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Moral Innocence as Illusion and Inability

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Abstract The concept of moral innocence is frequently referenced in popular culture, ordinary language, literature, religious doctrine, and psychology. The morally innocent are often thought to be morally pure, incapable of wrongdoing, ignorant of morality, resistant to sin, or even saintly. In spite of, or perhaps because of this frequency of use the characterization of moral innocence continues to have varying connotations. As a result, the concept is often used without sufficient heed given to some of its most salient attributes, especially those germane to moral agency and the moral community. In this article I intend to identify these attributes and propose that moral innocence is best defined as an inability to enter the moral community as a result of a trust in moral illusions. The content of the illusions pertains to several factors including one's role(s) in the moral community, one's ability to wrong or harm others, the intricacies of one's moral interaction with others, and the corresponding manifold complexities tangled up with the concepts of good and evil. Maintaining these illusions impedes or even prohibits an appropriate exchange of praise and blame with others. As membership in the moral community requires precisely this ability to engage in such an exchange, moral illusions necessarily give rise to an inability to participate in the moral community.

Keywords Moral innocence · Moral community · Moral illusion · Moral imagination · Moral agency · Responsibility

The concept of moral innocence is frequently referenced in popular culture, ordinary language, literature, religious doctrine, and psychology.[1] The morally innocent are often thought to be morally pure, incapable of wrongdoing, ignorant of morality, resistant to sin, or even saintly. In many literary and religious contexts, moral innocence is associated with sexual innocence and is considered an attribute that an individual should try not to lose, or should try and regain. In spite of, or perhaps because of this

[1]For example: See Blake (1789); Wordsworth (1807); Brontë (1847); Golding (1954); Davis (2011); Munzer (2012). The FBI Database for tracking violent crimes against children is called, "Innocence Lost" (http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac/innocencelost). The International Movie Database lists 467 films with the theme of innocence and innocence lost.

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frequency of use the characterization of moral innocence continues to have varying connotations. As a result, the concept is often used without sufficient heed given to some of its most salient attributes, especially those germane to moral agency and the moral community. In this article I intend to identify these attributes and propose that moral innocence is best defined as an inability to enter the moral community as a result of a trust in moral illusions.[2]

In the first section, referencing John Martin Fischer's and Mark Ravizza's account of moral agency, I demonstrate that moral innocence is a status characterized primarily by the presence of moral illusions. The content of the illusions pertains to several factors including one's role(s) in the moral community, one's ability to wrong or harm others, the intricacies of one's moral interaction with others, and the corresponding manifold complexities tangled up with the concepts of good and evil. Maintaining these illusions impedes or even prohibits an appropriate exchange of praise and blame with others. As membership in the moral community requires precisely this ability to engage in such an exchange, moral illusions necessarily give rise to an inability to participate in the moral community.

Following this section, I present a two-part negative argument addressing what moral innocence is not. The argument proceeds to distinguish moral innocence from both "simple moral ignorance" and moral purity. I posit "simple moral ignorance" as the absence of any moral acumen whatsoever. To equate moral innocence with simple moral ignorance is inaccurate because the morally innocent do indeed recognize a moral order, albeit one that is rudimentary, unsophisticated, and illusory.[3] Defining moral innocence as moral purity is likewise mistaken because moral purity is determined by evaluating someone in terms of standards set by moral rules and principles. In contrast, the morally innocent are not yet subject to any terms of moral evaluation.

In the third section of this essay, I examine the specific characteristics related to inabilities associated with innocent illusion. Participation in the moral community requires an *ability* to make appropriate responses to others. Members of the moral community are defined by their ability to engage other members through recognizing the accountable origination of their actions and the responses those actions elicit from others. I clarify the salient features of this ability by explaining it in reference to a distinction between "seeing" and "seeing that". This distinction establishes that the ability to "see that" certain actions and events have the moral significance they have is the hallmark of membership in the moral community.[4] Holding fast to moral illusions results directly in an inability to see that certain actions and events have the moral significance they have. Therefore, moral innocence is most accurately understood as illusion begotten inability—specifically, an inability to participate in the moral community.

