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**The Indispensability of Empathy:
The Role of Empathy in Making Moral Judgments**

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The Role of Empathy in Making Moral Judgments**

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2016

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, John Deigh, for the years of professional support and thoughtful feedback. Those familiar with his work recognize that he is an exemplary model for how to think carefully about moral psychology. With this quality of thought, he challenged my views and forced me to reexamine starting assumptions. These challenges helped me to develop and improve the ideas that became this dissertation. I also owe a special thanks to Kathleen Higgins. In addition to her valuable guidance on this project, she has been an unwavering source of encouragement and advice. I have benefited immensely from her professional and personal wisdom. I also wish to thank the other members of my committee: Michelle Montague, Jonathan Dancy, Daniel Jacobson, and Paul Woodruff. They not only opened their doors and inboxes to my fledgling ideas, but they were generous with their time and insightful with their comments. My work has also benefited from friendships with fellow graduate students in Austin, Texas. Brian Miller and Derek Anderson deserve special thanks for enabling me to talk my way through numerous philosophical quagmires often at impractical hours of the morning. I also wish to acknowledge the fruitful conversations I shared with Matthias Barker, Nora Berenstain, Brian Cutter, David Frank, Jeremy Evans, Alex Grzankowski, and Steve James. I am grateful for their company in wandering down many philosophical roads. Finally, I owe a special debt of gratitude to my partner in love and life, Briana. I dare not imagine the struggles I avoided because of her humor, patience, and unwavering conviction in me.

**The Indispensability of Empathy:
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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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Do we need empathy as moral agents? Some philosophers think not. Some also deny that we benefit from empathy, and some go as far as to argue that empathy impairs our ability to make sound moral judgments. These doubts about empathy call into question its place in moral life. The aim of my dissertation is to remove these doubts by showing that empathy is indispensable to moral agents. Empathy helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feelings such that we are in a better position to make, correct, and recognize moral judgments. Empathy, however, is not just a helpful resource; it is not something optional that agents can choose to disregard. Instead, for those who can take advantage of it, empathy is required as a resource that enables more sophisticated participation in the moral community.

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Introduction

Our lives are full of social interaction. On a daily basis we engage in activities such as joking, cursing, intimidating, insinuating, praising, gossiping, flirting, promising, complimenting, insulting, and manipulating. Although these sorts of activities are commonplace, they can be incredibly subtle. They can involve layers of subtext, embody ambivalent sentiments, and have unintended consequences. Moreover, these activities can make a significant impact on the quality of our lives. It is normal to identify ourselves in terms of our relationships with our family, friends, lovers, colleagues, peers, and enemies, and social interaction is a central way in which we participate in these relationships. As a result, these activities can cause us to experience benefit and harm, and they can alter how we think about ourselves.

Given the role of interpersonal relationships in our lives, it clearly matters whether we are able to track what is going on in social interactions. This tracking, it seems, often depends on how well we understand others' thoughts and feelings. For example, in many cases we need to recognize how another person sees a situation in order to discern how her actions express her will or intentions. Similarly, we need to understand how her actions express her will or intentions in order to know how best to respond. For example, when a friend says that he appreciates my help, it makes a

difference whether he is being sincere or whether he is just being polite. His attitudes partially determine the nature of the interaction. Interpersonal understanding involves appreciating this sort of nature, and it thereby equips us to better navigate the social setting. The better we understand what others are trying to say and do, the more clearly we can evaluate their attitudes and actions, and the more sophisticated and nuanced we can make our responses.

So how can we effectively gain understanding of others' thoughts and feelings? Which psychological resources should we rely on to discern and navigate social interactions? At first glance, empathy looks like a promising candidate. Empathy is often described as something that makes us sensitive to the mental lives of others and that helps us to recognize differing points of view. For example, Atticus Finch praises the value of empathy in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. He states, "If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you'll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it" [Lee 1960/2010: 39]. The author Azar Nafisi offers a similar endorsement of empathy. She claims that it makes possible genuine dialogue:

I believe in empathy. I believe in the kind of empathy that is created through imagination and through intimate, personal relationships... Through imagination and our desire for rapport, we transcend our limitations, freshen our eyes, and are able to look at ourselves and the world through a new and alternative lens...Only curiosity about the fate of

others, the ability to put ourselves in their shoes, and the will to enter their world through the magic of imagination, creates this shock of recognition. Without this empathy there can be no genuine dialogue, and we as individuals and nations will remain isolated and alien, segregated and fragmented [Nafisi 2007: 171-72].

Another reason to think that empathy helps us to interact with others is that people sometimes point to the absence of empathy as an explanation for why people fail to understand or act appropriately in social settings. For example, autistic individuals can struggle with recognizing others' mental states, and they often feel at a loss regarding what they ought to do given those mental states. Jeannette Kennett describes the experiences of autistic individuals as follows:

High-functioning adults with Asperger's syndrome and autism often report a sense of alienation and aloneness, as well as a greatly reduced need for human contact. Temple Grandin describes herself as like an anthropologist on Mars in her attempts to understand other people: an Asperger's syndrome couple say 'they beamed us down from the transporter together'. Another autistic man, Jim Sinclair, writes 'In some ways I am terribly ill equipped to survive in this world, like an extra-terrestrial stranded without an orientation manual' [2002: 347].

The social struggles of high-functioning autistics are commonly attributed to a deficiency in their empathic abilities. It is also common for people to explain the moral apathy demonstrated by psychopaths in terms of their failure to empathize with others. Because they do not empathize, they do not see others interests and ends as mattering in the same way as their own interests and ends.¹

Empathy, however, has come under fire in recent philosophical literature. In particular philosophers have raised criticisms about the role of empathy in moral life. For example, some philosophers deny that we need empathy when making moral judgments. Some also deny that empathy provides understanding that helps us to make moral judgments, and some go as far as to argue that empathy impairs our ability to make sound moral judgments. These criticisms cast doubt on the idea that empathy is a beneficial resource for moral life; they suggest that perhaps moral agents could do just as well (or better) if they didn't empathize when interacting with others.

There are several putative reasons to doubt that empathy is an indispensable resource for moral agents. One such reason is that there are moral agents who appear incapable of empathy but who nevertheless make accurate moral judgments. For example, Jeannette Kennett argues that autistic individuals cannot empathize but they learn principles that correctly guide their moral judgments [2002]. Another putative reason is that empathy can produce feelings that distract us from understanding others' attitudes. Heidi Maibom argues that empathizing causes feelings of personal distress

¹ See Deigh 1995 for interesting discussion of this line of thought.

[2010]. These feelings, she claims, turn our attention inwards and prevent us from appreciating others' experiences. A third putative reason is that we cannot precisely replicate what others experience when we take their perspectives. For example, Peter Goldie argues that empathizing only provides a distorted representation of others' attitudes [2011]. A fourth putative reason is that empathy is susceptible to bias. Jesse Prinz argues that this susceptibility makes empathy an unreliable resource for understanding others' attitudes [2011b]. Taken together, these putative reasons build a case against empathy as something that has an indispensable role in moral life.

In this dissertation I contest this case. The philosophical literature, I argue, fails to adequately account for the normative and psychological role of empathy in moral life. Morality demands that we aim for soundness in making moral judgments. Empathy supports this aim by helping us to appreciate the nature of others' thoughts and feelings, and it does so in a way that alternative resources do not. Empathy is not something that we can justifiably choose to stop using; rather, those of us who are capable of empathy need to include it amongst the resources with which we navigate the social domain. In this way empathy is an indispensable resource for moral agents.

The term "empathy" is used in different ways in the philosophical and psychological literature. In this project "empathy" refers to a process in which we imaginatively take up another person's standpoint and reenact how she thinks and feels about a particular situation. Reenacting how another thinks and feels about a situation viewed in a particular light can cause us to notice features of the situation that we

previously overlooked, and it can cause us to construe features as having a different evaluative significance. For example, when I empathize with a friend who is angry I imagine being in her circumstances and having her relevant beliefs, values, and expectations. I come to see a feature of the situation as offensive, and I experience an echo of her anger about that feature. It is easy to confuse empathy with other psychological phenomena that share similar qualities. For example, emotional contagion is another process by which we come to experience affective states that resemble another's affective states. Although empathy and emotional contagion both involve affective-mirroring, they do not have the same benefits for interpersonal understanding. Because they do not have the same benefits, it is important that we distinguish the two when trying to clarify the merits of empathy. In Chapter 1 I explain how empathy in particular helps us to understand social interactions and the nature of others' attitudes. Towards this end I conceptually distinguish empathy from phenomena such as sympathy, empathic concern, mimicry, neural mirroring, emotional contagion, emotional identification, self-oriented perspective-taking, and inferential thinking. I show that empathy supports interpersonal understanding by helping us to appreciate how another person views a situation, how she thinks and feels about that situation, and how her affective attitudes are a rational response to features of the situation.

My account of empathy and interpersonal understanding points to several ways in which empathy is beneficial for moral agents. One way is that empathy helps us to appreciate how others' conduct expresses their will, concern, or sentiments regarding

another. These expressions are often relevant to the moral worth of others' conduct. Empathy enables us to better take these expressions into account and thereby make sound judgments that respond to the moral worth of others' conduct. In a closely related way empathy also helps us to disqualify and dispel our inappropriate judgments about others' conduct and to affirm and sustain our judgments that are appropriate. A third way in which empathy is beneficial for moral agents is that it helps us to appreciate and be moved by others' moral judgments. I explore these three ways in Chapter 2 by looking at moral judgment in terms of the reactive attitudes. I show that empathy improves our dealings with the reactive attitudes, and in doing so it makes possible a more sophisticated participation in the moral community.

However, as mentioned, some researchers doubt that empathy is a beneficial resource for moral agents. These researchers, however, tend to focus on moral judgment in terms of judgments of right and wrong. Therefore, in Chapter 3 I extend my account by showing how empathy also helps us to make judgments of right and wrong. I then defend this extended account by responding to three putative reasons to doubt that empathy produces understanding that helps us to make moral judgments. These putative reasons are found in the work of Goldie, Maibom, and Prinz. I show that we should reject each of these reasons, and therefore, they do not create a problem for my account of empathy as a beneficial resource for moral agents.

In Chapters 1-3 I show that empathy has a constructive role to play in regards to moral judgment; however, I leave unspecified the full extent of that role. We can still ask

whether we *need* empathy. Several philosophers attempt to answer this question. For example, Prinz [2011a], Maibom [2010 and 2009], Kennett [2002], and Snow [2000] all argue that moral agents do not need empathy. They do this in part by pointing to examples of individuals who cannot empathize but who purportedly make moral judgments. In Chapter 4 I argue that these accounts are correct in separating the concept of empathy from moral judgment and in recognizing that we can make some judgments without empathy. However, I claim that the accounts still fail to adequately characterize the significance of empathy for moral agents. For those of us who are capable of empathy, it helps us do what we ought to do. It provides understanding of others' thoughts and feelings such that we are in a better position to make and correct judgments that respond directly to morally relevant features of situations. It is not a resource that is simply beneficial or instrumentally valuable for those who can take advantage of it; rather it is required as a resource that enables agents to participate in the moral community in more sophisticated ways. Therefore, empathy is not a resource that we can justifiably choose to disregard; rather, it is an indispensable resource for moral agents.

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Chapter 1: The Nature of Empathy

What is empathy? Empathy is a psychological process by which we imaginatively adopt another's perspective and experience an echo of her thoughts and feelings. In later chapters I argue that this process plays a constructive role in moral life. However, before doing so, it is important to clarify what empathy is and how it functions. We need to see how empathy helps us to better appreciate and respond to others' attitudes in order to evaluate its merits. One challenge in doing so is that empathy resembles other psychological phenomena. These other phenomena, however, do not provide benefits in the same way for interpersonal understanding. Therefore, in order to identify and evaluate the merits of empathy, we need to conceptually set it apart from the other phenomena. In this chapter I provide this conceptual separation. I outline the nature of empathy and I show how that nature distinguishes it from related phenomena. The nature of empathy is such that empathizing helps us to better appreciate the nature of others' attitudes and actions. More specifically, it helps us to appreciate how another person views a situation, what she thinks and feels about that situation, and how those attitudes are a rational response to features of the situation.

