The Revised Enactive Account: Interpersonal Understanding and Perceptual Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Most of human action is guided by perception in the absence of reflection. This paper seeks to defend Alva Noë's argument in Action and Perception that perception is a rational action, and to extend his account to describe the functioning of perceptual understanding in social interactions. Perception is active in that we track relationships between appearances and objects of perception themselves. According to Noë's anti-representationalist account of perception, we must be shown to achieve accurate perceptual understanding (what he calls perceptual presence). This entails that we can accurately employ our skills to successfully navigate the appearances of objects that we engage with. In the first section, I outline Noë's account of the achievement of physical content, and define the notions of sensorimotor understanding, and perceptual presence. The second section extends Noë's enactive account to describe the perception of social content, introduces the possibility of achieving social perceptual presence, and explores how fragility pervades perception in social interactions. I draw upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty to indicate the role that our own body and the bodies of others play in putting our minds into the world. Minds are directly perceptually experienced in that our actions display our minds, and the norms that guide our behavior. In the third and final section, I return to Noë's notion of fragility and examine how my extension of his enactivism (what I call the Revised Enactive Account) explains failures to accurately perceive and understand others. I consider implicit bias and generalizations to be instances of the failure to achieve social perceptual presence. I conclude by discussing further applications and implications of this project. If successful, this paper opens the door to explore normative perception, and agency during non-reflective (inter)actions.

KEYWORDS

Enactivism, Perception, Understanding, Perceptual Presence, Fragility, Implicit Bias, Interpersonal Understanding, Alva Noë, Maurice Merleau-Ponty

INTRODUCTION

Perception guides the majority of human behavior without interference from thoughtful reflection. We often respond immediately to our situation when engaging with objects or other people, without pausing to reflect before taking action. We hold open doors for people, we stand the appropriate distance away from someone while talking, and we hug our friends but shake our bosses hands; and we often execute these actions without thought or error. However, some of the most serious issues arise from situations when thought is not involved, and our responsive abilities take control. Troublesome problems like prejudice and discrimination arise from a misperception and misunderstanding of the other. This paper seeks to uncover the root of error in social understanding. I develop the argument that the interpretations accompanying our perception can be made transparent and accessible to facilitate our ability to locate and repair gaps in our understanding. I assert that fixing our understanding entails repairing the skills we use while navigating both the physical, and socio-cultural world. In constructing and defending my argument I extend the enactive account of perception forwarded by Alva Noë in *Action and Perception* to encompass instances of social perception and understanding. The resulting Revised Enactive Account (from now on referred to as REA) investigates the perception of social significance during interpersonal interactions.

My argument shows that social perception occurs in the same mode as the account of physical perception forwarded by Noë in *Action and Perception*. The REA's extension of Noë's account into the world of socio-cultural significance can hold people accountable for actions they take in response to others, even in the absence of thought. This paper uncovers cognitive structures and mechanisms that shape our social perception. First, I examine how we come to perceptually understand physical objects, then I extend the account of skill-sets involved in understanding physical objects to investigate their function in social interactions. In surveying our interpersonal understanding in social contexts, I propose ways in which we can deepen and improve our understanding. My argument relies on the claim that social content—like cultural norms—can be perceived without the need for reflection. This argument requires that I show both how our minds are displayed in the behaviors we execute, and how we access social norms that guide our actions without reflection. This explanation of social content results in

an account of how social understanding engages with objects of perception, how it fails to engage, and how to repair our understanding to avoid such failures.

SECTION I

Alva Noë gives an account of the role that understanding plays in perception in *Action and Perception*. On this account, the actions we take to explore our world exhibit our understanding. According to Noë, accurate perception is an achievement that relies on our understanding of various ways we can interact with the world. In portraying perception as an achievement he posits that we actively explore the way the world appears *to* us *from* here in order to find out how the world is through these multiple appearances (Noë, 2014, 85). He provides an account that delineates what content stimulates our sensory organs, and what content is present as absent. The former is sensorily given, and the latter is experientially achieved, but both are directly available to our minds. The present as absent content can only be presented and acted upon if we have the appropriate perceptual skills. The problem of using our skills to determine the present as absent content is called 'the problem of perceptual presence.' Achieving perceptual presence means having accurate expectations of how actions would bring present as absent content into view (Noë, 2004, 119). For example, I know how to pick up a coffee cup and turn it to see its backside, or bring it to my lips for a sip.