What precisely is the ability to participate in the moral community? I have briefly remarked that it is the ability to engage in "appropriate exchanges of praise and blame

[2] To be clear, I do not mean to investigate particular innocence, or the status of not being morally responsible for a particular act. This kind of innocence applies to individuals qua moral agents who have an excuse or justification for what they have done and are not, as a consequence, blameworthy in a particular set of circumstances. My task is to examine moral innocence as the status one has prior to becoming a moral agent in the moral community. We might call this status global or general innocence in contrast to local or particular innocence.

[3] This is not to say that ignorance does not play any role in moral innocence. However, the morally innocent are not "simply ignorant".

[4] A general ability to see that events have moral significance does not require that an individual moral agent always correctly or actively utilizes that ability. Analogously, I maintain the ability to run even if I am not running at this moment, run awkwardly, or run without proper form.

with others". To put it slightly differently, having the ability to take responsibility for one's actions means that one can be fairly praised or blamed, as well as participate in the "appropriate praising or blaming of others". What is the deeper meaning of this claim? It draws our attention to the fact that an appropriate exchange of praise and blame with others is analogous to joining an ongoing conversation or to playing a game.[5]

In his seminal essay *Freedom and Resentment*, P. F. Strawson (1974) outlines many of the rules that structure the game. First, we hold reactive attitudes towards others' intentions towards us. Generally, we expect others to have goodwill, or at least not active ill will, towards us. When other individuals express an unjustified ill will towards us, then we often feel resentment. These are personal reactive attitudes. We also have expectations about others' wills towards a third party. When one person treats another poorly without justification, then we often feel not only resentment, but also indignation or moral disapproval. These are vicarious reactive attitudes. Just as there are personal reactive attitudes associated with the demands on others for oneself and vicarious reactive attitudes associated with the demands on others for others, so too are there self-reactive attitudes associated with demands on oneself for others. As Strawson indicates: "And here we have to mention such phenomena as feeling bound or obliged (the 'sense of obligation'); feeling compunction; feeling guilty or remorseful or at least responsible; and the more complicated phenomenon of shame" (Strawson 1974, 9).

One plausible way to interpret the give and take of reactive attitudes is as a form of *moral address* from oneself to others, from others towards oneself, and on behalf of others towards others. Correspondingly, these forms of address establish a moral conversation of sorts among members of the moral community. As a result, entry into the moral community is permission to join this ongoing conversation.

It is important to note that a conversation is a kind of social game. In order to be a potential player of a game an individual has to have the ability to make a play in the game in the first place. To do so, the individual has to learn the rules and practices of the game. Wittgenstein identifies this rule-learning not as a rationally articulable understanding, but as a performative ability—a performative ability that manifests itself in the utterance, "Now I know how to go on" (Wittgenstein (1958), #150–156, 179). Just as games are constituted by their formative rules and internal practices, so too are conversations formed by rules and social practices that delimit how they usually proceed. Above all, a potential conversationalist must have the ability to engage others in conversation in order to continue the discourse.[6] This conversational ability rests upon learning the rules and intricacies of social conversation and our given social practices. Clearly, if an individual were to simply grunt incoherently at her interlocutors, we could not judge her to be an appropriate or competent conversational partner. She may be unable or unwilling to play the game of appropriate conversation with others.[7] Again, learning the rules of the game brings about a performative ability to play the game.

[5] For additional characterizations of the moral community as a conversation see, Gary Watson (1987) and Michael McKenna (2012).

[6] In a conversation there are a variety of appropriate responses in a given context. Once can declare, inquire, exclaim, and so on. For more on appropriate ways of using language given specific contexts, see Austin (1962).

[7] My focus in this essay is on the ability or inability, and not on the willingness or unwillingness.

The moral conversation is no different. A moral agent has to learn what fair play in the moral community amounts to in order to be able to make an appropriate move. She learns the rules of moral interaction and develops the ability to go on in the game or conversation. In other words, what it means to be a moral agent is to be able to engage in, or to go on with, fair play in the game of praise and blame. Membership in the moral community requires the ability to respond appropriately within the game. In contrast, moral innocence is characterized by the inability to make such a move. As we will learn, this inability is engendered by moral illusions.