1. 'EMPATHY'

One problem that arises when discussing empathy is that researchers use the term in different ways. As Alvin Goldman states, “The term ‘empathy’...does not mean the same thing in every mouth” [2011: 31]. For example, in some mouths “empathy” refers to the neurological event of mirroring in our own brain someone else’s neural states [Jacoboni 2011]. In other mouths it refers to the experience of perceiving that a person has certain mental states [Zahavi 2014], and in still others it refers to imagining things from another’s perspective [Coplan 2011].² Moreover, we cannot solve this problem by appealing to people’s pre-theoretical use of the term. As Heather Battaly observes, people use “empathy” to refer to “a process of caring, or sharing, or knowing, or some combination thereof” [2011: 278]. The equivocal use of the term creates a problem because the different phenomena that people call “empathy” have different benefits for understanding and interacting with others. If we want to assess the merits of empathy, then it matters to which phenomena we are referring. I address this problem by isolating one of the phenomena and reserving the term “empathy” exclusively for it. My aim in this project is to show, contra the criticisms in the literature, that this particular phenomenon is a valuable psychological resource. Critics of the phenomenon refer to it as “empathy,” so I follow their dialectical lead and also refer to it as “empathy.”

² See Stueber 2014, Coplan 2011, and Batson 2011 for helpful overviews of the different ways in which researchers use the term “empathy.”

In this project “empathy” picks out a process in which we imaginatively adopt or take up another’s perspective.³ We take up another’s perspective by imagining being in her position with her relevant beliefs, values, experiences, and character traits.⁴ In a limited sense we imagine being her as she thinks and feels about a particular situation.⁵ This imagining can cause us to view a situation in the same way as another person and have states that resemble the other’s states.⁶ In this way, empathy is an *other-oriented* form of perspective-taking.⁷ For example, when we attempt to empathize with someone who is afraid, we try to see the situation as she sees it, and this can cause us to experience an “echo” of what she feels. If she feels afraid about the stock market starting to decline because of her financial portfolio, then thinking about things from her perspective can

³ It is possible that all things considered some other phenomenon has a better claim to the term “empathy.” For example, Dan Zahavi [2014] identifies several historical reasons for using “empathy” to refer to a phenomenon in which we directly perceive and experience others’ mental states. However, this does not create a problem for my project. My project is about identifying and defending the merits of a particular phenomenon. This is consistent with referring to the phenomenon by another name. Amy Coplan makes a similar point when justifying her focus on a particular phenomenon. She claims, “it is less important that we call this process empathy than that we stop conflating it with several related processes for it is the conflation that has led to so much ambiguity and confusion, making it difficult to analyze and evaluate empathy researchers’ work and threatening to hamper both philosophical and empirical efforts to study the significance of all of these processes” [2011: 5].

⁴ Other theorists who use “empathy” in a similar way include Coplan 2011, Morton 2011, Goldie 2011, Prinz 2011a, Prinz 2011b, Stueber 2006, Kennett 2002, Snow 2000, Hoffman 2000, Sherman 1998, and Deigh 1995.

⁵ The qualifier, as I explain below, refers to the fact that we do not fully identify with the other person. We do not lose sight of the fact that we are imaginatively adopting another’s way of seeing the world.

⁶ Goldie describes the phenomenon as follow: “Very roughly speaking, what I am against is what I will call *empathetic perspective-shifting*: consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine being the other person, and thereby sharing in *his or her* thoughts, feelings, decisions, and other aspects of their psychology” [2011: 303].

⁷ When empathizing we are not trying to determine how we would see or respond if we—holding fixed our psychology—were in the other’s circumstances. This would be a form of *self-oriented* perspective-taking. We are also not trying to determine what is the appropriate way to see and respond to the situation based on an idealized subject’s view of the situation. When empathizing we do not correct for epistemic failures in the other’s perspective. I say more about these distinctions in §6. Also see Goldie 2011, Coplan 2011, and Hoffman 2000 for more on self versus other-oriented perspective-taking.

cause us to feel something similar about the declining market. When we experience resembling states while empathizing, we attribute those states to the other person. We recognize that the states we experience are a reenactment of her thoughts and feelings about the situation.⁸

Three terminological points are worth clarifying. First, “empathy” does not refer to an emotion; it refers to the imaginative process of taking up another’s perspective and reenacting how she is thinking and feeling about a situation. This process can cause us to have affective states. If we empathize with someone feeling angry, then we see from her perspective how a feature of the situation is offensive and we experience states resembling her anger.⁹ When we experience these states, our experience is not identical with the other’s experience, but it is nevertheless similar. The states we experience resemble the other’s states in terms of their object, appraisal, valence, and affective tone.¹⁰ Second, “empathize” is a success term. When we empathize with another person we come to see the situation as she sees it from her perspective. If we try but fail to see the situation from another’s perspective, then we are not empathizing but *trying* to empathize. Empathizing produces attitudes such as belief, appreciation, or knowledge about how the other thinks and feels about the situation [Battaly 2011: 283, Eisenberg and Strayer 1987: 8-9]. Third, “perspective” refers to a standpoint that we have in virtue of our psychology and our position in a physical, social, and cultural setting. This

⁸ For more on how we maintain a distinction between our self and the other see Coplan 2011: 16; Hoffman 2000: 62-64; and Sober and Wilson 1998: 233.

⁹ This is not to deny that so-called “bottom-up processes” such as emotional contagion can also play a causal role in producing resembling mental states [Coplan 2011].

¹⁰ For more on how empathizing produces resembling but not identical mental states, see Morton 2011: 319, Snow 2000: 69, Sober and Wilson 1998: 233, and Smith 1790/2002: I.i.4.7.

standpoint affects what we see when we view a situation. It makes salient some features while causing us to overlook other features. It also causes us to view certain features as having evaluative and normative significance. When we empathize, we imaginatively adopt the other's standpoint in order to view her situation as she views it.

This section offers an initial sketch of the nature of empathy. Although it is only a sketch, my account already separates the phenomenon in question from other phenomena that researchers label as empathy. For example, consider an oft-cited definition by Frédérique De Vignemont and Tania Singer:

There is empathy if: (i) one is in an affective state; (ii) this state is isomorphic to another person's affective state; (iii) this state is elicited by the observation or imagination of another person's affective state; (iv) one knows that the other person is the source of one's own affective state [2006: 435].

Similar to this definition, my account claims that empathy can involve experiencing affective states that we recognize resemble or are an echo of another's attitudes. However, unlike their definition, my account identifies other-oriented perspective-taking as the means by which we come to have resembling states. This identification conceptually distinguishes empathy from phenomena that do not involve this process and from phenomena that involve more than just this process. My account will take on greater detail and precision as I explain how empathy is distinct from related phenomena in the empathy literature. In particular I will clarify how empathy differs from sympathy,

empathic concern, mimicry, neural mirroring, emotional contagion, emotional identification, self-oriented perspective-taking, and empathic inference.

2. SYMPATHY

I begin by looking at sympathy. Contemporary use of the term “sympathy” refers to an emotion felt for another person in virtue of perceiving or thinking about the condition, situation, or prospects of that person. It is often premised on a concern for the other’s well-being [Darwall 1998]. For example, we say that ‘we feel sympathy for our grieving friend after hearing about the loss of her child.’ This use of “sympathy,” however, can be understood in three different ways. First, it can refer to the experience of an emotion such as commiseration, pity, or compassion [Goldie 2000: 213-14]. We experience these emotions in response to something bad befalling another person. Second, “sympathy” can refer to a *sui generis* emotion. Understood in this way, sympathy is a distinct type of negative emotion that we feel for another out of a concern for something bad befalling that person. These two ways of understanding sympathy fit with prominent definitions of sympathy. For example, Heidi Maibom states, “*S* sympathizes with *O* when *S* feels bad for *O* as a result of believing or perceiving that something bad has happened to *O*” [2009: 287]. Stephen Darwall defines sympathy as “a feeling or emotion that responds to some apparent threat or obstacle to an individual’s good and involves concern for him, thus for his well-being, for his sake” [1998: 273].¹¹ A third way of understanding “sympathy” is that it refers to more than just negative

¹¹ These definitions leave it open whether feeling bad refers to a *sui generis* emotion or to other negative emotions.

emotions. On this understanding we can sympathize with others when either good or bad things befall them. For example, I am happy for you because your welfare improves. My happiness is a sympathetic emotion because I feel it for you in virtue of perceiving good things happen to you.¹²

Sympathy has some similar qualities to empathy. For example, both phenomena are in some sense other-oriented. When we empathize with a friend we focus on how *she* sees and responds to a situation, and when we sympathize we feel an emotion *for her* in virtue of the way in which her condition bears on her well-being. Further, both phenomena characteristically involve affective states that can change how we feel, and these states can in turn change what we are motivated to do. And finally both phenomena are often treated as morally praiseworthy. For example, we commend children for being compassionate and attuned to the emotions of others. To complicate the issue even further, some theorists use the language of “empathy” when discussing sympathy. For example, Daniel Batson identifies empathic concern as an emotional experience that we have when perceiving the suffering or distress of another person. He claims, “I shall use *empathic concern* and, as a shorthand, *empathy* to refer to the *other-oriented emotion elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need*” [2011: 11]. Empathic concern, he clarifies, is not a single, discreet emotion; rather, it consists of a constellation of other-oriented emotions [11-12].¹³ Inversely, some theorists use the language of “sympathy” when discussing the phenomenon of empathy. For example,

¹² For an example of someone using the term in this way, see Maibom 2014: 04.

¹³ Researchers also use other terms to identify the same phenomenon. For example, Martin Hoffman calls this phenomenon “sympathetic distress” [2000].

although neither is entirely consistent in how they use the term, David Hume [1739/2000] and Adam Smith [1790/2002] use “sympathy” to refer to an imaginative process whereby we come to experience a sentiment that matches another’s sentiment. For example, Smith describes the process as follows:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something, which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. [1790/2002: I.i.1.2]

Despite the similarities, we should keep empathy and sympathy conceptually distinct because of some key differences between the two. For example, sympathy is something that we feel for another. It is an affective state. Empathy, in contrast, is not an affective state. Empathy is an imaginative process whereby we try to reenact how another thinks and feels about a situation in virtue of seeing that situation in a particular way. As mentioned above, this process can involve experiencing affective states, but the process is not itself an affective state. Another difference is that the affective states we experience when empathizing are not felt *for* the other person in the way that sympathy is felt *for* another. Sympathetic affective states are felt for another in the sense that they represent a concern for a person’s well-being. The person is part of the object of the emotion. In contrast, the object of empathic affective states need not involve the other person. For example, when I empathize with a parent who is angry because her child is being

difficult, then the feelings of anger I experience are also directed at the child. The parent is not the object of my affective states; I do not feel angry *at* or *for* her. However, if in watching the situation unfold I come to feel sympathy, then my sympathetic feelings would be directed at the mother. I would feel sorry for her because of what she is going through. This distinction is perhaps less clear in cases involving reflexive states. For example, if a man feels guilty for a fatal car crash, then he is part of the object of his own emotion. If I empathize with him and experience a resembling state, then that state is also about him. Though he is the object of what I feel, this does not make the state a sympathetic emotion. I experience, while imagining the situation from his perspective, a self-directed emotion. Sympathy, in contrast, is other-directed. We feel something for someone because we care about her well-being. The feeling is outward looking in a way that feelings of guilt are not. A third difference between sympathy and empathy is that resemblance is not a constraining feature of sympathy. For example, we might feel pity for the man because of what he now has to live with. Our pity is sympathetic but it does not resemble his guilt. In contrast, empathizing involves resemblance. If we try to empathize with the man but we come to experience a different type of emotion, then we have likely failed to appreciate how he sees the situation. However, it is worth clarifying that experiencing resembling states while empathizing can ultimately lead to non-resembling states. For example, experiencing an echo of the man's guilt while empathizing could help me to appreciate his suffering in such a way that I am moved to feel sympathy for him. Finally, sympathy and empathy differ insofar as sympathy necessarily involves a concern or pro-attitude for the other person. It is because we care

about the other person and her well-being that the perception or thought of something bad befalling her is emotionally moving.¹⁴ Moreover, we are often motivated to help a person when we experience sympathy in response to her suffering [Batson 2011]. Empathy, on the other hand, need not involve any pro-attitude for the other person. It is neutral as a process. By empathizing, I argue, we can come to better understand how another person is responding to a situation; however, what we do with that understanding depends on other values and motivations we have. For example, empathy could help us to better appreciate another's suffering, and we could then use that understanding to inflict even greater suffering upon the person [Battaly 2011: 297-98].¹⁵

Although empathy does not require that we have a pro-attitude for the other person, it is certainly compatible with having such an attitude. For example, we might try to empathize in order to understand another's response because we care about that person. We might think that her response matters and is worth understanding. Understanding her response may reveal something about her condition such that we come to feel sympathy for her. Things can also work in the other direction. Feeling sympathy for someone might motivate us to better understand what she is going through. This

¹⁴ It is also because of this concern or pro-attitude that we sometimes describe sympathy as sharing in another's sorrow or suffering. Because we care about the other person, her misfortune is meaningful to us in a personal way. We feel bad because we care about this person's well-being, and our feeling shows solidarity for the person. In this way our sympathy can indicate an effort to participate in carrying the burden of the sorrow. Empathy, in contrast, need not involve the pro-attitude that gives rise to this solidarity.