The enactive view that Noë presents entails that we access the world with our minds, rather than construct internal isomorphic models. Accordingly, our bodily actions demonstrate our embodied mind. Noë' calls this sensorimotor understanding, and focuses specifically on how our bodily movements fill out our experiential contact with the physical world.[1] Sensorimotor understanding engages with the world by exploring how appearances relate to the thing itself. Noë argues that we achieve perceptual presence when sensorimotor understanding can bring

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1. For those interested in a debate about the nature of non-reflective rationality, the extent to which such behaviors are rational, and how much they depend on the body, Rietveld's 2010 article on the McDowell Dreyfus debate is a particularly helpful entry point, as is Schear's 2013 collection of essays.

us into contact with all the relevant details about how appearances relate to the thing itself.[2]

Noë's enactive account critiques the representationalist view of content. Representationalists liken perception to a camera that captures detailed snapshots of our perceptual field. According to representationalists, all of the perceptual content of the world is given to consciousness instantaneously. The main problem that accompanies the representationalist view is accounting for how we achieve a perfect representation from imperfect sense organs that give us flawed presentations. As Noë states: how is it that "we can enjoy this sort of richly detailed, high-resolution visual experience, when our actual perceptual contact with the world, in the form of the stimulation of the retina, is so limited[?]" (Noë, 2004, 36). Our eyes cannot present our brain with all of the content necessary for such a detailed picture because of the blind spot that interrupts our perceptual field where the optic nerve attaches to our retina, and this gap in our visual field must be filled in by the brain. The representationalist tradition has lead many scientists and philosophers to look for an explanation of how the brain initiates a neural process to complete the picture by filling in these gaps with information.

Perceptual detail is confined to a very small focus area in the center of our visual field. Noë points out that the representationalist argument of the experience of rich perceptual detail cannot account for the many instances where movements are necessary to access bring detail into focus (Noë, 2004, 49). When motion is detected on the edge of our visual field, the brain is limited by the uneven distribution of cones that give us color content. The brain alone cannot tell us what color the moving object is, but instead relies upon our movements to access the rich detail. Only by directing our eyes toward the moving object can we accurately perceive its color.

According to Noë's enactive account, the representationalist tradition is based on a flawed supposition of how we experience the world. By introducing the enactive account of perception, Noë avoids the need to explain how the brain transforms sensory information into detailed mental representations. According to Noë, we do not internally represent the rich detail of our perceptual field as a picture. Instead, the detail of our perceptual field is accessible, which means that

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2. According to Noë the most notable difference between achieving perceptual presence and missing part of the sensorimotor profile is a fuller experience of present as absent content. Perceptual presence is demonstrated by successful engagement with this content.

our perceptual field has extremely little detail until we access the detail with our movements. Even when we are not accessing details, our skills can give us "quick and easy access to the relevant detail when [we] need it" (Noë, 2004, 50). This erases the problem of creating isomorphic world models, and replaces it with a need to explain how we identify and access relevant details in the world.

The difficulty of making detail accessible is the aforementioned problem of perceptual presence. In order to understand how detail is accessible even when it is not being accessed, Noë introduces the difference between an object's appearances to us from here, and how it exists in the world (Noë, 2004, 164). For example, when I encounter an apple I only have sensory information about the side facing me. However, by achieving perceptual presence I can experience the apple as a whole, including its occluded backside. On Noë's enactive account, we achieve perceptual presence by gathering and assembling content. "Looks are genuine, relational properties of things," so we access the object by understanding the ways that various vantage points present the object (Noë, 2004, 164). In understanding the object we understand the way that relationships between us, the object, and the environment shape the pattern of appearances. Understanding this pattern allows us to anticipate how our movements and the object's movements affect appearances. Thus, rather than being given the detail in the form of a mental picture, we enact our understanding and respond to accessible detail in the world.

In fact, our entire body enacts perception. The body is central to the process of exploring the world and gathering various appearances until we achieve presence. Bodily actions place the mind in direct contact with the world. Navigating and accessing these appearances is an authentic encounter with the world because appearances are real properties of the object. We do not compose models that take us from in here to out there in the world. In fact, according to Noë there is no in here and out there, rather: "this encounter with how they [things] appear is itself an encounter with the world" (Noë, 2004, 85). The process that achieves access and compiles the multiple appearances from various vantage points is called sensorimotor understanding.