Moral Innocence and Illusion

By clarifying the conditions under which an individual is included in the moral community, we simultaneously determine the conditions under which an individual is excluded. Since the morally innocent are excluded from the moral community, its entry conditions can shed a light on why the morally innocent are incapable of participating in appropriate exchanges of praise and blame. In *Responsibility and Control* Fischer and Ravizza (1998) provide the structure of the functional properties of moral responsibility and entry in the moral community.[8] They argue compellingly that moral responsibility has two necessary elements. First, an agent is morally responsible for an action when the action issues from the agent's own moderate reasons-responsive mechanism. What it means for an agent's mechanism to be moderate reasons-responsive is that the mechanism is reasons-receptive in a strong way and at least reasons-reactive in a weak way (Fischer and Ravizza 1998, p. 69–76). The mechanism is receptive in a strong way when it is regularly receptive to reasons, which means that in the agent resides a mechanism that "has the capacity to recognize reasons exist" (Fischer and Ravizza 1998, p. 69). The agent must be able to recognize reasons in a regular fashion such that her responses and actions create a pattern or seem logical. She need not always act on these reasons but it must be possible that she do so. The mechanism is reactive in weak way when it can react to a sufficient reason to do otherwise. As Fischer and Ravizza describe it, in the agent resides a mechanism that has "the capacity to translate reasons into choices" (1998, p. 69). The mechanism need not actually react to a sufficient reason to do otherwise, but if there is a possible world where it does, then it is weak reasons-reactive. For example, imagine a jewel thief about to embark on her next heist. It is conceivable that she "reacts" to a moral reason to which she is receptive not to steal jewels, and yet still steals the jewels, as long as there is a possible world where she does not steal the jewels. Under these conditions she is morally responsible for the jewel theft even if it is only a remotely conceivable, but still logical and physical, possibility that she would react appropriately to the moral reason she recognizes by not stealing the jewels in the actual world. Combining strong reasons-receptivity with this weak reasons-reactivity forms moderate reasons-responsiveness.

However, moderate reasons-responsiveness is not sufficient on its own for moral responsibility and entry into the moral community. The agent's mechanism could be subject to responsibility-undermining conditions. To deal with this possibility, Fischer and Ravizza introduce the second fundamental element of moral responsibility: the

[8] See also, R. Jay Wallace (1994).

action-issuing mechanism must be the agent's own. A necessary condition of the action-issuing mechanism becoming one's own is "taking responsibility" for what one does (Fischer and Ravizza 1998, p. 207–217). In turn, taking responsibility has three basic elements: the agent recognizes that her actions have some "upshot" in the world; the agent recognizes that she is an appropriate candidate for the reactive attitudes; and these two beliefs must be based on appropriate evidence. This last element serves to rule out freedom-undermining conditions such as brainwashing, behavioral engineering and the like. As the metaphysics of free will is not our present concern, the article will concentrate on the first two components of taking responsibility.

We have just examined the necessary conditions of membership in the moral community. The moral agent must be moderate-reasons responsive, recognize that her actions have some upshot in the world, and acknowledge that she is an appropriate candidate for the reactive attitudes. Let's now look at a clear example of a moral innocent who does not fulfill these conditions. The following example and corresponding analysis will illustrate how moral illusions lead to an inability to appropriately engage with others in the moral community. These illusions and their ensuing inability constitute moral innocence.

Imagine a toddler or young boy (e.g. 2–3 years old) attending the birthday party of a young girl and seemingly overcome by excitement, he tears open the presents that have been brought for her.[9] We might look at this case and conclude that the boy is simply ignorant of right and wrong, and further, that it is precisely this ignorance that constitutes his moral innocence. To be sure, the boy does not fully grasp all of the ways in which his act impacts the birthday girl. Prior to his deed, his motivating desire to do something he considers to be fun may leave little room for him to ponder the details of how his act might wrong the birthday girl. He may in fact be incapable of fully imagining the excitement with which the birthday girl looked forward to opening her presents, the great disappointment she experiences in the aftermath of this unfulfilled expectation, the cultural importance of a child's birthday celebration, or the pride the girl's parents feel in celebrating her birthday.

We are confronted immediately by the question of why we should believe that moral illusions have anything to do with the boy's inability to recognize or imagine the various ways his act impacts the girl, her parents, and the other party attendees. Is it not true that prior to his moral education the boy is simply ignorant of any moral order and that he acts without any conception of right and wrong? We are impelled to answer this question in the negative if "simple moral ignorance" means that the boy lacks any and all moral knowledge or moral acumen. The concepts of good and evil are not completely foreign to him. Rather, he is unable to sufficiently and appropriately organize many of his potential acts under these categories. The boy does indeed subscribe to a certain moral order, albeit an incipient and illusory one. The moral order he adopts is not one in which the concepts of good and evil are absent, but one in which the concepts of good and evil have an unrealistic, or rudimentary and incomplete content.