¹⁵ Bernard Williams makes this point in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. He states, "But one thing must be true is that the insightful understanding of others' feelings possessed by the [empathetic] person is possessed in the same form by the sadistic or cruel person; that is one way in which the cruel are distinguished from the brutal or indifferent. But the cruel person is someone who has no preference to give help (he is not someone who has a preference to give help but finds it outweighed by a preference for enjoying suffering). Yet he certainly *knows*" [1985: 91].

motivation might move us to empathize. In this way, empathy and sympathy can be closely related even though there are important differences between the two phenomena.

3. MIMICRY AND NEURAL MIRRORING

Mimicry and neural mirroring are two phenomena discussed in the empirical literature on empathy. “Mimicry” refers to a process in which we imitate the bodily expressions of those we observe [Decety and Meltzoff 2011]. For example, sometimes when I perceive someone smiling my face changes to more closely resemble that smile. This change is an autonomic response to the perception; it is not that we see someone smiling and then consciously or intentionally make ourselves smile. Neural mirroring is also an autonomic response. We are hard-wired such that our perception of a goal-directed action causes the firing of a neural pattern that resembles the neural pattern in the agent’s body [Freedberg and Gallese 2007]. The neural pattern in our body, however, may not result in action. For example, if I see someone grasping a cup, this perception causes the neural pattern to fire that would correspond with my grabbing a cup. This is sometimes called “embodied simulation” because we simulate within our own bodies the neural basis for another’s action. Marco Iacoboni argues that a similar effect occurs when we perceive another’s emotion. He claims that we mirror the neural pattern of the emotion in our own neural system [Iacoboni 2011].

Mimicry and neural mirroring are similar to empathy in that they produce resembling states. They use our own psychological machinery to reflect or reenact something that is going on in another person. Despite this surface similarity, these

processes are different from empathy in several important ways. Unlike with empathy, we cannot choose to initiate these processes. For example, we cannot decide to mirror another's neural states. At best what we can do is to decide to put ourselves in a situation in which mirroring could occur. We also cannot control mimicry or neural mirroring. I cannot stop myself from having neural states that resemble another's neural states. Furthermore, with these processes we often do not recognize when they are occurring because the process and the effects are below the level of conscious awareness. For example, if I perceive someone who is angry, then my face—without my noticing—may take on micro expressions that mimic the other's facial expression. Because we cannot consciously start, control, or recognize the effects of these phenomena, theorists refer to them as “bottom-up” processes [Preston & Hofelich 2012, Coplan 2011].

Empathy, in contrast, is a top-down process [Coplan 2011]. It is something that we can deliberately choose to do. It is also something that produces effects in us that we can recognize [Eisenberg and Strayer 1987: 6-9]. For example, I see a friend crying while watching what I take to be a not very sad movie. In reaction to the situation I empathize with her in order to better appreciate why she is responding in this way. Taking up her perspective can help me to reenact how she is seeing the movie, and it can cause me to experience an echo of her affective state. Although we can choose to empathize, this does not mean that we always have a conscious intention to empathize or that empathy always involves the same levels of imaginative effort or cognitive awareness. Sometimes we construe a situation as from another's point of view without recognizing what we are doing or without forming a conscious intention to do so. However, the point is that unlike

mimicry and neural mirroring, empathy is not just something that happens to us. This is significant because it means that empathizing is within our power such that we can empathize more or less. Because we can control whether we empathize more or less, it makes sense to ask normative questions such as whether we should empathize with others while trying to be moral.

4. EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

Emotional contagion is another bottom-up phenomenon discussed in the empathy literature. It is worth examining on its own because it has more in common with empathy than mimicry or neural mirroring. It is a process in which perceiving another's emotional expressions causes us to *experience* a similar affective state [Coplan 2011, Goldman 2011]. We may come to experience this state without consciously registering or thinking about the meaning of the other's expressions. It is as if we simply catch or become "infected" by the others' feelings [Scheler 1954]. Stephen Davies describes it as follows:

One emotional state, appearance, or condition is transmitted to a person (or creature) who comes to feel the same way; the display of the first emotional state plays a causal role in the process of transmission and the first emotional state must be perceived, either attentionally or non-attentionally, by the emotion's recipient; the first emotional state is not the emotional object of the response, however, because the responder does not hold about the first emotional state beliefs that make it an appropriate intentional object for the response in question [2011: 138].

Decety and Meltzoff offer a similar definition, but they attempt to explain what Davies refers to as the ‘causal role.’ They argue that the perception of the emotional expressions causes the observer to imitate those expressions. The imitation then functions as an informational feedback, which causes us to adopt the corresponding affective state. They claim,

Emotional contagion, defined as the tendency to rapidly mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently converge emotionally with the other...is a social phenomenon of shared emotional expression that occurs at a basic level of cognitive awareness [2011: 68].

It is quite possible that mimicry and neural mirroring are underlying mechanisms for emotional contagion [Goldman 2011]. However, these processes should still be distinguished from emotional contagion because on their own they do not necessarily produce any motivational, affective, or phenomenological consequences in the subject. Emotional contagion, in contrast, changes the way a subject feels and those changes can impact a subject’s motivational set. It is this higher-level impact that makes it similar to empathy, and it is for this reason that Alvin Goldman refers to emotional contagion as “basic empathy” [2006]. However, in spite of the similarity, empathy and emotional contagion have some notable differences. With empathy we attend to the other person, her condition, and what her states are about. The resembling states that we experience are intentionally directed at the same object as her states. For example, when I empathize

with my friend who is crying at a movie, the sadness that I experience is also about the movie. Emotional contagion, in contrast, does not require that we attend to others in the same way. For example, when I walk into a room filled with happy people, my perception of their expressions can cause me to feel happy. This effect can occur even if I do not consciously register that they are happy or register what their happiness is about. It could even occur if their happiness is a mood and lacks a discrete object. With emotional contagion, I might come to feel happy about some personal matter unconnected to the current situation.

Researchers characterize emotional contagion as unintentional and operating below the level of cognitive awareness [e.g., Coplan 2011: 9].¹⁶ This language is appropriate because we cannot track or control the process that connects our perception of another's expression to our experience of a resembling state. Of course, we can partially regulate whether emotional contagion occurs. For example, we can learn to identify situations in which others' emotions are contagious. We can reflect on how we feel when in those situations. And we can deliberately put ourselves in or take ourselves out of such situations. This would impact the activity of emotional contagion. However, this is not the same as actually controlling the process. Even when we anticipate an instance of emotional contagion, we do not guide the process. We at best only perceive its effects. In this way the language of 'contagion' or 'infection' is quite fitting. With a disease we can control our exposure and we can recognize symptoms, but we have no

¹⁶ Coplan cites several theorists who describe emotional contagion as unintentional [Wispé 1987: 76-77] and below the level of awareness [Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson 1994: 5].

control over how the disease produces effects in us. Empathy is different. As explained in the previous section, we can be aware of what we are doing when it comes to empathy. We can choose to start empathizing, and we can make ourselves stop empathizing. We can change what we imagine and thereby affect how we take up others' perspectives. By taking up these perspectives we can cause ourselves to experience states that resemble someone else's states.

It is worth pausing at this point in order to clarify language found in the empathy literature. Researchers often refer to something called "affective matching" [e.g., Maibom 2014]. Affective matching occurs when two or more people have the same type of affective state. It is important to recognize that this matching can arise in different ways. For example, affective matching can arise from people independently responding to an object with the same type of emotion. For example, two people can experience fear about a horror movie, and although their states resemble each other it is not because they are sensitive to or responding to each other's mental life. Put otherwise, affective matching does not take into account how the resemblance is produced. This is worth mentioning because researchers sometimes characterize affective matching as the identifying feature of "affective or emotional empathy" [e.g., Bloom 2014]. This use of the term "empathy," however, runs together different phenomenon that it is better to keep separate. On my account, both empathy and emotional contagion produce affective matching, but they do so in different ways. In order for a phenomenon to count as empathy it needs to produce affective matching in the right sort of way.

For a similar reason we should distinguish empathy from what one might call “feeling-with-another” or what Max Scheler calls “*miteinanderfühlen*” [1954: 12]. Feeling-with-another is a phenomenon in which two or more people have affective-matching and at least one person recognizes that she is feeling the same emotion as another. In Scheler’s example, two parents feel sorrow at the loss of their child. They also recognize that the other parent feels sorrow and because of this recognition there is a sense in which they feel their sorrow together [12-13]. I maintain that although they have matching affective states and they recognize this match, they are not empathizing. They are not empathizing because neither parent tries to see things from the other’s perspective. They presumably do not try because they already appreciate much about how the other feels. However, because they do not take the other’s perspective, they do not experience the other’s mental state as “external” to themselves [13]. They do not come to experience sorrow as an echo of the other’s sorrow as they would with empathizing. We can see the significance of this distinction if we consider cases in which we do not share the other’s values or concerns. With empathy, unlike with feeling-with-another, we could still produce affective-matching because we would imaginatively take up the others’ perspective. We would imaginatively adopt her values and concerns, and in doing so, we could see the situation as she sees it and experience resembling thoughts and feelings about the situation. We could do this even though we do not ourselves normally care about things in the sort of way that would elicit the relevant thoughts and feelings.

5. EMOTIONAL IDENTIFICATION

Emotional identification is seldom discussed in the empathy literature. It occurs when an intense engagement with another person causes us to lose sight of distinctions between that person and our self [Coplan 2011: 16, Goldie 2000: 193, Deigh 1995: 758-59].¹⁷ As we focus on the other person we adopt mental states that seem appropriate to that person's situation. However, because of our narrow focus, we do not appreciate that the mental states are fitting for or in some sense belong to a subject in the other's situation. We experience the mental states as if we actually were the other person. Goldie describes the phenomenon as follows:

This [phenomenon] takes various forms which have in common the fact that, when one emotionally identifies with another, one's sense of one's own identity to some extent *merges* with one's sense of the identity of the other, so that there is a sort of draining away of the boundaries of cognitive and sensory identity [193].

For an example of emotional identification, consider a case given by John Deigh.

Indeed, when such identification is strong and one's own identity weak or budding, the result is likely to be a loss of the sense of oneself as separate from the person with whom one identifies. Thus a boy who so strongly identifies with a favorite ballplayer that every game is an occasion for

¹⁷ Stocker and Hegeman describe it as occurring when "boundaries between them are too porous or nonexistent, each is too caught up in the life of the other, too involved and overly concerned with that person" [1996: 116]. Coplan quotes this passage as well [2011: 16].

intense, vicarious ball playing...he makes believe that he is this player and loses himself in the process. He takes the latter's perspective and imaginatively participates in the player's trials, successes, and failures, but in doing so he may merely be transferring his own egocentricity from one perspective to another [1995: 759].

As the boy loses sight of his own identity, his thoughts and feelings begin to better fit with the situation in the field. He experiences the attitudes that correspond with being the ballplayer. If he perceives something as threatening the player's success, then he experiences fear. He does not fear the threat because of a concern for the wellbeing of another; rather, he fears it because of a concern for his own success *qua* the player.¹⁸

Emotional identification is similar to empathy in two key respects. Both phenomena involve imaginative attention directed at another's situation as if one were a subject in that situation, and both produce affective states that respond to features of the situation. Despite this similarity, emotional identification involves a different mode of perspective-taking than that which characterizes empathy. Empathy involves imaginatively stepping into another's perspective while remaining aware that this perspective is distinct from our own. We do not identify with that perspective, and therefore, we do not identify with the corresponding view of the situation or the resulting thoughts and feelings. Empathy maintains a psychological distance from the other subject. This distance creates space for us to appreciate how the states that we experience

¹⁸ This is a modified version of an example used by Scheler [1954: 18-30].

resemble how *the other* thinks and feels about a situation viewed in a particular way. Emotional identification, in contrast, does not preserve a distinction between the self and other. The person *as other* falls out of view. As a result, we do not differentiate the other's perspective from our own, and the consequence is that we no longer appreciate how our experiences resemble another's view or response to the situation.