Noë likens the achievement of perceptual presence to understanding, because he views perception as a kind of conceptual activity. Sensorimotor understanding is a kind of know-how for Noë. He identifies concepts as things that enable us to access and grasp the world, rather than limiting concepts to propositions. Noë

resists over-intellectualizing the intellect by claiming that knowledge enables access and need not always fix reference (Noë, 2012, 38). Noë argues that our faculties allow us to access the world instead of requiring that our minds create a complete model of the world. We know where to look for detail, rather than holding all of the detail in our mind at once. Experiential blindness demonstrates the mode of understanding involved in sensorimotor understanding.

In *Action and Perception,* Noë describes experiential blindness: what he defines as blindness due to the "inability to integrate sensory stimulation with patterns of movement and thought" (Noë, 2004, 4). Experiential blindness is the failure of our sensorimotor understanding to make content available in such a way that allows our successful engagement with objects in the world. According to Noë such blindness results from a misapplication of a sensorimotor profile, or a partially or completely missing sensorimotor profile. Noë argues that perception achieves access to the world, and avoids experiential blindness, when our skills act upon sensory information in the right way to create experience. Noë's illustration of experiential blindness provides a solid account of how sensorimotor knowledge supplies content to perceptual experience: "It demonstrates that merely to be given visual impressions is not yet to be made to see" (Noë, 2012, 5). Seeing is not passive, it is understanding sensory information's place in a pattern of sensorimotor dependence. Such patterns shape our anticipation of what changes in appearance result from movements. Additionally, cases of experiential blindness uncover the fragility of our perceptual presence.

Kohler's reversing goggles experiment exhibits one instance of experiential blindness.[3] In this experiment objects located on the right stimulate the left eye and vise-versa. Subjects experience three stages of experiential blindness as a result of right-left reversing goggles. In the first stage of adaptation, objects on the left merely appear to be on the right. In the second, tactile senses defer to vision such that objects on the left not only *look* to be on the right, but are *felt* on the right side as well. In the final stage objects on the left are experienced on the left, even though they are registered by sensory organs on the right side of the subject's body. Notably, this final stage is only reached when subjects actively interact with and navigate their environment. This is a case of experiential blindness as evidenced by the fact that patterns of sensorimotor dependence in the perceiver break down—our actions no longer successfully engage with

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3.   Kohler described by Noë, 2012, 62

objects. Our movements no longer completely engage with the objects in the world because the goggles prevent us from accurately anticipating what changes in appearance result from which movements.

The enactive account argues that this phenomenon illustrates that sensorimotor understanding supplies the content of perceptual experience. In the case of reversing goggles, subjects that reach the third stage of adaptation exercise sensorimotor knowledge in a way that more closely engages with the objects as they are in the world than those in the first stage. Sensorimotor knowledge is responsible for presenting the world as we experience it. Accurate sensorimotor knowledge responds to the way the world is as a result of how it appears to us. Consequently, the more we hone our sensorimotor skills, the better we are at successfully engaging with the world.

Cases of experiential blindness reveal the extent to which perceptual experience depends on our sensorimotor skills. This understanding implements concepts that enable our interactions in the world. Sensorimotor understanding tracks relations between objects, the perceiver's body, and the environment. Perceivers implement concepts in a similar way that one would implement calipers: we grasp the world and understand the relational affects of our actions thanks to sensorimotor understanding. Accordingly, the exercise of sensorimotor understanding fixes the scope of perception. This point relates to experiential blindness: we cannot see an object accurately if we do not understand how our actions would change its appearance. Therefore objects that we do not understand do not turn up fully in our perceptual field. We grasp the object by having all of its details available to us, and by knowing how appropriate movements access these availabilities and change appearances. Noë compares this grasp to how we hold an entire person by holding their hand. But there are more appearances than just the physical. I argue that when we access the whole object we access its social content as well.

