuition that the torture of Regeni is wrong gives you the impression that the fact is wrong and gives you the impression that you perceive the wrongness of the fact at hand. Nonetheless, this claim faces an immediate obstacle: the diversity of moral intuitions. Consider the following commonly cited examples of objects of moral intuition:

(1) Enjoyment is better than suffering.
(2) Promises ought to be kept.
(3) Torture is wrong.
(4) Saint Francis is a good man.
(5) Turning the switch in the trolley dilemma is permissible.

It is likely that a subject who has the intuition that (1) or (2) has the impression to understand a truism like the fact that *the sky is blue* and *the grass is green*. Similarly, one who has the intuition that (3) or (4) has the impression to represent something belonging to common sense. However, this second group of intuitions is likely more emotional than the former, especially if one has the intuition that (3) or (4) from vivid episodes, such as

reading the story of Giulio Regeni or watching a movie on the life of Saint Francis. Finally, in contrast with the former intuitions, the intuition that (5) seems more complex. Most likely, if one has the intuition that (5), one experiences some cognitive effort (possibly the same required to provide an answer to a reasoning problem). Perhaps this latter intuition is less intense than the intuitions that (3) and (4), depending on how familiar the subject is with the trolley dilemma.

The analysis just sketched suggests that the way in which people experience moral intuitions varies depending on the object, the context, and, of course, cultural and individual differences.[41] This is problematic for quasi-perceptualists, who argue that moral intuitions have a distinctive presentational phenomenology: how can the intuitions that (1-5) have the same phenomenology if they are apparently constituted by very diverse experiences?

Chudnoff has a prompt response to this objection: he argues that the fact that intuitions are diverse does not undermine their being presentational because *intuitions are constituted by different experiences*, such as imaginings, conscious thoughts, emotions, and visual perceptions, among others. What makes intuitions presentational states is not their components, which can be diverse, but rather how the subject experiences their succeeding one another. Thus, some trains of thought constitute conscious inferences, whereas some trains of thought constitute genuine presentational intuition experiences. This is a promising move, first because it accommodates the diversity of moral intuition[42] and second because it keeps the thesis that moral intuitions are sui generis mental states while accepting that they can be constituted by ordinary states. Nonetheless, quasi-perceptualism still owes an explanation of why moral intuition trains of thought are phenomenally different from cases of conscious inferences, beyond their being automatic.

Chudnoff states that conscious inference and intuition are two phenomenally distinct ways of understanding the content of a certain proposition. Paraphrasing his words,[43] in inferential trains of thought, first, one thinks about q, then thinks that q supports p, and one concludes that p is true. In this case, p seems true to one because of the appreciation of the force of an argument (from q to p). In contrast, if one has the intuition that p, one represents the content p, and it seems to one that p because of the apparent awareness of a truth-maker for p.[44]

To sustain the phenomenological distinction, Chudnoff provides a paradigmatic mathematical example in which two distinct experiences are contrasted (cf. *table 1*).

Following Chudnoff's interpretation, Youth consciously infers that 0.999... = 1 and Adult intuits that 0.999... = 1. Although both cases are successions of mental states, they count as different experiences. Youth accepts that 0.999... = 1 from a set of independently supported claims that lead to 0.999... = 1. Therefore, 0.999... = 1 seems true to Youth in virtue of the appreciation of the force of an argument. In contrast, for Adult, it is sufficient "to make clear to himself" what it is for 0.999... to be 1 to believe that 0.999... = 1. The mathematical proposition does not seem true to him by virtue of an argument he understands but just in light of the representation of its content. Whereas Youth's trains of thought lack presentational phenomenology, Adult's experience does have presentational phenomenology.

I find the example fairly unconvincing. Youth's belief that 0.999... = 1 derives from explicit reasoning: the process from which he concludes that 0.999... = 1 is slow, takes effort, and involves working memory. Adult's belief, by contrast, is more automatic: he makes quick mental associations that lead him to confidently conclude that 0.999... = 1. Aside from the degree of automaticity (including all the correlated features outlined in the preceding section), the only striking phenomenological difference between the two experiences is that Adult has the impression to have a *better understanding* of the truth of 0.999... = 1, compared to Youth. Grimm calls this experience «sub-

Table 1. Extract from E. CHUDNOFF, *Intuition*, p. 68.