Researchers refer to the way in which empathy maintains psychological distance as “self-other differentiation.”¹⁹ Martin Hoffman describes this as a cognitively sophisticated sense of the self that allows us to distinguish things happening to us from things happening to others [2000: 62-64]. Because empathy uses our own psychological machinery to better understand others, it is crucial while empathizing that we can accurately maintain this distinction. As Amy Coplan explains,

One thus remains aware of the fact that the other is a separate person and that the other has his own unique thoughts, feelings, desires, and characteristics. This enables deep engagement with the other while preventing one from losing sight of where the self ends and the other begins *and* where the other ends and the self begins. Without clear self-other differentiation, we are almost certain to fail in our attempts to empathize. We either lose our sense of self and become enmeshed or, more often, we let our imaginative process become contaminated by our

¹⁹ See Coplan 2011 and Hoffman 2000 for illuminating description of this notion. Theorists sometimes use other names to refer to this aspect of empathy (e.g., “self-other distinction” Bischof-Köhler 2012, “self-other awareness” Decety and Meltzoff 2011).

self-perspective and thus end up engaged in a simulation that fails to replicate the experience of the other [2011: 16, Coplan refers to emotional identification as “enmeshment”].

Sober and Wilson make a similar point,

When Barbara learns that Bob’s father has just died, she may empathize with Bob without losing sight of the fact that they are two different people, not one and the same person...Barbara understands perfectly well who it is who has just lost a parent. When people confuse the real misfortunes of others with their own more fortunate situation, we do not praise them for their ability to empathize; empathy is not the inability to keep track of who is who [1998: 233].

6. SELF-ORIENTED PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

There are different kinds of perspective-taking, but in general “perspective-taking” refers to a kind of imaginative activity by which we change our standpoint on a situation. We change our standpoint by imagining that we are in a different position or that we have different psychology.²⁰ For example, we can imagine that we are in a different set of circumstances with different beliefs, different values, and different experiences. This imaginative activity requires cognitive sophistication and careful regulation. We need to be able to construe a situation in different ways, entertain beliefs

²⁰ It is sometimes also called “perspective shifting” [e.g., Goldie 2011].

that we do not have, and disregard some of our own concerns and related affective responses. As Coplan states, “perspective-taking requires mental flexibility and relies on regulatory mechanisms to modulate our level of affective arousal and suppress our own perspective” [2011: 13]. Empathy, as mentioned earlier, is a form of other-oriented perspective-taking. It involves imagining being in another’s circumstances and having the relevant features of her psychology. By doing so, we are able to reenact how *she* views a situation and how *she* thinks and feels about the situation.

We need to distinguish this form of perspective-taking from what we might call “*self-oriented* perspective-taking.” Self-oriented perspective-taking involves imagining being in the circumstances of another person but with our *own* beliefs, values, experiences, and dispositions. We imagine how we—holding fixed our own psychology—would think and feel if we were in the other’s position. Heidi Maibom calls this an “*imagine-self*” process [2014, 2010], and Goldie refers to it as “*in-his-shoes* perspective-shifting.” Goldie states that the phenomenon involves “consciously and intentionally shifting your perspective in order to imagine what thoughts, feelings, decisions, and so on *you* would arrive at if you were in the other’s circumstances” [2011: 302]. Smith identifies this distinction between self and other-oriented perspective-taking in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. He explains it as follows:

But though sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and

character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize. When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession, should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters.”
[1790/2002: VII.iii.i.4].

It is important to make this distinction because sometimes the two forms of perspective-taking produce different states in us even when thinking about the same set of circumstances [Coplan 2011, Goldie 2011, 2000, Batson 2011].²¹ For example, if I imagine myself in the shoes of a tightrope walker, then I feel anxiety. I experience this negative attitude because I take no pleasure in being up high. This distaste for heights is part of my psychological profile. However, if I imagine being the tightrope walker with his psychology, then I view the situation in light of his confidence and familiarity with heights. This is a different perspective on the situation. When viewed from that perspective the situation does not give rise to the negative attitudes. It would reproduce the other’s way of thinking and feelings about the situation.

I believe that for a similar reason it is worth distinguishing a third form of perspective-taking. This form involves imagining being in another’s circumstances but having an edited or idealized version of that person’s psychological profile. For example,

²¹ Evidence from neuroscience suggests that these processes rely on different neural mechanisms [Coplan 2011: 10, Ruby and Decety 2004, Jackson, Brunet, et al. 2006].

we would correct for such things as epistemic shortcomings and irrational fears when imaging things from the other's perspective. This third form of perspective-taking is not often discussed in the literature. Even theorists who are careful to separate the first two often do not distinguish this third. For example, Coplan states, "Although many researchers discuss only a single form of perspective-taking, which can be more or less successful, there are at least two appreciably different forms" [2011: 9].²² Although it is not often discussed, this process is worth distinguishing because it can produce different states in us than the states we would experience if we empathize or if we imagine our self in the other's circumstances. For example, we see a girl blissfully playing in shark-infested water. She does not recognize that there is danger lurking below. If we imagine being the girl in her circumstances (i.e., empathy) or we imagine ourselves blissfully playing in the water, then we would experience an echo of her joy. However, if we imagine being her in her circumstances but we correct for her ignorance, then we would experience fear. Our fear would be an appropriate response to the danger, but it would not reenact her actual thoughts and feelings about the situation.

By highlighting these distinctions I do not mean to imply that we can only use one form of perspective-taking when thinking about another's attitudes. On any given occasion we can oscillate between the different forms. Moreover, I believe that each form has the potential to help us better appreciate others' thoughts and feelings. However, the distinctions do imply that of the three forms only empathy is constrained by the other's

²² Goldie [2011, 2000] and [Batson 2010, 1997] also identify only two forms of perspective-taking. Martin Hoffman is the most notable exception. He identifies a version of this third form as a variant of what he calls "other-focused" perspective-taking [2000: 57].

actual perspective. Empathy, therefore, is uniquely set up to reenact how view situations and how others think and feel about those situations. This is particularly salient when we consider cases in which another person thinks and feels about the situation differently than we would or differently than she should. In these cases empathy is better equipped to produce states that resemble the other's actual thoughts and feelings.

Several other clarifications are in order. First, my account is neutral about whether perspective-taking is the default means by which we identify or understand others' attitudes. There are some neurological and phenomenological reasons for thinking that it is not [Zahavi 2012]. For example, in many cases we understand what a person is thinking and feeling without having to engage in complex imagining. I see a baby giggling while being tickled, and I recognize that she is happy. It seems that I do not need to imaginatively take her perspective in order to understand her response. Theorists offer different explanations of how such understanding occurs.²³ For example, Dan Zahavi [2014, 2012] argues that we primarily understand others' mental life by way of a primitive form of perception or quasi-perception. We are hardwired to directly experience others as undergoing intentional mental states. Zahavi claims that these experiences are qualitatively different from our experiences of non-minded objects and our experiences of our self. Even if Zahavi is correct, this basic mode of interpersonal understanding is compatible with more complex modes such as perspective-taking [2014: 141]. Empathy,

²³ The most prominent accounts involve versions of Theory-Theory and Simulation Theory. For more on these theories see Ravenscroft 2010, Hutto 2008, Goldman 2006, and Stueber 2006.

as I show below, would still be a valuable resource that helps us to appreciate the nature of others' attitudes and actions even if it is not the default means.

Second, sometimes we try to take others' perspectives but fail to experience resembling states. This can happen for several reasons. For example, if we have inaccurate beliefs about another's psychology, then these beliefs can cause us to take up a perspective that does not reflect the other's perspective. Similarly, if another's experiences, values, context, or beliefs are too foreign from our own, then we might struggle at imagining how that person construes the situation. People sometimes respond to things in irrational, inconsistent, and aberrant ways. When this occurs even if we come to see the situation from a similar standpoint, we may not respond in a similarly irrational, inconsistent, or aberrant way. In all of these cases, we fail to reenact how the other person thinks and feels about the situation despite trying to take her perspective.

Third, as mentioned earlier, empathy does not produce states that are identical to the other person's states. Rather, the perspective-taking process produces only an echo or resemblance of the other's thoughts and feelings. The states are not identical for at least three reasons. First, we need to think about the other person's psychology when imaginatively adopting her perspective. Her psychology shapes her perspective and thereby her response to the situation. Therefore, we need to take it into account when shifting into her perspective. However, as Goldie points out, the other person normally does not think about such things when responding to the world [2011: 309]. In a similar way, when we experience an echo of another's thoughts and feelings, we might be attending to the nature of those states in a way that the other person is not. Therefore, our

mental states will involve considerations or features not present in the other person's thinking. The second reason is that when empathizing we do not lose sight of the fact that we are imagining things from another's standpoint. Because of this self-other differentiation we do not identify with the thoughts and feelings that we experience. We take our experience as a reenactment of how the other thinks and feels. In this way the states produced by empathizing are importantly different. They have an external or alien quality not present in the original. The third reason that our states are not identical is that they differ in intensity. There are two senses of intensity that are relevant here. The first is that the resembling states tend to be less affectively or emotionally intense. If the other person feels rage, then we experience a more constrained version of anger. Adam Smith argues that this difference arises because we only experience the states in virtue of imagining seeing a situation from the other's perspective. In contrast, the other person experiences the emotions in direct response to her situation. He states,

After all of this, however, the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned. That imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary. The thought of their own safety, the thought that they themselves are not really the sufferers, continually intrudes itself upon them; and though it does not hinder them

from conceiving a passion somewhat analogous to what is felt by the sufferer, hinders them from conceiving any thing that approaches to the same degree of violence [1790/2002: I.i.4.7].

Our resembling states are also often less intense in terms of phenomenal quality. They lack the same qualitative depth and robustness. Imagining being someone else thinking and feelings about a situation tends not to be as phenomenally rich as actually being the person responding to the situation. This is part of the reason why I describe the states that we experience as an *echo* of another's states. Adam Smith makes a similar point; he describes the states we experience as a "shadow" of the states that the other experiences [1790/2002: II.ii.2.1].

The question then is 'if not identity, how similar do the states need to be in order to count as resemblance?' Other theorists note that it is difficult to specify when a state is similar enough that it adequately matches the other's state [e.g., Morton 2011: 319, Snow 2000: 69, Sober and Wilson 1998: 233]. Nancy Snow claims that such specification is not built into the concept of empathy [2000: 69]. However, even if she is right, we can still identify the kinds of features that determine whether or not there is sufficient resemblance. For example, it is necessary that the states have at least the same intentional object, appraisal, affective tone, and valence. These features are necessary because they are relevant to how states constitute meaningful or rational responses to a situation. Therefore, for an empathic observer to have states that resemble another's, the states need to be similar in at least these ways. For example, a journal emails me with a decision

regarding my submission. Before opening the email, I am anxious yet hopeful. My experience represents both that I care about the publishing of the paper and that I am uncertain about the journal's decision. If someone tries to empathize with me and his imaginative activity produces states that are not about the journal's decision, then his states do not resemble mine. He is not thinking and feeling about the situation in the right way. Similarly, if his states fail to include any sense of ambivalence, then they are not capturing the complexity of my attitudes about the situation. If such discrepancies occur, then the other's imaginative activity fails to fully reenact how I think and feel about the situation. Adam Morton makes a similar point. In defining empathy, he claims,

I have required just that one 'represent' the state of the other person, but in a way that captures its affective tone and perspective. I intend this to involve the same sort of emotion felt in the same sort of way, but I am not requiring that the fit be perfect. I do have in mind, though I am not writing it into the definition, that the way one represents another's state of mind in empathizing with them enable the kind of understanding of the person that empathy should support [2011: 319].