This notion is supported by philosophers and psychologists alike. Michael McKenna notes that while the morally innocent are aware of a moral order, theirs is a simplistic

[9] This example is borrowed from Fischer and Ravizza (1998, p. 208). The boy's wrongdoing is admittedly quite mild. Nevertheless, the example helpfully draws our attention to a moral innocent who is capable of wronging another, and who maintains an illusory conception of the moral order.

one where "the superhero is always pure, strong, physically superior, handsome or beautiful, and the villain always tainted, physically enfeebled, ugly, and so on" (McKenna 2008, p. 7). Developmental psychologists Jean Piaget (1932/1965) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1984) substantiate this claim and conclude that early in their development children understand that obedience and disobedience to rules carry consequences that they wish to seek or avoid.[10] As they mature, but still at a young age, children even develop a basic understanding of fairness regarding the distribution of toys, sweets, and other coveted goods.[11] Although their main interest may be their own favorable treatment rather than the fair treatment of others, the notion of fairness nevertheless plays a role in their interaction with others. Additionally, Michael Slote (2013) relies on the work of Carol Gilligan (1982) and Martin Hoffman (2000) to call attention to the manner in which care and empathy play a constitutive role in the beliefs that young children form about the world.[12] Children tend to imbibe the attitudes and beliefs of those they feel closest to. Taken together these findings demonstrate that the standard building blocks of morality—attention to consequences, intention, and fairness, and the expression of care and empathy—are present in the moral order of those we consider morally innocent.

Each of these authors appeals to an incipient sense of morality that children have. To be sure, there is much more to be said about how children actually come to understand consequences, intention, fairness, or show care and empathy. Psychologists also disagree about the content of the developmental stages or when they occur or ought to occur in child's moral development. Despite this lack of unanimity, psychologists widely affirm that children employ some moral order beginning at a very early stage in their development. Whatever form or content this moral order may assume as a child matures, the reality is that it exists however incipient, rudimentary, and incomplete. This mere fact stands in sharp contrast to the notion that children are simply ignorant of any moral order.

In summary, the moral order in which the morally innocent operate is incomplete and unsophisticated rather than wholly absent. Therefore it would be mistaken to assume that the boy in the above example is simply ignorant of the concepts of right and wrong. It is more accurate to claim that the boy maintains illusions about which actions fall under the categories of right and wrong, about the manifold ways his actions impact others, and about the significance of that impact. More mature moral agents know that the ethical landscape can be quite treacherous, with the path to good and right actions obfuscated by a myriad of unforeseen or unforeseeable elements. The boy's moral education, which has as its goal his eventual entry into the moral community and the development of the ability to participate in the appropriate exchange of praise and blame, is characterized chiefly by replacing his illusions with a more sophisticated moral perspective.

[10] Although the two models cohere generally, Kohlberg disagrees with Piaget regarding how many stages of moral development a child goes through. Piaget's model has two stages: roughly, before 10 to 12 years of age children see rules as fixed and tend to focus on consequences. Later on they see rules as permutable to allow for exceptions, and tend to focus on intention. Kohlberg's findings lead him to posit six stages of moral development that start with rule-following and end with a recognition of individual rights and universal principles.

[11] For more on the psychology of moral development, see: Kohlberg (1981); Kohlberg et al. (1983); Gibbs et al. (1992); Langford (1995); Hoffman (2000); Gibbs (2003); Killen and Smetana (2006); Popper (2013).

[12] Slote (2013), pp. 66–71.

Innocence as Moral Purity?

In the previous section we examined the reasons why defining moral innocence as simple moral ignorance is inaccurate. The morally innocent are not simply ignorant of a moral order; they subscribe to an incipient, rudimentary, and illusory one. This negative segment of the argument continues by addressing another common but inaccurate claim: moral innocence is synonymous with moral purity. Defining moral innocence in this way may seem intuitively correct at first. This interpretation finds expression not only in literary and religious works, but in philosophical ones as well. For example, in Peter Johnson's provocative study *Politics, Innocence, and the Limits of Goodness* (1988), he writes: "Innocence…is the state of being blameless, without stain, or moral blemish. It discloses moral purity" (9). Innocence conceived in this way is a kind of absolute virtue or moral saintliness.[13] By means of this consideration, it is a character trait that is praiseworthy on its own terms.