Youth	**Adult**
Youth is in grade school. He's familiar with algebraic reasoning, but he doesn't know any advanced mathematics. His teacher tells the class that 0.999...=1. No one in the class believes this. So the teacher presents the following algebraic argument: Let x=0.999... 10x=9.999... - 0.999... 9x=9 X=1 0.999=1 Reluctantly Youth and his classmates concedes that 0.999... might very well be 1, but they are still a little mystified by this.	Adult is in a college. He is struggling through a course in real analysis. The professor is going over infinite series. Adult learns that 0.999... is the infinite series 0.9 + 0.09 + 0.009 + ... (or: 9x1/10 + 9x1/100 + 9x/1000 ...). This brings to mind something that has puzzled him since his youth, namely that 0.999...=1. But now this proposition seems clear as a day. For all the proposition that 0.999...=1 says is that the sum of this infinite series is 1. And this is plainly true because the sequence 0.9, 0.9+0.09, 0.9+0.09+0.009+... tends toward 1.

jective understanding».[45] In short, in such an experience, a subject has the impression to have found the solution to a puzzle that produces typical "aha" or "eureka" experiences that indicate the subject's satisfaction of having made sense of things. This is what seems to happen to Adult, which has a deeper grasp of 0.999... = 1, compared to Youth's superficial understanding.

The fact that the contrast between Youth and Adult can be explained by the concept of automaticity plus the concept of subjective understanding is problematic for quasi-perceptualism. First, the sense of understanding is not constitutive of moral intuition. It is quite accepted in the literature that having the intuition that *p* does not guarantee a full understanding of *p* or an understanding of the reasons why *p* is true.[46] One example of moral intuition without understanding is the case of Julie and Mark, in which many subjects have the intuition that the conduct is wrong but do not show a full understanding of the reasons why it is wrong. Therefore, subjective understanding accompanies moral intuition only contingently. Second, the occurrence of subjective understanding does not entail the occurrence of a presentational state. Subjective understanding concerns the satisfaction of a desire for knowledge, i.e., the natural will of humans to make sense of the world.[47] Such a desire can be achieved through an illuminating perception, as well as through a conscious inference. Thus, the fact that Adult experiences subjective understanding does not mean that his intuition is an intellectual perception. For these reasons, the example of Youth and Adult does not clarify why presentational phenomenology should be constitutive of intuition. A fortiori, it does not clarify why presentational phenomenology should be part of moral intuition experiences, which are very diverse; they are sometimes accompanied by understanding, and sometimes not.

Needless to say, if one example is not convincing, it does not mean that the proposed theory is false. However, since phenomenological arguments are mainly based on paradigmatic examples, quasi-perceptualists have to provide a convincing contrasting case to argue that moral intuitions have presentational phenomenology. As long as it is not shown that presentational phenomenology is *indispensable* to explain the contrast between conscious inference trains of thought and intuition experiences, the quasi-perceptualist theory of moral intuition remains insufficiently supported.

5 Concluding remarks

Quasi-perceptualism is the view that intuitions are like perceptions in being presentational mental states. In this essay, I have argued that a quasi-perceptualist theory of moral intuition is explanatorily superfluous. First, I have shown that the theory is unnecessary to explain the salient psychological features of moral intuition. Second, I have argued that quasi-perceptualism lacks a convincing argument that shows that moral intuition has presentational phenomenology.

To the extent that one has to posit the existence of sui generis mental states, such as intellectual perceptions, only if explanatorily necessary, the fact that quasi-perceptualism is unnecessary in the moral domain favors ordinary accounts of moral intuition, such as sentimentalist or dual-process theories. Importantly, such a conclusion does not entail skepticism about moral intuition. Moral intuitions might exist, although they are ordinary mental states. Nor has what I argued undermined the importance of intuitions for moral knowledge. Finally, it is important to point out that the objections I have raised against quasi-perceptualism concern the moral domain. Therefore, one cannot exclude that intellectual perceptions are indispensable in other domains, such as in the philosophy of mathematics or epistemology.