In the next section, I argue that the realm of perceptual objects is not restricted to physical objects. A closer look at the requirements for perceptual objects indicates that social content is an object of perception. I posit that our skills are able to anticipate how our actions bring about changes in other people as a result of our ability to perceive norms that guide and structure these interactions. I argue that in extending Noë's account, the REA readily describes social interactions and suggests how perception causes misunderstanding between people.

SECTION II

Noë does not address the cultural components of perception. I will further expand the notion of sensorimotor understanding to describe how our perception is socially informed and embedded, and how bodily actions are essential to achieving presence while interacting with others in environments containing cultural significance.[4] I will draw upon Merleau-Ponty's account of the embodied mind to indicate how we directly perceive others during social interactions. On this account a person's mind is perceived in their actions, hence we have direct access to other people.[5] I argue that our understanding of social content structures our understanding of the other, allowing us to access relationships between appearances of others and how they are in actuality. Social content shapes the significance of actions, and plays a central role in guiding our anticipation of the effects our actions have on others. My main claim is this: we directly perceive the minds of other people, and this perception uncovers norms active in social situations by repeated socialization.[6]

For my argument to work, social content needs to be directly accessible to perception. Social content is composed of the norms that guide behavior in group settings, and these can be understood through perception. Norms are often expressed in scripts for social scenarios. Scripts contain responses we deem appropriate given our understanding of others. A mind is embodied in another's actions, and as such the norms that govern their behaviors can be understood by observing behavior under a range of different scenarios. We typically draw upon these scripts non-reflectively. By observing the actions and responses of others we

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4.   I do not cover the role of emotions in intentionality, or emotions as motivations to achieve accurate interpersonal understanding but for further reading on the role of intentionality see: Drummond 2004, 2013, Slaby 2008 and both of Ratcliffe's articles from 2005 cited below. For more about emotions as motivators in perception see Frijda's 2002 article.

5.   Romdenh Romluc's 2011 unpublished manuscript as well as Thybo-Jensen 2013 discuss how our embodied perception can be considered rational, particularly without reflection. My account draws upon these arguments but examines how we perceive the embodied minds of others

6.   My hope is that establishing this implies a further claim that we are responsible for the perceptual tools of understanding that we utilize in engaging with the other in a world of socio-cultural significance. For a more in depth discussion of non-reflective agency see Doris 2015. Additionally for more about what is considered reflection and what is not I drew upon Jacob's unpublished manuscript.

construct an understanding of how social norms are expressed in actions, and the range of scenarios that a norm actively guides.

As discussed above, the enactive account puts stress on maintaining access to dynamic relationships between appearance and anticipated change in an environment. It is important to notice the fragility of our presence. In examining fragility, Noë identifies two possible ways we fail to attune ourselves with our environment. First, we can be mistaken about how things look; secondly, we can be mistaken about our relations to things. Accessing appearances without understanding how they relate to the object in the world distances us from our world. If we are not mindful of the pattern we are accessing, our anticipations will be incorrect and our actions will fail to achieve their desired goal.

Fragility is problematic because we only access the world through appearances and often it is hard to identify how appearances relate to the world. This is why lapses in presence are hard to detect. However, the fact that we only access the world through appearances does not mean our access is not direct, it merely means that our skills are responsible for maintaining this direct access—it does not come free. This is because in perceiving appearances we perceive the world, not our visual field, which means we have trouble becoming aware of flaws in our perceptual understanding (Noë, 2004, 72). It follows that appearances tell us about the world, but we are responsible for discovering what they communicate to us. Lapses in perceptual presence occur when we misinterpret appearances. In the following section, a structural account of the world that we access through appearances will indicate that we are responsible for failures to achieve presence.

The REA must address two main problems: how is social content made accessible in perception and, how can the autonomy of the individual be maintained while non-reflectively responding to cues in the environment?[7] The latter point is concerned with the fact that automatic responses often seem to forfeit responsibility to the environmental cues that triggered the reaction. The goal of the REA is to explicate the role that understanding plays in perceiving these environmental cues and triggering the agent's response. Leon De Bruin and Sanneke De Haan summarize these counterpoints in their article: "Enactivism

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7. At this point the REA only addresses these two problems I think it can be adapted to fit with Julia Annas's work on virtue and Jacobson's work on moral perception (Annas 2008 and Jacobson 2005). Virtue ethics seems the most prepared ethical view to discuss the sense of normativity in perception, and our obligation to achieve accurate perception of others. However, these concerns are for another project.