Equating moral purity with moral innocence is not surprising. There is indeed a long Judeo-Christian tradition of doing so.[14] Nevertheless, thinking of moral innocence as moral purity can be misleading. "Purity" refers to moral saintliness that is quite different from moral innocence. Indeed, moral saintliness is delimited precisely by what moral innocence essentially excludes—namely, membership in the moral community. Peter A. French compellingly elicits this point: "Moral purity, if there is such a thing, is determined by evaluating someone from the perspective of or against the standards set by moral rules and principles…. Moral virginity is the condition or state of not being a proper subject of those standards" (1992, p. 30). In short, it is not that the innocent are morally pure insofar that they lead morally perfect lives, but morally virginal insofar as they have not yet been initiated in the practices characteristic of the moral community. When we consider the morally pure individual we ought perhaps to think of J.O. Urmson's moral saint, who "does actions that are far beyond the limits of his duty, whether by control of contrary inclination and interest or without effort" (1958, p. 201). Comparatively, Susan Wolf defines the moral saint as, "a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be" (1982, p. 419). These are individuals who are appropriate targets of moral praise (or blame). The morally innocent, in contrast, are not yet subject to any terms of moral evaluation. As a consequence, it is mistaken to equate moral innocence with moral purity.

Moral innocence, I have endeavored to show, is best understood in terms of the existence of moral illusions regarding one's agency, one's interaction with others, and the concepts of good and evil. Throughout this essay, I have remarked that these illusions give rise directly to an inability to participate in the moral community. In the following section, we examine and specify the details of this inability.

Moral Innocence as Inability

If moral innocence cannot be identified as moral purity or simple moral ignorance, then how ought we understand it? I propose that the illusions described above render the

[13] For other philosophy texts that connect moral innocence with moral purity see: Murdoch (1976); Slote (1983); Wolgast (1993).

[14] See Hebrews 7:26; Proverbs 20:9; Psalms 26:6, 73:13; Exodus 23:7; Philippians 4:8; 2 Cor 11:2

moral innocent unable to participate in the moral community. The unsophisticated, rudimentary, and incomplete moral order of the innocent impedes the ability to join the moral conversation. With this in mind, we can uncover an essential component of this ability through an examination of the difference between "seeing" and "seeing that".

"Seeing that" refers not only to a visual accomplishment, but also to an accompanying recognition of the significance of the event seen. To borrow an example from French's (1992) discussion, one might see a child being led into a van without recognizing or "seeing that" the child is being kidnapped. Accordingly, the morally innocent "see" without always "seeing that". "Seeing that" involves a conceptual understanding of the significance of an event or state of affairs. Moral innocence means not having the training or the ability to use or recognize moral conceptual descriptions with insight. As a result, the loss of moral innocence refers to the acquisition of the ability to competently (i.e. regularly and fittingly) recognize moral and immoral persons and actions.

Admittedly, one might object to the claim that there is any relevant distinction between "seeing" and "seeing that". Set on collapsing this distinction in his compelling book *Patterns of Discovery* (1965), N.R. Hanson argues that seeing *x* simply is seeing that *x*. To this end, Hanson compares Johannes Kepler, who regarded the sun as fixed, with Tycho Brahe, who thought the earth was fixed and all the celestial bodies orbit around it. Precisely because the two scientists differ in their interpretation of what they see, Hanson concludes that the two do not see the same thing in the east at dawn.

For Hanson, being visually aware of the same object is not equivalent to seeing the same thing because "[s]eeing is an experience" (1965, p. 6). An image reflected onto one's retina is not sufficient for seeing. If it were, says Hanson, then it would be appropriate to claim that a camera sees. "People, not their eyes, see" (Hanson 1965, p. 6). In some sense Tycho and Kepler "see" the same thing – namely a bright yellow luminescent disc in the sky, but in another sense they do not. Tycho sees one of earth's satellites and Kepler sees the center of the galaxy. It seems clear to Hanson that something is very different about their visual experiences. He concludes that a visual experience cannot be merely the physical state of light reflecting upon the eye. Rather, it involves an immediate interpretation of what is seen.[15] "Seeing is not only the having of a visual experience; it is also the way in which the visual experience is had" (Hanson 1965, p. 15).