The fourth clarification is that taking others' perspectives can produce states that resemble more than just emotions. This is a departure from how many theorists describe empathy [e.g., Morton 2011, Prinz 2011a, 2011b, de Vignemont and Singer 2006, Maibom 2010, 2007, Smith 1790/2002, Snow 2000]. Our responses to the world, however, are often complex sets of intentional states, and these sets do not consist of only

emotional states. For example, my brother is reminiscing about a childhood Christmas. He is feeling nostalgic and his nostalgia is an affective state. However, he also has doubts about the accuracy of his memories, he has beliefs about the origins of those memories, and he has desires to recreate those memories for his children. These latter states do not fit neatly into the category of emotions. Nevertheless, these states characterize what he is going through as he thinks about that Christmas. They are part of the complex set of intentional states that constitute how he is responding to the situation. If I only appreciate his feeling of nostalgia, then I fail to appreciate significant aspects of his thinking and feeling. Put otherwise, when we view a situation from another's perspective, we do not just see it as calling for certain emotions. We can also see it as justifying certain beliefs or eliciting certain desires. Seeing it in this way can cause us to have beliefs or desires that resemble the other's non-emotional states. Having these states can be part of reenacting another's complex thoughts and feelings about a situation.

Finally, it is worth highlighting that taking others' perspectives does not entail that we approve of the their perspectives or their thoughts and feelings. In fact we can reenact how others' think and feel about a situation even when we disagree with their values or how they view the situation in light of those values. We take up others' perspectives, as I argue in section 8, because it helps us to appreciate the nature of their thoughts and feelings. Appreciation, however, does not necessarily cause us to endorse the other's attitudes as appropriate, agreeable, or praiseworthy. For example, if I empathize with a child bullying another, I might come to better appreciate his feelings of superiority. Despite this appreciation, I can still judge that the bully's feelings are

inappropriate and that his conduct is morally blameworthy. In short, empathy is not itself an evaluative process.

7. ALTERNATIVE RESOURCES

Perspective-taking is not the only way in which we improve our understanding of others' thoughts and feelings. In this section I group together some of these alternative resources. These resources are sometimes problematically referred to as "empathic inference." The term "empathic inference" comes from the work of William Ickes [e.g., 2009, 2003]. Ickes describes empathic inference as the everyday mindreading that people do when attempting to determine others' thoughts and feelings [2009: 57]. It involves coming to have new beliefs and feelings about someone's attitudes based on our perception of the other person and our prior set of attitudes. Our prior set may include beliefs about the following sorts of things: the other person, the situation, the standard human response to this situation, and the object of the other's mental states. These attitudes form an inferential base. By viewing the other's attitudes and actions in light of our inferential base, we can come to feel and believe new things about the other's response. Researchers also refer to this activity as "mentalizing." To clarify, there is a way of understanding "empathic inference" and "mentalizing" such that it includes perspective-taking. I am not using the terms in this way. In this section "empathic inference" and "mentalizing" refer to ways in which we think and make inferences about others thoughts and feelings without taking up their perspectives.

Peter Goldie distinguishes two ways in which we think about others without taking their perspectives [2011, 2002, 2000].²⁴ First, we can think about others in an impersonal way. In doing so we rely on a range of psychological norms, expectations, or folk theory regarding human beings in order to better understand and predict their attitudes. This theorizing does not draw on phenomenal concepts or what it is like to have such attitudes [2002: 248-49]. Second, we can think about others in a personal way. By ‘personal’, Goldie means that we can think about others and their attitudes in terms of concepts that we have in virtue of subjective or first-personal experiences. For example, we can think about what it is like for someone to be afraid based on a personal familiarity with the phenomenology of fear [2002: 249]. Goldie claims that we can think about others in this way without imagining being them in their circumstances. He states,

The neglected alternative [to empathy] is the possibility of seeing the other *as another person*, understanding and responding to him as having dispositions and attitudes perhaps deeply different from one’s own, whilst not theorizing about him as one might theorize over other kinds of things.

The point of view is third-personal, but in no way impersonal [2011: 303, n.2].

Goldie’s point is that we come to have beliefs about others’ situations that depend on our own subjective experiences, these attitudes can help us to understand what others are going through, and we do not need to empathize in order to have these attitudes. For

²⁴ Goldie does not use the terms “empathic inference” or “mentalizing.”

example, I see a student who is crying while looking at an exam I just returned. I infer that the student is disappointed and I recognize how unpleasant it feels to be disappointed. My recognition depends on perceptual cues, my knowledge of the student, and my own personal experiences with disappointment. I do not need to imagine the situation from her standpoint in order to grasp the nature of what she is thinking and feeling.

Mentalizing or empathic inference is less demanding than empathy because it does not involve perspective-taking. Taking another's perspective requires that we have familiarity with the other person and the relevant situation. We need to recognize her relevant beliefs, values, experiences, and dispositions insofar as they bear on the particular situation. We also need some sense of what it is like to be in that sort of situation. If we do not know these things, then we are going to struggle to reenact how she views the situation and how she thinks and feels about the situation. This is a demanding standard. We struggle to meet this standard in cases where we know little about the person or where the situation is unlike anything we have ever experienced. For example, most middle-class American children cannot even imagine what it is like to be a poor child scrounging for food in a war-ravaged city. The poor child's situation is so different that it exceeds the children's imaginative abilities. Of course empathic inference also benefits from greater familiarity with the other person or the situation. The more we know about the person or the situation, the more we can draw upon when trying to infer the nature of her thoughts and feelings. The difference, however, is that empathic inference does not *require* the familiarity. We are not trying to reenact the other's

thoughts and feelings or how she views the situation, and so we do not need the familiarity in order to imaginatively recreate her perspective. As a result, inference is a resource that we can use in a wider range of cases.

This is not the only difference between the two sorts of phenomena. Empathy also involves an experiential feature that empathic inference lacks. When empathizing we experience an echo of how the other thinks and feels about a situation. This echo is an internal or first-personal subjective experience that resembles what the other undergoes in responding to the situation. As I argue below, this experience helps us to better appreciate her thoughts and feelings. Empathic inference, in contrast, does not involve perspective-taking. As a result, although we might experience feelings about another's response, those feelings are not a reenactment of how she thinks or feels. We do not experience how she responds to the situation given her perspective. In this way, inference and empathy do not have the same upshot when compared as resources for interpersonal understanding.

8. EMPATHY'S UPSHOT

In the preceding sections I clarify how empathy is distinct from related phenomena. Empathy, I claim, is a process of other-oriented perspective-taking that enables us to imagine another's view of a situation and experience an echo of their thoughts and feelings. When we experience these states we do not entirely identify with them; rather, we recognize that they resemble the other's attitudes given their perspective on the situation. In this section I explain the upshot of empathy for interpersonal

understanding. I argue that the experience of resembling states helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feelings. In particular it helps us to appreciate how those thoughts and feelings are part of a meaningful response to a particular situation. It does so in roughly the following way: by reenacting how others think and feel about a situation, we come to better appreciate how another person views a situation, what she experiences in response to the situation, and how her thoughts and feelings are a rational response to specific features of the situation.

To begin, we must recognize that empathy involves more than just identifying the types of attitudes that others experience.²⁵ Recognizing an attitude type is not the same as understanding how that attitude is meaningful.²⁶ We can identify the attitude without appreciating why it makes sense for the person to have that attitude in response to the particular situation. For example, if I know that someone is afraid, but I do not know the object of her fear or I do not grasp what it is about the object that she finds frightening, then I do not appreciate how her fear represents a meaningful response to the particular situation. I do not appreciate the reasons in virtue of which she responds with fear. Empathy, I argue, helps us to appreciate how another's attitude is meaningful. When we take the other's perspective we construe the situation as she sees it. This means that we come to see the object of her fear, in light of her beliefs and concerns, as dangerous. We also experience an echo of her fear of the object. By reenacting how she thinks and feels,

²⁵ I mention this because theorists sometimes describe empathy as simply a mechanism for attributing mental-state types [e.g., Bloom, 2014].

²⁶ "Meaningful" here refers to the rational character of an attitude that reflects an agent's responsiveness to reasons or what she takes to be reasons.

we can better appreciate how her attitude is a rational response to a specific feature or set of features in the situation.

Consider the following example to help clarify this point: My friend is reading the newspaper and becomes upset about one of the articles. Without taking his perspective, I can discern that he is angry just by looking at his facial expression. I can also assume—based on the nature of anger—that he is angry because he found something offensive. Based on contextual features I can also infer that his anger is about something in the article. In this way, his attitude is intelligible to me. It makes sense for someone to get angry at offensive writing in a news article. However, because I do not see what is offensive in the article, I fail to grasp something about the particular nature of his thoughts and feelings. I do not appreciate what he finds offensive or how his feelings are (or are supposed to be) a rational response to specific features of the situation. One thing I can do to improve my understanding (in addition to talking with my friend) is to read the article as if from his perspective. Reading while imagining having his beliefs, values, and concerns can make salient new aspects of the article. It can draw my attention to features or qualities of those features that I may not see when reading from my original perspective. Attending to these features as offensive in light of my friend's concerns allows me to reenact his thoughts and feelings. By reenacting the thoughts and feelings about those features, I come to better appreciate how my friend feels and how those feelings represent a rational response to the particular article. In short, empathizing with my friend helps me to understand what he is going through and why he feels the way that he does.

Expanding on this point, we can identify three related ways in which empathy helps us to understand the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. First, empathizing helps us to see how another views the situation. When we take another's perspective we imaginatively adopt the other's position, beliefs, values, and concerns, and we view the situation in light of these psychological features. Because the other's psychology differs from our own, viewing the situation from that perspective can change what is salient to us and it can change how we construe the evaluative significance of features of the situation. As a result, we may come to see things differently than how we initially saw them when we take up another's perspective. For example, I hear a comedian tell an off-color joke that casually deals with issues of sexual harassment. I initially laugh at the joke because of its shock value and its use of a clever juxtaposition. My friend—who spends more time thinking about gender issues—does not laugh. He believes that sexual harassment is a serious social problem, and he thinks that it is not something about which male comedians should joke. As a result, he experiences anger because he views the joke as too casual and insensitive in its treatment of the topic. Suppose that I empathize with my friend and imaginatively adopt the sorts of concerns that shape his perspective. I will start to see the joke in a new light. The joke's clever juxtaposition would lose salience, and its trivialization of the topic would gain salience. Viewing things in this way would help me to appreciate the situational features to which he is responding.

Second, empathizing helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feeling by producing resembling states. When I take my friend's perspective and construe the joke as offensive I experience an echo of my friend's anger. Experiencing the echo provides a

vivid representation of what he feels. This representation involves an experiential element that is not present in just discerning that he is angry. The distinction is comparable to remembering that I was annoyed with a friend's behavior versus imaginatively reliving the situation such that I feel the annoyance again. Having the experience provides an "enlivened" representation [Smith 1790/2002 I.i.2.2]. This enlivened representation helps me to appreciate what he is going through when he responds to the joke. Moreover, experiencing what he is going through can in turn impact how I view the situation. Emotion research indicates that being in affective states can cause us to construe features of a situation as having greater evaluative significance [Walton 1997]. For example, feeling jumpy after watching a horror movie makes us more disposed to see things as dangerous. The shadows on our walk home from the movie appear as hiding places for something scary. Because empathizing can cause us to experience affective states, empathizing can lead to an increase in the salience of features with evaluative significance. For example, I take the perspective of my friend who is angry. I focus on what he sees as offensive and I experience an echo of his anger. Experiencing this echo brings into sharper view how features of the situation appear offensive. My view of certain features as offensive becomes pronounced because I am experiencing a state resembling anger. Therefore, experiencing resembling states not only helps us to appreciate what another feels, it can also help us to appreciate how he sees evaluative contours of the situation such that he feels those things.

Justin Steinberg makes a related point. He notes that we take in a substantial amount of information when we engage with the world as subjects. Though much of this

information is often not articulable or salient in higher-level conscious thinking, the information affects how we conceptualize and respond to the situation. He claims that because of the richness of the first-person subjective experience, we can lose a lot of information about how another person thinks and feels about a situation when we do not adopt a similar perspective. He states, “First-person perspectives contain so much compressed, sub-personal information that *for all intents and purposes* one might have to *feel* what it is like to grasp the whole perspective” [53]. This isn’t to claim that we need to grasp everything about an experience in order to understand someone’s thoughts and feelings. In many cases we might determine that we sufficiently understand another’s thoughts and feelings without the full breadth of this information. Instead, the point is that the way in which empathy provides understanding—by using our own imaginative and emotional machinery to acquaint us with the others’ thoughts and feelings—enables an extensive appreciation of those attitudes and how they relate to a particular view of the situation. Moreover, it provides this appreciation quickly, and thereby, it can help us in situations where we do not have much time and information with which to reflect, investigate, or theorize about the nature of the others’ experience.