and Social Cognition." The first problem arises from the means by which agents couple with their social environment. Coupling, or engagement, occurs when the perceiver maintains direct contact with the objects of perception.[8] The nature of access to norms and other people during interpersonal coupling in social settings is of particular importance for my essay. This is because our access to the other and the norms that guide engagement must be direct in order for them to be considered achievements of *perceptual* presence, and not reflection or deliberation. If access to norms was only achieved reflectively, people may not be considered agents when acting non-reflectively.[9]

Most social interactions are executed non-reflectively, and classifying them as an achievement of perceptual presence allows people to be held accountable for their adherence to perceived norms. The second aforementioned problem, about how we can be considered agents in the absence of thought, is due to the fact that the enactive account maintains that the actions of the perceiver are driven by environmental cues that can be socially determined. It appears that this is possibly explained by the theory of ecological control from sociology, where the agent's autonomy is jeopardized by submitting guidance to environmental cues.[10] However, I argue that people are accountable in social interactions because they are responsible for perceiving relevant norms at play in guiding peoples' behaviors. Further, the perceiver has direct access to the mind of the other person and understands how, or at least that, norms guide their behavior. Additionally, like sensorimotor understanding, social understanding is a fragile achievement. I posit that the fragility of social settings arises in part from people's reliance on heuristics and other cognitive shortcuts. We can easily lose perceptual contact with the other.

De Haan and de Bruin outline the typical responses for how people engage with social content (de Haan and de Bruin, 2012). Noë's enactive account does not explicitly describe how higher level social cognition can be achieved. Abstract

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8. I use coupling and engagement interchangeably, as both terms pertain to the means by which we achieve *direct* access to our environment.

9. This engages with the popular assumption that agency depends on rationality. I have no room to argue for this claim at the present. For more reading I suggest looking at how Doris complicates this claim in his recent work *Talking To Ourselves: Reflection, Ignorance and Agency.*

10. Erik Rietveld's work on situation specific responses as well as Steven Crowell's work discuss the possibility of normative assessment of our engagement, as well as the possibility of agency in non-reflective actions (Rietveld, 2008 and Crowell, 2013)

social cognition entails the adherence to norms governing behavior, and the ability to understand how another person's perceptual understanding engages with the world. Two arguments from theory of mind shed some light on a reflective description of how higher level social functioning occurs. Theory theorists (TT) identify intentional behavior as the means of social interactions, and examine how mental states give rise to intentions and actions (de Haan and de Bruin, 2012, 226). In this way we would seek to uncover the propositional intentions of the other person in order to understand their actions. TT treats mental states as conceptually driven, and often explains actions in terms of beliefs and desires that people have. For TT these mental states are internal and un-embodied. Stimulus theorists (ST) differ from TT by proposing that social interactions are process driven. This means that people can interact with others as long as they can take part in a form of mind reading by likening some other person's process of acting on mental states and intentions to their own processing. Mind reading entails continually putting oneself in the other person's shoes (de Haan and de Bruin, 2012, 227). Problematically, ST only allows access to the other through representing our own mind, and assuming it to be a reliable model of another person's mind. De Haan and de Bruin identify the inaccurate explanation of experience arising from TT and ST of mind. Social interactions are not experienced in a third person way, nor do we experience ourselves as reading the other's mind. We engage with their mind through their bodies' actions.

Shaun Gallagher has offered a second-person approach and argues that people's minds are directly accessible through their actions (Gallgher, 2008). However, Gallagher defers to TT and ST when our second personal engagement with others fails to access abstract social content. By extending Noë's account, the REA explains the ability to understand the norms guiding a person's actions in a way that maintains direct coupling with the physical and social world. Although social content is abstract, below I further develop how perception achieves access to norms through their guidance of other people's actions. Actions are mindful, and our repeated exposure to social interactions allows us to understand the limits placed on behavior by abstract social norms. This means that the REA readily explains how to achieve access to norms that guide and give significance

to our actions in a second personal way that avoids over-intellectualizing social interactions.[11]

I aim to elucidate our embedding within a world of cultural norms by examining the role that Merleau-Ponty gives the habitual body in understanding other people (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Social groups are often represented schematically to facilitate interpersonal understanding. This allows us to quickly perceive and respond to significance in other's actions. The structure of phenomenology reveals our ability to directly access both other peoples' minds in their actions, as well as the norms that guide and inform such interactions.[12] Additionally, phenomenological structure of intentionality allows for an account of failure in social settings that does not require a consequent decoupling from direct access. The phenomenological account of embodied mind importantly prevents both the need to read minds, and the over-intellectualization of human actions.