Hanson further defines "seeing" in terms of expectations: "seeing an object *x* is to *see that* it may behave in the ways we know *x*'s do behave." (1965, p. 22; my emphasis). The seeing of *x* is thus shaped by prior knowledge of *x*. Since Kepler and Tycho understand the sun and its relation to the cosmos in different ways, they also see the sun differently. Consequently, for Hanson seeing simply is seeing that. In brief, "seeing" always includes some conceptual understanding or insight.

My analysis of this issue challenges Hanson's view. It is simply counterintuitive to claim that any act of seeing requires prior knowledge of the object seen. In his essay "'Seeing' and 'Seeing That', 'Observing' and 'Observing That,'" French (1975) asks us to consider an example of a child and an astronomer alternately looking through a telescope pointed in a particular direction. The child reports seeing only a white blotch in a black background. The astronomer tells the child that it is a nebula. Under

[15] However, Hanson does not go so far as to claim that this interpretation is ex post facto. It is not a mental state applying a principle to an experience just had.

Hanson's explanation, the child cannot be said to have seen a nebula. Instead of accepting such a counterintuitive claim we need only recognize that the child did indeed see a nebula, but he did not *see that* it was a nebula.[16] The knowledge that Hanson argues is laden in every act of seeing is actually implicit in every act of seeing that. In order for the child to see that it is a nebula she needs to possess some knowledge of what nebulas are. Rather than being a defining characteristic of seeing generally, the presence of knowledge or insight is precisely what distinguishes "seeing" from "seeing that." Just as the child does not see that the object in front of her is a nebula, the morally innocent do not see that certain actions and events—including their own actions or events they themselves set in motion—have the moral significance they have. They have not yet sufficiently learned the rules of the moral conversation. As a result, the morally innocent lack the performative ability to make the next move in the game. It is precisely this inability that excludes them from the moral community.

Developing the ability to see that certain actions and events have the moral significance they have, or knowing how to make the next move in the moral conversation or game, often requires using one's moral imagination. Consider once again the example of the boy opening the birthday girl's presents. He lacks the imaginative ability to understand the significance of his actions or their impact on those around him. More mature moral agents, conversely, are able to imagine the way in which different courses of action will have different ethical outcomes. In another example, an individual discovers on Saturday that her bike has been stolen from her back porch. On Sunday, someone shows up at her house with the bike. The thief explains that he stole it the previous day, but then regretted his actions and decided to return it. The bike-owner imagines how this situation might proceed for both parties if the apology is accepted or if the police are called and informed of the crime. On balance, the understanding of moral interaction provides the owner with the ability to imagine in this way, and the act of imagining further provides her with an awareness of the complexity of moral interaction.

To be sure, imagining consequences is only one use of the imagination. Other uses of the imagination include visualizing various situations and asking oneself what one would think or do in different situations. Additionally, one can conjure a mental image of being another person. Specifically, one might conceive what it might be like to be more virtuous or conversely what it is like to be a scoundrel. Let's imagine that a person strolls downtown and passes a homeless person begging for money. Although the stroller's first inclination could be to keep on walking, the same individual can imagine what a more compassionate person might do in a similar situation. Alternatively, as someone writes a check to donate money to her local humane society, she can imagine someone caring less about the suffering of others. She visualizes a life that is more carefree and that provides more spending money for herself. Furthermore, one might imagine being a participant in a way of life that is not one's own. While visiting friends who live in a foreign country, one imagines what their value system demands in certain situations in order to adopt the proper respectful behavior. For example, would they expect guests to remove their shoes before entering their house? In all of the previous

[16] One might worry that there is an epistemic level confusion here. There is an added third party objective standard about the truth of there being a nebula. However, this is precisely the reason to distinguish to seeing from seeing that. The child clearly sees a nebula despite lacking the ability to name it or correctly list its essential properties. This is why she does not *see that* it is a nebula. Her inability to name it properly is a direct result of her inability to see that it is a nebula. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this point.

scenarios, the moral agent imagines hypothetical situations in order to discern appropriate responses toward other moral agents.[17] The ability to imaginatively juxtapose a variety of ethical scenarios and choices characterizes the member of the moral community.