I’ve claimed so far that empathizing helps us to appreciate how others view a situation and how they think and feel about that situation. These two ways in which empathizing helps us to appreciate others’ attitudes give rise to a third. Empathizing helps us to appreciate how others experience their attitudes as a rational response to the situation. When we reenact how others think and feel about a situation, we experience an echo of their attitudes and that echo is about some feature of the situation construed as

having evaluative significance. In this way, we experience the echo as a rational response to the feature of the situation. The feature is presented as a reason to respond in a certain sort of way. For example, by empathizing with my angry friend, I experience an echo of his anger and that echo is *about* the inappropriateness of the joke. I thereby experience my resembling state as a rational response. It responds to the presentation of the joke as offensive for trivializing a sensitive subject. Moreover, experiencing this rational response disposes me to react in characteristic ways. Affective states are often motivating; they prime us to respond to the evaluative presentations of their objects. Therefore, experiencing an echo of my friend's anger as about the offensiveness of the joke can affect my own motivational set within the bounds of the empathic process. It can prime me to respond to the joke in further ways that reflect one who is offended. The experience of this priming, in turn, helps me to better appreciate how my friend feels moved to respond to the situation. In this way, empathizing with my friend helps me to appreciate the complex nature of what he is going through. I experience how—given his view of things—his thoughts and feelings constitute a meaningful and fitting response to the situation.

In short, empathizing involves using our own psychological machinery to reenact how others think and feel about situations that they view in particular ways. The experience of these reenactments helps us to appreciate the complex nature of others' thoughts and feelings. For example, empathy helps us to appreciate how others view a situation, how they feel in response to the situation, and how that feeling represents a

meaningful response. I argue in the next chapter that this appreciation benefits us as moral agents.

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Chapter 2: Empathy and the Reactive Attitudes

In the previous chapter I examine the nature of empathy as a resource for interpersonal understanding. I show that empathy helps us to appreciate the complex nature of others' thoughts and feelings. In particular it helps us to appreciate how their attitudes represent a meaningful response to a specific situation. This account, however, does not yet show that empathy benefits us as moral agents. In this chapter I begin to develop this part of the account. Using the reactive attitudes as a proxy for judgments of moral worth, I show that empathy helps us to make and correct judgments about the worth of someone's conduct and to recognize others' judgments about moral worth. The appreciation it provides of others' thoughts and feelings makes possible a more sophisticated participation in the moral community.

1. INTRODUCTION

P.F. Strawson's "Freedom and Resentment" is one of the landmark essays in 20th century moral philosophy. One of the highlights of the essay is how it draws attention to the role of affective states in moral life. Strawson argues that we naturally respond to displays of interpersonal regard with attitudes such as gratitude, approbation, and love, and we react to a lack of regard with resentment, indignation, and guilt. He refers to these sorts of responses as the "reactive attitudes." The reactive attitudes, he claims, are a

“complicated web of attitudes and feelings which form an essential part of the moral life as a we know it” [1993: 64]. They are ‘part of the moral life as we know it’ because they structure the way in which we participate in interpersonal relationships. As participants in these relationships, we expect and demand that people express sufficient regard and goodwill when they interact with one another. When we discern that someone meets or fails to meet these expectations, we are liable to experience the reactive attitudes. Our attitudes rest on, reflect, or constitute appraisals of the quality of will with which the person interacts. They are intimately bound up in our activities of praising and blaming and in making judgments about the worth of someone’s conduct.

Not everyone is as confident as Strawson that the reactive attitudes—particularly the negative reactive attitudes—are a constructive or essential part of moral life.²⁷ However, even if one is doubtful about the value of the reactive attitudes, one cannot deny that the reactive attitudes characterize the way in which we normally experience moral life. Most of us cannot avoid responding to displays of concern with reactive attitudes of approval or reacting to displays of malice with disapproval. Similarly, most of us cannot turn off our sensitivity to others’ reactive attitudes. We are sensitive to others’ reactive attitudes because we care about how others think and feel. This prevalence is one reason why I examine the benefits of empathy in terms of the reactive attitudes. I wish to illustrate how empathy supports moral judgment in one of its widespread, everyday forms.

²⁷ For example, Watson [2004] raises skeptical concerns regarding the necessity of the ‘retributive sentiments’ for holding one another accountable. He identifies Gandhi and King as exemplars of moral virtue that combat oppression without expressing malice or vindictiveness [257-58].

There are three additional reasons to focus on the reactive attitudes. First, empathy is thought of as a phenomenon that deals primarily with the affective side of human experience. It makes sense, therefore, to begin assessing its role in moral life by looking at how it deals with an affective dimension of moral life. Second, much of the research on empathy and morality focuses on whether empathy helps agents to determine if an action would violate a harm norm or moral principle [e.g., Mastro 2015, Prinz 2011b, Maibom 2010, Snow 2000]. Although these sorts of judgments about right and wrong and what one ought to do are a crucial part of moral life, we also expect mature moral agents to make and recognize sophisticated judgments about motives and the moral worth of attitudes and actions. We expect them to assess the quality of agents' thoughts and feelings, and to determine how those thoughts and feelings contribute to the moral quality of agents' conduct. Therefore, because these judgments are a significant part of moral life and they are connected to the reactive attitudes, it is worth examining whether empathy is a resource that helps us in our dealings with the reactive attitudes. Finally, Prinz, who denies that empathy is a valuable resource for moral agents, defends a sentimentalist account of moral judgment [2011a]. By showing that empathy supports our dealings with affective states such as the reactive attitudes, I can show that empathy is a resource that helps us to deal with the kind of states in terms of which he understands moral judgment.

In this essay I identify three ways in which empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes. Empathy helps us to appreciate how others' conduct expresses ill will, goodwill, or indifferent disregard towards another person. This appreciation, in turn, helps us to have appropriate reactive attitudes that respond to the moral worth of others'

conduct. In a similar way, empathy helps us to disqualify and dispel reactive attitudes that are inappropriate while affirming and sustaining attitudes that are appropriate. Finally, empathy helps us to appreciate and be moved by others' reactive attitudes. Put otherwise, if we take the reactive attitudes as a proxy for judgments of moral worth, then empathy benefits us as moral agents by helping us to make and correct judgments about moral worth and to recognize others' judgments about moral worth.

2. THE REACTIVE ATTITUDES

In "Freedom and Resentment" Strawson never provides a precise definition of the reactive attitudes. He claims that his argument rests on ideas that are familiar from everyday understanding. He states, "my language, like that of commonplace generally, will be quite unscientific and imprecise" [48]. In this chapter I follow Strawson and do not offer a precise definition of the reactive attitudes. My goal is to show that empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes, and I can do this without providing a theory-laden account. Nevertheless, I will provide a general characterization of the reactive attitudes in order to bring the phenomenon into the foreground.²⁸

The reactive attitudes are responses we have to the quality of agent's attitudes and actions. We experience a reactive attitude when we discern that someone in her conduct is displaying or failing to display concern, regard, or goodwill for another [49]. Strawson identifies two sorts of other-directed reactive attitudes [57]. The *personal reactive*

²⁸ I am not taking a position in the debates over the nature of the reactive attitudes or how those attitudes constitute the ground of moral responsibility. For examples of work discussing these issues, see Macnamara 2015, 2011, Deigh 2011, Wallace 2011, 1993, Darwall 2006, Watson 2004, and Bennett 1980.

attitudes arise when we discern that someone is expressing ill will, a lack of regard, or goodwill towards us. For example, if someone publicly insults us in order to cause us pain, we resent his doing so. If our neighbor closes the garage door that we accidentally left open in order to save us from theft, then we appreciate her help and feel gratitude towards her. In comparison, the *vicarious reactive attitudes* arise when we register someone displaying ill will, lack of regard, or goodwill towards another person. If we hear about a colleague callously making insensitive comments to a vulnerable student, we experience indignation in response to our colleague's lack of concern. If we hear about a child courageously defending a peer from bullying, we feel approbation for the considerate child. We also have reactive attitudes in response to our own attitudes and actions. The *self-reactive attitudes* arise when we recognize that our own conduct meets or fails to meet the expectations about regard or goodwill we have for others. If I realize that I have thoughtlessly hurt my brother by disparaging his career choices, then I feel guilt or remorse for what I've done. Conversely, if I generously help a disadvantaged acquaintance secure social aid, then I feel pride about my altruistic behavior.

Our reactive attitudes are involved in judgments of moral worth. When we are indignant we disapprove of someone displaying ill will or disregard for another. Our attitude indicates a condemnation and withdrawal of esteem. It communicates an attribution of blame to the person.²⁹ When we feel approbation for someone we approve

²⁹ It is beyond the scope of my project to determine the precise nature of the relationship between our reactive attitudes and our appraisals of someone as worthy of blame or praise. My argument is consistent with a variety of accounts of this relationship. What is important—for my project—is that our reactive attitudes are intricately bound up in our practices of blaming and praising one another. This is not to claim that all blaming and praising involves reactive attitudes or that blaming and praising always involves an

of her exhibiting interpersonal concern. Our attitude indicates an endorsement and giving of esteem. It communicates an attribution of praise. When we praise or blame someone for her attitudes and actions, and our appraisals involve the reactive attitudes, we are responding to her as one with whom we participate in an interpersonal relationship. We view her as subject to the demands and expectations about showing regard when relating to others, and we treat her as responsible for meeting these demands and expectations. Our reaction to how someone meets these demands is at the heart of what it is to participate in interpersonal relationships. As Strawson observes, “being involved in interpersonal relationships as we normally understand them precisely is being exposed to the range of reactive attitudes and feelings that is in question” [54].³⁰ Not all of our reactive attitudes or interpersonal relationships are necessarily best characterized in moral terms. We participate in various kinds of interpersonal relationships, and the differences in these relationships affect how we react to others’ attitudes and actions [49]. Nevertheless, one kind of relationship in which we participate is the relationship between members of the moral community. We demand and expect moral agents to treat one another with certain levels of respect and concern. When agents meet or fail to meet these expectations we experience reactive attitudes and these attitudes are involved in judgments of moral worth. Jonathan Bennett eloquently puts the point as follows:

affective dimension; rather the claim is that when activities of blaming and praising occur in moral life our reactive attitudes are often present and they are connected to the blaming and praising in a relevant sense.

³⁰ In this essay—as in Strawson’s—the notions of ‘participation’ and ‘interpersonal relationship’ do not pick out finely delineated phenomena. They only gesture at a familiar yet imprecise aspect of everyday life.

When we regret an action, we may blame the agent for it, resent his doing it, hold it against him, find fault with him, speak of or to him in a manner which is censorious or vilifying or abusive, seek revenge, demand punishment. These responses are all related to *blame*—not as a faulty compass may be blamed for an accident, but in the stronger sense in which the object of blame must be believed to be personal, and the attribution of blame is a censure or reproach, which could naturally carry with it thoughts about moral unworthiness. When we welcome an action, we may respond with praise, admiration, gratitude, thoughts of reward, or the like. These responses can be thought of as praise-related—not as one might praise a fine physique or beautiful hair, but rather as one might accompany praise with thoughts of moral worth [1980: 14-15].

We do not exclusively relate to others in the interpersonal manner characteristic of the reactive attitudes—what is sometimes called the “participant stance” [e.g., Macnamara 2011: 82]. Sometimes we step back from treating people as participants in interpersonal relationships, and we adopt an objective stance towards those persons [Strawson 1993: 53]. Strawson states, “we can have direct dealings with human beings without any degree of personal involvement, treating them simply as creatures to be handled in our own interests, or our side’s, or society’s—or even theirs” [54]. When we step back we change how we react to others’ conduct. We no longer view others as participants who are personally responsible for displaying regard for others. Because we

no longer view them in this way, we no longer react with attitudes that are premised on personal displays of regard. Moreover, if we are experiencing the reactive attitudes, taking up objective attitudes can cause our reactive attitudes to dissipate [52]. Strawson distinguishes objective attitudes by stating,

The objective attitude may be emotionally toned in many ways, but not in all ways: it may include repulsion or fear, it may include pity or even love, though not all kinds of love. But it cannot include the range of reactive feelings and attitudes which belong to involvement or participation with others in inter-personal human relationships; it cannot include resentment, gratitude, forgiveness, anger, or the sort of love which two adults can sometimes be said to feel reciprocally, for each other [52].

It is worth further clarifying several things about the reactive attitudes. First, not all reactive attitudes are moral in character. We can experience gratitude when someone helps us to perform a devious action without our gratitude being accompanied by thoughts of moral worth. In these cases our attitude is not involved in an evaluation of the other as morally praiseworthy.³¹ In this essay I am only focusing on reactive attitudes as they occur in instances of moral judgment.