Merleau-Ponty's notion of the habitual body indicates how the mind is expressed in action, and therefore directly accessible to perception. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty identifies the body's special role as both subject and object. It is that *through* which our world is given. Because our interaction with the world can only be achieved through the body, our bodily movements are themselves expressions of our mind. As a result, repeated bodily movements and the thoughts they enact become part of our habitual body. The habitual body structures our engagement with the world, by determining the range of affordances we perceive and the strength of each affordance's solicitation.[13] Affordances are actions that appear worth doing, and undertakings that attract our attention. We express our habitual body in our movements: it structures our engagement with the world. The building and exercising of our habitual body *is* our mind at work. By acting in accordance with perceived norms, we respond to normative solicitations and thereby place our mind out into the world.

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11. The resulting REA also retains the phenomenological accuracy of a second person account of interpersonal understanding.

12. For a further discussion of how embodied mind can help us to anticipate actions and responses to certain situations, and how such anticipations are formed and experienced see J.C. Berendzen 2014.

13. For more on the affects that habit and attention can have in structuring our perception see Komarine Romdenh-Romluc's "Habit and Attention" in press.

The habitual body of the other is understood as exhibiting their mind by expressing their stance in regards to norms that evoke responses in various situations. We understand their habitual body, their interpretation of the world, and their perceptions by seeing these expressed in their movements. Interpersonal understanding is extremely difficult to achieve as it uses situational norms as a foil to make sense of the another's goals. Peoples' beliefs are expressed in what they say and do in response to social scenarios. However, to understand the social content of a particular person's habitual body, one must also understand the range of appropriate actions determined by societal norms. Our access to societal beliefs is directly understood through multiple interactions, and our encounter with the habitual body of the other is contextualized within the broader realm of social significance.[14]

Importantly, the habitual body has built up heuristics that allow quick, and mindful responsivity. This arises from the fact that "habit is motor and perceptual, [and] lies between perception and movement" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962 153). As a result, the habitual body eases interaction by making perception mindful, and eliminating the stage of intention formation before action. We can act quickly and responsively, and perceiving such actions taken by others is to perceive their mind. The habitual body puts the mind out into the world of direct access by demonstrating the person's means of engaging with the environment. One's style of engagement is shaped by the norms guiding their behavior, as beliefs composing the habitual body structure our understanding. Typically actions resulting from certain norms are restricted to particular scenarios. For example, the norms of sportsmanship only appear when interacting with athletes at a competition. Someone who believes in sportsmanship is more likely to recognize the achievements of others. Values eventually become so fine grained that actions that would violate one's beliefs do not even appear as options. By observing another's habitual body in different settings we can come to understand the norms that structure their behavior. We understand the values of others when we can anticipate what environmental factors are required to make the other act in a certain way. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's notion of habitual body indicates how interpersonal understanding can be directly accessed in another person's actions.

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14. Some of these norms are taken to be universal, others vary from country to country. I discuss the latter later in the paper.

An examination of the structure of social perception elucidates means by which we understand other people. Within social interactions there is the self, the other(s) and a background of norms and societal expectations. In the same way that we perceive presence in absence in physical interactions, we experience the societal norms even though they are not present in the same way as sensory content. We see norms as present as absent by understanding the effect they do and would have on the situation given particular actions. If we are perceptually present we understand what scenarios and actions are necessary to evoke their expression. For example, Peter Norman's behavior on the Olympic podium during the 1968 Olympic games exhibited his understanding of fellow athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos. After the race, the American sprinters realized they only had one pair of black gloves. Norman understood the beliefs that Smith and Carlos expressed by standing atop the podium with their fists raised in the black panther solute. His understanding is demonstrated by his suggestion that they each wear one glove. Norman demonstrated his understanding of how actions adhere to norms by proposing that they share the gloves, which are essential symbols to the meaning of Smith and Carlos's protest. Norman understood Carlos and Smith's actions expressed solidarity with blacks in the United States, and around the world, that were facing harsh responses to Civil Rights activism. He also understood the relationship between their action and the message of black strength and racial equality. This is just one example of how exploring our engagement with others brings us into perceptual contact with the norms that give significance to actions. Our interactions are determined by which norms are in focus. Encoded in our actions are norms that structure our apprehension, and such actions express to others our worldview. Understanding other people entails that we understand what norms they endorse, and how they express these norms in their actions.