To imagine what it is like to be someone else, or to participate (mentally or physically) in a way of life that is not one's own, or to conceive how different consequences might affect others, all depend on the ability to recognize that one's experiences are not the only ones of significance. The imaginative (re)creation of possible scenarios allows one to gain insight into the significance of different ways of life and courses of action. A moral agent can conceive of many circumstances and she can also evaluate the relevant moral consequences of each. The moral imagination explores future possibilities and hopefully helps us avoid the repetition of past mistakes.[18]

This ability (or perhaps set of abilities) allows one to participate in the moral community—to join the moral conversation—through appropriate exchanges of praise and blame. Recall once again the example of the boy opening the birthday girl's presents. He is not yet a full-fledged member of the moral community. As he becomes the target of very mild reactive attitudes, he has an opportunity to begin the process of becoming a morally responsible agent. His evolving moral education acquaints him with the intricacies of right and wrong and the fact that behaving wrongly raises the reactive attitudes in others. At this nascent juncture, the boy may not apply any reactive attitudes to himself. He may not really feel guilty or even grasp what feeling guilty involves. More likely, his primary concern is not to raise such reactions in his parents again. Nevertheless, he may also begin to gain a sense of ownership of his actions when they are appraised by others. The reactions from the parents serve heuristically to teach the boy about moral agency. He begins to shatter some of the illusions he holds regarding his interaction with others, begins to *see that* he is the author of his actions, and further, that his actions have a moral significance more complex than he had previously realized. In other words, he begins to internalize the rules of the game so that he can participate in the moral community.[19]

In sum, we have learned that to enter the moral community an individual must have the ability to make appropriate responses motivated by an awareness of both the accountable origination of actions and also the responses one's actions elicit. This recognition provides the precondition for participation in the moral community. By lacking the imaginative ability to "see that" moral interaction is more complex than they believe it to be, the morally innocent are unable to participate in appropriate exchanges of praise and blame and to join the moral conversation. This inability is precisely what makes them innocent. Rather than being a sign of "simple ignorance" or purity, innocence is characterized by inability—an inability brought about by moral illusions.

[17] Additionally, I might imagine how to go on to bring about wrongdoing or evil. I can imagine what the worst consequences for someone else would be, how a vicious person might act, or imagine a different way of life in order to act cruelly or disrespectfully. Thus, the moral imagination need not lead one to be morally good. It can easily lead to wickedness. It does, however, give one the ability to go beyond a simple knowledge of good and bad, and to question why knowledge of good and bad can be indeed 'simple'.

[18] For more on this notion, see Kekes (2006).

[19] See Morris (1976) and French (1992) for more on the suggestion that the loss of moral innocence includes the recognition of one's own ability to wrong others.

Conclusion

My goal has been the clarification of the concept of moral innocence. To achieve this end I argued that moral innocence is most accurately understood in terms of illusions and inability rather than moral purity or a "simple moral ignorance". My examination emphasizes that to be morally innocent is to be *unable* to participate in the moral community. The relevant inability emerges directly out of the existence of illusions concerning the moral order and one's moral interaction with others. To support this claim, I rejected the intuition that the morally innocent completely lack moral acumen whatsoever. On the contrary, the morally innocent tend to recognize a moral order, albeit one that is unsophisticated, rudimentary, and incomplete. We find that the morally innocent are unable to engage in the appropriate exchange of blame and praise, or to "go on" in the moral conversation—the hallmark of participation in the moral community. This article has examined the moral imagination lacking in the morally innocent as well as the importance of being unable to "see that" actions and events have crucial moral significance. Additionally, we have seen with several examples the role that is played by the moral imagination in exercising the ability to participate in a moral dialogue. Building upon but going further than the work of Strawson, Fischer and Ravizza, Hanson, and French, our findings lead us to the conclusion that moral innocence is most accurately defined in terms of illusion and inability. The present clarification of moral innocence adds significant insight to previous broader discussions of moral agency and the moral community. Precise comprehension of the characteristics of those who are excluded from the moral community goes a long way in informing us about the characteristics of those who are permitted through its doors.

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