Second, I am not claiming that we have an imperative to experience reactive attitudes in particular cases. For example, Strawson never argues that we *ought* to

³¹ John Deigh makes this point while criticizing how Wallace and Darwall appeal to the reactive attitudes in their accounts of moral responsibility [2011]. He suggests that even more prototypical moral attitudes such as indignation, resentment, or guilt are not always or necessarily moral in character.

experience resentment in particular cases in which someone is worthy of blame. Instead, he only indicates that we have a negative imperative: we *ought not* to experience reactive attitudes when they are inappropriate. For example, we ought not to experience approbation if someone expresses indifferent disregard in his actions. Bennett puts the point as follows:

Consider the proposition that someone ‘is blameworthy’. Strawson has a sense for this if it means that it *would not be wrong to* blame the person, but not if it means that it *would be wrong not to* blame him...Strawson’s account has nothing like this—no imperatives demanding indignation or any other reactive feeling, but only imperatives forbidding them in certain areas, and permissions to have them in the remaining areas [1980: 24].

There are two sorts of occasions in which our reactive attitudes are inappropriate. The first occurs when the targets of our attitudes do not fully participate (at least not without significant qualification) in interpersonal relationships. They do not fully participate because they lack relevant psychological capacities or development [e.g., young children]. We do not treat such individuals as fully responsible for displaying regard because of their condition. Because they are exempt from our demands and expectations to display regard, they are inappropriate targets for the reactive attitudes [Strawson 1993: 52].³² The second sort of occasion occurs when the targets of our

³² These conditions are the grounds for what Watson calls “type-2” pleas. Such pleas attempt to show that, as Watson states, “the agent, temporarily or permanently, globally or locally, is appropriately exempted from the basic demand in the first place...they present the other either as acting uncharacteristically due to

attitudes *do* fully participate in interpersonal relationships and we would normally hold them accountable. Despite being the right kind of targets for the reactive attitudes, our attitudes are inappropriate on these occasions because there is some feature of the situation that excuses the agents for causing benefit or harm.³³ Strawson describes such cases as follows:

To [this] group belong all those which might give occasion for the employment of such expressions as ‘He didn’t mean to’, ‘He hadn’t realized’, ‘He didn’t know’; and also all those which might give occasion for the use of the phrase ‘He couldn’t help it’, when this is supported by such phrases as ‘He was pushed’, ‘He had to do it’, ‘It was the only way’, ‘They left him no alternative’, etc...They do not invite us to view the *agent* as one in respect of whom these attitudes are in any way inappropriate. They invite us to view the *injury* as one in respect of which a particular one of these attitudes is inappropriate. They do not invite us to see the *agent* as other than a fully responsible agent. They invite us to see the injury as one for which he was not fully, or at all, responsible [1993: 51].

extraordinary circumstances, or as psychologically abnormal or morally undeveloped in such a way as to be incapacitated in some or all respects for ‘ordinary adult interpersonal relationships’” [Watson 2004: 224].

³³ These sorts of conditions are the grounds for what Watson calls “type-1” pleas. Such pleas attempt to indicate that despite appearances the agent did not actually fail to meet the basic demand or expectation to express regard and goodwill.

In short, I am suggesting we assume that for particular cases there is no imperative to have a reactive attitude. There is only a negative imperative to *not* have inappropriate attitudes. However, the absence of a positive imperative in particular cases is consistent with there being a more general imperative. There might be an imperative to at least *sometimes* have appropriate reactive attitudes. Similarly, perhaps there is an imperative that we make ourselves sensitive to others' reactive attitudes. We would then merit criticism if we do not at least sometimes experience appropriate reactive attitudes and register others' reactive attitudes. Put otherwise, if we look at particular cases in isolation, then we won't identify an imperative that indicates that we ought to have or register a reactive attitude in that case. However, if we step back and look at moral life more broadly, then we find that there appears to be something resembling a general imperative to be agents who are liable to experience appropriate reactive attitudes and register others' reactive attitudes.

Two considerations support this idea. The first is that such an imperative is not particularly demanding nor would it change how many of us live our lives. As Strawson observes, we cannot altogether stop experiencing or registering the reactive attitudes even if we wanted to. Doing so would require us to stop participating in interpersonal relationships such that we stop being sensitive to the goodwill or ill will of others. He claims, however, that our commitment to these relationships is so thoroughly and deeply rooted that this option appears psychologically impossible [55-57].³⁴ Second, some of our

³⁴ Even in cases where one pursues an ideal of human relationships that eschews the retributive reactive attitudes (e.g. King and Gandhi [Watson 2004: 257-58]) one is never completely rid of reactive attitudes.

relationships are such that participation is obligatory. For example, in most cases parents cannot justifiably stop interacting as parents with their children. Similarly, we cannot permissibly quit being moral agents and stop participating in the interpersonal relationships that make up the moral community. We cannot permissibly stop caring about whether our actions harm others or display sufficient regard, just as we cannot permissibly stop caring about whether someone else is doing harm or displaying regard. But if we cannot permissibly quit participating in the moral community and we cannot permissibly stop caring about whether people show sufficient regard for one another, then we cannot permissibly prevent ourselves from being liable to experience or register the reactive attitudes.³⁵ This seems plausible if we consider things in the context of moral judgment. If someone never responded to displays of ill will with reactive attitudes related to disapproval, or one never took note of others' reactive attitudes related to praise and approval, then it would be hard to view that person as adequately participating in the interpersonal relations that are at the heart of moral life. They would be unresponsive to the sorts of things to which a moral agent ought to react. Their unresponsiveness would suggest a failure to internalize the values at the core of morality.³⁶

Instead, one must continually struggle to suppress and regulate such attitudes while leaving space for pro-social sentiments such as gratitude, forgiveness, and reciprocal love.

³⁵ Note that this is consistent with the position that we should try to limit our experiences and expressions of the negative reactive attitudes.

³⁶ R. Jay Wallace makes a related point while arguing that blame involves a reactive emotion. He suggests that blame involves an emotional response because emotional response reflects a commitment to an internalized set of values. He claims, "To blame someone is a way of caring about the fact that they have treated others with contempt or disregard; when you experience indignation, resentment, or guilt, you are not merely left cold by the immoral attitudes that form the object of blame, but find that those attitudes engage your interest and attention...blame reflects our internalization of the values at the heart of morality..." [2011: 367]. If one never responded emotionally, then we would find it difficult to describe

One final clarification about the reactive attitudes is that they come in degrees of intensity. We can be more or less indignant in response to conduct displaying contempt. We can experience greater or weaker feelings of approbation in response to other's generosity. This variability in intensity is structurally similar to the variability of regard displayed in people's conduct. Attributions of praise and blame—on the part of mature moral judges—are appropriate insofar as they are sensitive to such degrees. In a similar way the appropriateness of our reactive attitudes depends in part on the relation between their intensity and the degree of regard and goodness/badness displayed in someone's conduct.

3. EMPATHY AND JUDGMENTS OF MORAL WORTH

In a pair of recent papers Jesse Prinz calls into question whether empathy is a valuable resource for moral agents. He claims, "Empathy is a thick concept, and it connotes praise. But an endorsement of empathy requires more than a warm fuzzy feeling. We need an argument for why empathy is valuable in the moral domain" [2011b: 214-15]. In this section I provide the beginnings of an argument. I show how empathy supports our efforts at making, correcting, and recognizing judgments of moral worth by helping us in our dealings with the reactive attitudes. Empathizing helps us to have appropriate reactive attitudes in response to the moral worth of others' conduct, and it helps us to register and appreciate the moral appraisal represented in others' reactive attitudes. Because the reactive attitudes partially structure our interpersonal relationships,

that person as having internalized the values (e.g., concern for goodwill) that come with a commitment to participating in the moral community.

the support that empathy provides can improve our participation in those relationships and make possible a more sophisticated participation in the moral community.³⁷

To begin, it is worth highlighting how others' thoughts and feelings make a difference when it comes to judgments of moral worth. The quality of an agent's conduct often depends partially on the nature of the agent's thoughts and feelings. For example, we approve of someone offering criticism when it is intended to help students, but we would disapprove of someone offering similar feedback if it were done condescendingly or if it were intended to put students down. We find it morally worse if a friend insults someone out of malice than if a friend causes the same insult inadvertently. If we aim to make sound judgments—judgments that are based on and respond to the morally relevant features of the other's conduct—then we often need to understand the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. We need to grasp how a person thinks and feels about a situation and how she takes herself to be interacting with others in that situation. In much the same way, if we want to understand what others' judgments indicate as worthy of praise or blame, then we need to understand how others are thinking and feeling about an agent and that agent's conduct.

As I argue in the previous chapter, understanding the nature of others' thoughts and feelings often involves more than just identifying the types of mental states or the

³⁷ It is worth clarifying that this position is consistent with the following two possibilities: 1) not all experiences of the reactive attitudes involve empathizing, and 2) not all moral judgments involve the reactive attitudes. My position only requires that a subset of our judgments of moral worth intricately involve reactive attitudes (or other evaluative attitudes) and empathy supports our dealings with some of those attitudes. The size of the subset, however, needs to be large enough such that if a person is blind to or disengaged from participating in the relevant subset of judgments, then she is disconnected from an important aspect of moral life. I discuss this issue in greater detail below and in Chapter 4.

objects of the mental states they are experiencing. To understand the nature of their thoughts and feelings we need to appreciate how they see or construe an object such that they respond to the situation in the way that they do. For example, in order to fully appreciate my friend's anger about an off-color joke, I need to appreciate what it is about the joke that he sees as offensive. By coming to recognize what it is about the joke that he sees as offensive, I can better appreciate how he thinks and feels and why he has those thoughts and feelings about this particular joke. In this way a better understanding of others' thoughts and feelings can require that we grasp their point of view. We may need to appreciate how their thoughts and feelings are related to a view of the situation that is shaped by such things as their concerns, values, and beliefs.

Empathy, I argue in Chapter 1, is a resource that helps us to do just this. It is a process in which we imaginatively take up others' perspectives such that we see a situation in a similar way and reenact their thoughts and feelings about that situation. This process helps us to appreciate how they are thinking and feeling and why they have those attitudes about the particular situation. Empathy is not the only resource we can use for interpersonal understanding, but it differs from the other resources in important respects. For example, empathy differs from bottom-up processes such as emotional contagion insofar as it is something that we can consciously choose to do. It is also unlike other imaginative processes insofar as empathy is oriented around taking up the other person's perspective. In virtue of this it helps us to better appreciate how the other person sees the situation such that she has particular thoughts and feelings about the situation. It is not, for example, about how we would think and feel if in similar circumstances (i.e.,

self-oriented perspective-taking). Moreover, empathy is unlike inferential processes insofar as it produces states that resemble the others' thoughts and feelings about the situation. The experience of these states quickly provides a rich representation of what the other person is going through in virtue of seeing the situation in a particular way.