SECTION III

Interactions are shaped by our ability to determine, anticipate, and respond to the social content of actions. The tools we use to understand each other and express norms are limited in their ability to access abstract social content. The fragility and failure to access the social dimension of interactions results from skills or shortcuts we use. This fragility is introduced by our desire to maintain a smooth and easy mode of social processing. We employ schemata to facilitate interpersonal

understanding by grouping people together and making generalizations. Schema allow us to access a group of beliefs that we perceive a person's habitual body to be expressing. Further, we implement schema to anticipate another person's responses to our own behavior. Cognitive shortcuts allow us to interact with the other as a member of a generalization rather than as an individual that we are completely unfamiliar with. Grouping people into schema according to a shared knowledge base is essential to making social interactions smooth and easy.

A study done by Donna Lutz and Frank Keil shows that even young children demonstrate the ability to use heuristics (Lutz and Keil, 2002). Their study showed that children as young as three were able to employ schemata to correctly select either a car mechanic doll or a doctor doll in answering questions about observable behavior of members belonging to either profession. Additionally, the study shows that four and five year-olds can answer abstract questions that go beyond observable information to theoretical knowledge possessed by members of each career. Doctors were associated with biological knowledge and car mechanics were linked with knowledge of mechanical physics.[15] These experiments demonstrate that we begin forming and utilizing schemata in social interactions from a very young age, and these schemata are built by observing another's actions.

This demonstrates that observing people's actions can lead to an understanding of the extent of knowledge within the other's habitual body. We do not just see their movements, but the significance of these movements are informed by the knowledge we take them to possess. Norms appear in the same level of abstraction as theoretical knowledge. This realm of beliefs is directly accessible through people's actions in the sense that our interactions with others react according to the norms we take them to be responding to with their actions. For example, when you accidentally cut someone off and they blow their car horn, you do not have to reflect on the situation to understand that their mad at you. Just as we explore the physical world to determine occluded physical content, we explore socio-cultural content through our interpersonal interactions. By socializing with others, and meeting with their responses we learn societal norms and expectations. In the same way that actions of the doctor bring children

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15. When asked who would know more about animal or plant anatomy, the children selected the doctor. When asked which profession would know more about how elevators worked, they selected the auto mechanic.

into contact with the knowledge guiding their actions, peoples' actions and reactions demonstrate their understanding and adherence to norms and beliefs of the society in which they live. The above example from Lutz and Keil can be understood by extending Noë's enactive account. The REA demonstrates how perceivers achieve access to norms during interactions with others.

Cultural norms are as simple as holding a door for someone behind you, or knowing how far away to stand from other people in an elevator. Some interpersonal norms, however, are as complex as knowing when to respect a friend's privacy, and when an intrusion is essential for their health.[16] We directly experience social content in that the attractiveness of actions in given situations are constrained by social norms. Understanding social norms would be something like perceiving the underlying principles that select a specific range of actions. Our habituated endorsement of such principles is evidenced by the actions that we select. In some cases we reflectively form a belief and habituate it until it non-reflectively structures our perception. We can also unconsciously perceive and respond to norms, and when these beliefs are habituated non-reflectively we have implicit perceptual understanding.

These norms are shared by groups of people because of the similar actions undertaken in specific situations. The action alone does not tell us the significance of a person's expression. We understand the person executing the action, the behaviors of those around them, and the cultural norms at play in the situation—which are all present as absent. The notion of fragility in Noë's physical account sheds light on the fragility of social presence. In social presence, we directly access content that is far more complex than physical content. Our presence is fragile insofar as it is difficult to access present-as-absent physical or social objects in the world. In order to maintain presence, one must know the actions available to them given the demands of the social situation, and anticipate others' reactions in the setting. This means knowing what is expected *and* how to bring it about.