Notes

[1] Cf. E. CHUDNOFF, *Intuition*; J. BENGSON, *The intellectual given*.

[2] This discussion is also orthogonal to the question whether moral intuitions are intrinsically motivating (on this topic, cf. A. KAUPPINEN, *A Humean theory of moral intuition*).

[3] Cf. J. HAIDT, *The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment*, p. 818.

[4] I will use the terms "judgment" and "belief" interchangeably. Cf. W. SINNOTT-ARMSTRONG, *Framing moral intuitions*; R. AUDI, *Intuition and its place in ethics*.

[5] Cf. A. KAUPPINEN, *A Humean theory of moral intuition*; J. GREENE, *Beyond point-and-shoot morality: Why cognitive (neuro)science matters for ethics*; P. RAILTON, *The affective dog and ita rational tale: Intuition and attunement*; S. ROESER, *Moral emotions and intuitions*.

[6] Cf. M. HUEMER, *Ethical intuitionism*.

[7] Cf. J. EARLENBAUGH, B. MOLYNEUX, *Intuitions are inclinations to believe*.

[8] Cf. E. CHUDNOFF, *Intuition*; J. BENGSON, *The intellectual given*.

[9] Quasi-perceptualism is closely related to the view of moral intuition as intellectual seeming, since quasi-perceptualists consider intuition as a specific kind of seeming (J. BENGSON, *The intellectual given*, pp. 729-730).

[10] Cf. J. HAIDT, *The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment*.

[11] Cf. J.A. BARGH, *The ecology of automaticity: Toward establishing the conditions needed to produce automatic processing effects*; A. MOORS, *Automaticity: Componential, causal, and mechanistic explanations*. Some authors understand the spontaneity of moral intuitions as "non-inferentiality" (cf. R. COWAN, *Clarifying ethical intuitionism*). I do not use this term because it is ambiguous: it switches from an epistemological to a psychological meaning (Cowan) and it is unclear from the evidence whether moral intuitions are psychologically non-inferential (cf. H. MERCIER, D. SPERBER, *The enigma of reason*).