Importantly, the mode of our access to norms is direct, whether or not we successfully perceive and respond to these norms in social situations. In addition to physical cases, experiential blindness prevents accurate understanding in social situations. In such instances, people do not know how to enact their understanding

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16. Plenty of work has been done discussing the best options in such hard scenarios, but my project is only concerned with the extent to which these norms are accessible. The first concern is ethical, whereas my pursuit is more perceptual-epistemological.

to access that which is present as absent. There are many everyday situations where people do not know what responses a particular situation calls for. Social situations of experiential blindness may be misreading a person's response, or anticipating a different reaction than the one that occurred. For example, East Asian cultures place less of an emphasis on speech because they have a more collectivistic culture that values silence above verbosity (Kim, 2007). When an American interacts with a person from an Eastern Asian culture, the American may interpret the short responses of the East Asian person as unfriendly, and the Eastern Asian person may perceive the American as rude and overly talkative. This misunderstanding results from an inability to access the norms of the other's culture. Neither person means any offense to the other, but they do not have the cultural understanding to convey friendliness in their actions.

The REA demonstrates that accurate cultural understanding fills out our behavioral repertoire in a way that allows access to abstract social content. I take such social content to be cultural norms. The normative force of such norms is exerted by the reactions that others in society have to our actions. The significance of behaviors we enact is learned through social engagement and we understand the minds of those around us by their actions. Learning how to interact with others means understanding what knowledge and norms inform their actions. The fragility of such processes is evidenced by numerous everyday social misunderstandings. The REA not only demonstrates the direct access people have to each others' minds in social interactions, but also explains the fragility of socially achieved presence and the potential failures in social situations.

CONCLUSION

Heuristics are just one example of fragility in social engagements. Heuristics are used to more easily and quickly understand the other, but often result in generalization and stereotyping. Responsible perceivers are aware of when they are using heuristics and when applying such models is appropriate. The REA explains how heuristics and other causes of experiential blindness in social perception can be made transparent. The proposed structure suggests that failures to adhere to social norms and understand the other result from failures to achieve presence. Gaps in social understanding result from an incomplete tool set. Only interactions with those we do not currently have the means to understand help us develop the skills needed to understand them. Such repairs and additions to our skill set

result from a shift in focus to gaps in our understanding. We may be moved to repair our understanding for a variety of reasons, most likely it will be because understanding the other helps us to better navigate our world.[17]

I have shown that Noë's *Action in Perception* demonstrates that perception is an achievement, but does not address the ability to access social content in perceptual presence. By extending Noë's account to encompass social content, the REA can consider the achievement of social presence along the same lines as physical presence. This places the focus of achievement on active engagement with the environment and the other. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's notion of the habitual body I have shown how the mind is placed into the realm of directly accessible content and demonstrates autonomy of the individual in their level of pre-reflective self awareness when navigating their world. Autonomy is expressed in such cases because one's responses are habituated and further engrained with each action. The habitual body expresses the mind in action, and the mind can assign soliciting power to various affordances offered by the environment. The fact that such actions are mindful allows the agent to be held responsible for the style of enacted social presence.

Future development of this project may show its ability to explain how implicit and explicit biases pertaining to race, gender, or any other group arise from failure to achieve social presence. The same heuristics we use result in social misunderstandings on the soft end, and outright oppression on the severe end. Importantly, the REA holds the perceiver accountable for their social comportment. As a result, the various forms of failure introduced by schemata must be addressed by the individual and uncovered through social interactions.

Most of our social interactions occur without reflection, but not without thought. Our mind is present in how we perceive, and by habituating actions that adhere to the appropriate norms we can learn how to engage with the other. In the future, the REA may be applied to better understand how to revise social perception, and outline how social perceptual presence ought to be achieved. This project concludes having established that social content is directly accessed in a way that retains the autonomy of people interacting in social situations. Supporting these two points indicates that attempts to revise social presence

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17. An account of why we choose to reform our perception requires more focus on values and a fuller description of how normativity is present in perception. This may be another potential application for the material on emotions from footnote 4.

must focus on how we construct perception, and how the use of heuristics to understand the minds of others both facilitates and obscures our access.

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