[12] Cf. J. EVANS, K. STANOVICH, *Dual-process theories of higher cognition: Advancing the debate*; A. MOORS, *Automaticity: Componential, causal, and mechanistic explanations*.
[13] Cf. J. EVANS, K. STANOVICH, *Dual-process theories of higher cognition: Advancing the debate*; J.A. BARGH, *The ecology of automaticity: Toward establishing the conditions needed to produce automatic processing effects*.
[14] Simon describes the unconscious mental process behind an intuition as a kind of *recognition*: a certain situation provides a cue, the cue gives the subject access to information stored in memory and the information provides the answer to the situation (cf. H.A. SIMON, *What is an "explanation" of behavior?*, p. 155). Cf. also M.E.P. SELIGMAN, M. KAHANA, *Unpacking intuition: A conjecture*.
[15] Cf. J. HAIDT, *The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment*.
[16] Cf. F. CUSHMAN, L. YOUNG, M. HAUSER, *The role of conscious reasoning and intuition in moral judgment*; M. HAUSER, F. CUSHMAN, L. YOUNG, K. JIN, J. MIKHAIL, *A dissociation between moral judgments and justifications.*
[17] Here is the whole story: «Julie and Mark are brother and sister. They are travelling together in France on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie was already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy making love, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret, which makes them feel even closer to each other. What do you think about that? Was it OK for them to make love?» (J. HAIDT, *The emotional dog and its rational tail: A social intuitionist approach to moral judgment*, p. 814).
[18] Here the point is not whether the subjects were right in judging the behavior (probably, they were, since Julie and Mark's behavior is risky and irresponsible), but rather how able they are in defending their intuitions.
[19] S. EPSTEIN, *Demystifying intuition*, p. 296.
[20] For a dual-process theory of belief cf. K. FRANKISH, *Mind and supermind*. For a dual-process theory of moral judgment cf. J. GREENE, *Beyond point-and-shoot morality*. For the distinction between belief and "alief", which approximately overlaps the concept of type 1 belief cf. T.S. GENDLER, *Alief and belief*.
[21] Cf. D. KAHNEMAN, *Thinking, fast and slow*; J. EVANS, K. STANOVICH, *Dual-process theories of higher cognition*. Some theories assume that the two processes correspond to two different cognitive systems (dual-system theories). This hypothesis is stronger since it presupposes that type 1 and type 2 processes are located in two different areas of the brain with different evolutionary histories (cf. J. EVANS, K. STANO-VICH, *Dual-process theories of higher cognition*).
[22] Cf. A. KAUPPINEN, *A Humean theory of moral intuition*; P. RAILTON, *The affective dog and its rational tale*.
[23] Cf. J. ANDOW, *Reliable but not home free? What framing effects mean for intuitions*.
[24] Cf. J. BENGSON, *The intellectual given*.
[25] Cf. J.C. WRIGHT, *On intuitional stability: The clear, the strong, and the paradigmatic*; J.C. WRIGHT, *Tracking instability in our philosophical judgments: Is it intuitive?*; J.L. ZAMZOW, S. NICHOLS, *Variations in ethical intuitions*.
[26] Cf. M. BRADY, *Emotional insight: The epistemic role of emotional experience*, pp. 16-25.
[27] I develop this account of intuitive strength in D. CECCHINI, *Moral intuition, strength, and metacognition*.
[28] Cf. J. BENGSON, *The intellectual given.*
[29] *Ibid*., p. 712.
[30] *Ibid*., pp. 712-713.
[31] Cf. N. ARPALY, *Unprincipled virtue: An inquiry into moral agency*, p. 9.
[32] Cf. M. BRADY, *The irrationality of recalcitrant emotions*; H. BENBAJI, *How is recalcitrant emotion possible?*.
[33] About "belief-discordant aliefs" cf. T.S. GENDLER, *Alief and belief*.
[34] Cf. K. FRANKISH, *Playing double: Implicit bias, dual level and self control*.
[35] Some evidence highlights that susceptibility to geometrical illusions can vary by culture (cf. M.H. SEGALL, D.T. CAMPBELL, M.J. HERSKOVITS, *Cultural differences in the perception of geometric illusions*).
[36] Cf. J.L. ZAMZOW, S. NICHOLS, *Variations in ethical intuitions*; H. SAUER, *Moral judgement as educated intuitions*.
[37] This phenomenon was reported by Wright, which reports a slight decrease in strength of intuitions after inducing instability (cf. J.C. WRIGHT, *Tracking instability in our philosophical judgments: Is it intuitive?*).
[38] Cf. E. CHUDNOFF, *Intuition.*
[39] *Ibid*., p. 37.
[40] Note that this is a pure phenomenal condition: it is true even in the case that the object of awareness (e.g., the red apple) does not exist. This means that the condition described applies in case of veridical, as well as falsidical perceptual experience.
[41] Cf. J.L. ZAMZOW, S. NICHOLS, *Variations in ethical intuitions*.
[42] For instance, unlike Chudnoff, Huemer is exposed to the objection from the diversity of moral intuition to the extent that he argues that moral intuitions are mere *intellectual* seemings (cf. M. HUEMER, *Ethical intuitionism*).
[43] Cf. E. CHUDNOFF, *Intuition*, pp. 66-67.
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] S. GRIMM, *The value of understanding*, pp. 108-109.
[46] One exception is Audi's account of moral intuition, according to which having moral intuition requires reflection and understanding (cf. R. AUDI, *Intuition and its place in ethics*). However, Audi is not quasi-perceptualist.
[47] Cf. S. GRIMM, *The value of understanding*.

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