These differences are important given the challenges that we sometimes face in understanding the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. Social situations can involve layers of complexity, and agents can respond to those situations in subtle, idiosyncratic ways. Moreover, we each have our own sets of beliefs, concerns, and expectations that shape the way in which we view social situations, and these views can differ significantly from those with whom we interact. Understanding others' thoughts and feelings, therefore, can require that we come to appreciate alternative ways of viewing a situation. This is not always easy or effortless, sometimes it requires deliberately considering how and why others might view the world differently. Further complicating things is that in many cases we do not have limitless time with which to investigate how others' see the situation and sometimes it is not feasible or appropriate to ask agents about the nature of their thoughts and feelings. Given these challenges, it is sometimes an open question how others view a situation and what is the nature of their thoughts and feelings. Empathy better equips us to answer such questions. It uses our imaginative abilities to entertain alternative views of the situation, and it uses our own emotional machinery to provide a reenactment of how other people feel given their view of the situation. In this way,

empathy is a resource that provides a rich appreciation of others' mental life, and it can do so on the fly within an unfolding social situation.³⁸

To see how this is valuable, consider the recent tension between law enforcement and supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM). Supporters of BLM point to police shootings as examples of unwarranted brutality that are part of a systemic violence against the black community. They see these incidents as signifying a callous disregard by police for the value of black lives. In contrast, the police officers and those defending their conduct argue that the shootings are the unfortunate consequence of officers defending law and order in the face of great danger. They claim that the shootings do not occur because of a disregard for the value of black lives, but rather they occur because officers face an impossible situation in which they are forced to make rapid decisions about the threat posed by dangerous-looking suspects to the wellbeing of themselves and innocent by-standers. Each group is indignant and believes that the members of the

³⁸ In this way empathy resembles a psychological resource such as episodic memory. Episodic memory is an expedient way to provide a robust representation of how we were thinking and feeling on a particular occasion. For example, if I want to know why I treated a friend gruffly a few weeks ago, then I will replay the experience in memory in order to relive how I was thinking and feeling about my friend such that I responded as I did. This experiential process is quick way to gain insight into the nature of my anger and my subsequent conduct. There are other resources I could also use to gain understanding. In many cases we know certain facts about our previous experiences, and on the basis of this knowledge we can infer something about the nature of our thoughts and feelings. However, because of the richness of our subject experiences, it is often difficult to access and consider many of the rich, qualitative details about those experiences just by way of semantic memory. We can see this exemplified by people who lack episodic memory, a condition called "severely deficient autobiographical memory" [For a fascinating account of someone with such a condition, see the story of Susie Mackinnon: <http://www.wired.com/2016/04/susie-mckinnon-autobiographical-memory-sdam/>]. These individuals memorize and record detailed facts about their previous states, and they can draw on these facts in order to correctly determine aspects of their previous experiences. However, their understanding about their previous experiences is greatly impoverished. They often cannot recount significant details about their experiences, and their only way to improve their understanding about previous thoughts and feelings is to rely on external resources such as others' testimony, detailed notes, or video evidence. Their inability to draw on episodic memory deprives them of a valuable resource that the rest of us use to improve our understanding about our own mental lives.

opposing group fail to appreciate what they are going through. For example, the supporters of BLM engage in protests, in part, because they believe that the police and society at large fail to appreciate how the black community feels targeted and threatened by law enforcement. The police and their supporters, in contrast, complain that the supporters of BLM fail to appreciate the difficulty and dangers of police work. They feel that the BLM protests show disrespect for those who have made sacrifices and been harmed in the line of duty.

The growing tension between the members of the two groups detracts from the quality of their interpersonal relationships. It has led to a withdrawal of goodwill, feelings of hostility, and acts of physical violence. Moreover, the tension not only impacts members of each group. Other people are drawn into discussions about the merits and demerits of each group's conduct, some people have property damaged in protests, and some people have friends arrested by police. These people thereby also have personal interactions that are affected by the general situation. The situation is complicated, and it gives rise to deep convictions and strong emotional responses. Many people feel resentment and indignation about others' conduct while feeling that their own conduct and point of view is not being understood or judged appropriately. In short, the complexity and tenor of the situation has made it difficult for people to appreciate and evaluate what one another are going through. Empathy can help to provide interpersonal understanding in these sorts of situations, and it does so in such a way that supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes. We can identify three related ways in which empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes.

3.1 The Support of Empathy: The First Way

The first way in which empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes is that it helps us to appreciate how someone's conduct displays regard or a lack of regard for others, and this appreciation, in turn, helps us to have appropriate reactive attitudes about the moral worth of that conduct. When we empathize with another person we reenact how she views a situation and how she feels about features of that situation. If her response to the situation involves negative sentiments for another such as feelings of ill will, contempt, or malice, then empathizing would produce an echo of these sentiments as part of a resembling response. We would come to experience similar thoughts and feelings about the person who is the object of her conduct. Similarly, if her conduct involves positive sentiments such as affection, love, or protectiveness, then we would view another person in a similarly positive light and feel an echo of these sentiments. Reenacting her experience would help us to better appreciate how she regards another person and how her conduct exhibits that regard.

For example, while walking on campus, I see several colleagues and students participating in a lively protest in front of the campus police department. The protesters are waving signs and shouting slogans familiar from the BLM. The police in response have lined up officers between the protesters and the department building. The presence of the officers, however, has incited greater passion in the protesters. I see several colleagues start to shout protest slogans in the direction of the officers nearest to them. Their shouting sounds accusatory, and it initially makes me feel uncomfortable. Struck by my colleagues' lack of civility towards another person, I consider what they are thinking

and feeling. On this occasion I take up their perspectives and in doing so I come to view the situation in light of their concerns about the treatment of black lives by law enforcement. I also imagine being in the midst of those protesters in a state of emotional arousal. Viewing the situation in this way helps me to appreciate how their antisocial conduct towards the officers is not about any personal offense done to them by the officers. Nor does it express any personal ill will or malice felt for those officers in particular. Instead their indignation is about the harm caused by the institution and the fact that nothing is being done about that harm. They direct their indignation towards the individuals because the officers are convenient representatives of that institution.

Empathizing with my colleagues helps me to appreciate what they are thinking and feeling in such a way that I do not experience indignation. I recognize that their conduct issues from a place of concern for the wellbeing of others, and that the emotional intensity and tenor of their shouting is influenced by the intensity and tenor of the larger protest. I excuse them for the antisocial character of their conduct. Suppose that this is a sound judgment. We can compare my reaction in this case to a similar case in which I see a protestor, a student of mine, exhibiting a more agitated behavior. In addition to chanting slogans, he levies personal insults and even throws a water bottle at the officers. The student, similar to my colleagues, is concerned about the wellbeing of the black community and he is caught up in the emotional fervor of the protesting crowd. However, unlike my colleagues, his agitation boils over into personal attacks. By empathizing with my student, I come to appreciate how he has the officers in view such that he responds as he does. I appreciate how his conduct displays contempt and ill will for the officers. In

virtue of this appreciation I come to experience indignation about the poor moral quality of his conduct. My indignation, however, is somewhat mitigated by his concern for others and his being affected by a mob mentality. These cases illustrate the way in which empathy can help us to navigate psychologically complex social situations. Empathy brings into focus how others view a situation given their particular perspective and the thoughts and feelings they have about that situation. This helps us to better appreciate the nature of their thoughts and feelings such that we discern the regard or lack of regard expressed in their conduct. This appreciation, in turn, helps us to respond appropriately to the moral worth of the conduct.

The experiential character involved in empathizing makes empathy psychologically potent as a trigger for the reactive attitudes. Consider the psychological difference between hearing a brief factual account of someone maliciously causing harm and witnessing that malicious response first hand. In both cases we can discern that the agent expresses ill will in her response. In the latter case, however, the other's maliciousness is presented to us in a qualitatively different way. It is as if we see and feel the other's disregard as an evaluative feature of the situation. This subjective, experiential component makes us more liable to experience the reactive attitudes. In a similar way, when we empathize with someone responding maliciously, we experience an echo of her negative sentiment in our reenactment. Experiencing this echo causes us to have a rich representation of the character of the other's thoughts and feelings. We come to appreciate how her thoughts and feelings involve an anti-social quality. This appreciation makes us more liable to experience indignation than we would be if we simply heard a

report that they lack regard for another. Feeling the lack of regard and ill will can move us, as participants in interpersonal relationships, to appraise the moral worth of the attitude.³⁹

It is also worth noting that we can empathize with the people most affected by someone's conduct. Reenacting how those people react to another's conduct can draw our attention to the moral quality of the conduct. For example, I can empathize with the police officer and reenact how he thinks and feels about my student's aggravated behavior. In doing so I would experience an echo of his hurt feelings and resentment towards the student. This empathic experience would draw my attention to the comments and make salient that they have evaluative significance. By attending to the comments as something causing harm, I may be moved to appraise their moral worth.⁴⁰ In this way, empathizing with the officer makes me more liable to experience reactive attitudes in response to the students' behavior.

³⁹ The imaginative activity involved in empathy fits naturally with the participant stance. When we empathize we are not just trying to collect facts about how another responds to the world. Instead, we are trying to appreciate how that person, given her circumstances and individuating features, is thinking and feeling about others in the situation. One way of construing this activity is that we as participants are trying to understand how another participant is engaging in interpersonal relationships, and we pursue this understanding by trying to reenact the other's form of participation. In contrast, hearing a detached factual description of someone's behavior is just as compatible with inhabiting a participant stance as it is with inhabiting an objective stance. For example, when someone outlines the facts pertaining to another's response we could easily engage in a cost-benefit analysis of such a response. This analysis would make us liable to experience objective attitudes rather than participant attitudes.

⁴⁰ Hume makes a similar point in the *Treatise* [1739/2000: 2.2.2-8]; however, he has a slightly different phenomenon than empathy in mind. What he calls "sympathy" is closer to what I identify in Chapter 1 as "emotional contagion." See Coplan and Goldie 2011: X-XI for more on Hume's understanding of empathy. Martin Hoffman [2000] also makes a structurally similar point. He argues that when we cause another to feel distress and we empathize with that person, the empathic experience of distress can trigger feelings of guilt. Hoffman argues that these experiences of guilt brought about by empathizing play a foundational role in our moral development. I discuss both Hume and Hoffman's accounts in more detail in Chapter 4

I do not wish to oversell the support that empathy provides in helping us to have appropriate reactive attitudes. First, empathizing does not produce mental states that perfectly resemble the other's thoughts and feelings.⁴¹ Because it does not produce perfectly resembling states, we do not experience precisely the same attitudes as the other person. As a result, reenacting how another views a situation and how she feels about that situation does not completely disclose the agent's ill will, goodwill, or indifferent disregard. Second, empathy cannot reveal others' ill will or negative feelings in cases where they carefully hide such sentiments. For example, a person can perform an action that benefits another but perform that action as a charade. In such a case the agent may only want to trick others into thinking that he cares. Despite having the trappings of a praiseworthy deed the agent is not acting with goodwill. He is secretly and perhaps maliciously laughing at having pulled the wool over people's eyes. If this is the case, then trying to empathize might not help to reveal the true nature of his conduct. We cannot accurately reenact his view of the situation if we do not know to correct for the façade of concern. A similar problem arises if the agent performs an action that neither harms nor benefits another, but the agent performs that action with ill will. Trying to empathize with the agent in either case is not going to cause us to have an appropriate reactive attitude. Third, empathizing is not necessary for experiencing reactive attitudes in particular cases. Without empathizing we can form beliefs about the nature of others' conduct and these beliefs can trigger the reactive attitudes. For example, if someone describes a case of physical abuse, then we could recognize that the abuser lacks goodwill and we could

⁴¹ For more on this issue and why it is the case, see Chapter 1, section 6.

experience indignation in response. We can do this without deliberately taking up his perspective and having a resembling response.⁴²

Even with these limitations empathy is a resource that helps us to experience appropriate reactive attitudes in response to the moral worth of others' conduct. By taking another's perspective we come to reenact how she thinks and feels as she interacts with another person. If her conduct involves negative thoughts or feelings towards another, then these thoughts and feelings can impact the moral worth of her response. Even if empathizing produces an imperfect resemblance of the other's attitudes, the reenactment would still involve some version of the thoughts and feelings that characterize the nature of the other's response. It would still involve viewing and thinking about some other person in a way that involves insufficient regard. Experiencing a reenactment would draw our attention to the qualitative character of the others' thoughts and feelings. As we better appreciate the nature of others' thoughts and feelings and how they arise, we better discern and appreciate how their attitudes and actions manifest ill will, goodwill, or indifference. This appreciation helps us to respond appropriately to the moral worth of the other's conduct.⁴³

⁴² I address the question of whether empathy is necessary for making moral judgments in Chapter 4. At this point, I only wish to highlight that we can respond to blameworthy attitudes or actions without empathizing in the particular case.

⁴³ My point in this section resembles a Humean idea found in the work of Michael Slote [2010: Chapter 1]. The idea is that empathizing with an agent who has positive or negative attitudes about someone else can produce in us associated feelings that are moral in character. Slote argues that when an agent shows concern for another it is because she empathizes with that person. He claims that this empathic concern is accompanied by a feeling of warmth. When someone fails to empathize and feel concern for another then her attitudes are accompanied by a feeling of chilliness. Slote argues that when *we* in turn empathize with the agent, we experience a copy of her warm or chilly feelings. The experience of these resembling feelings can cause feelings of warmth or chilliness in us that are *directed at the agent*. These latter feelings, he claims, represent an appraisal of the other's behavior.⁴³ Despite both of us claiming that empathy can give

3.2 The Support of Empathy: The Second Way

Empathy also supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes by helping us to manage the attitudes that we are actively experiencing. Empathy provides an appreciation of others' thoughts and feelings that puts us in a better position to disqualify and dispel our inappropriate reactive attitudes and affirm and sustain our appropriate reactive attitudes.⁴⁴ Thus, whereas the previous section shows how empathy helps to bring about appropriate reactive attitudes, this section shows how empathy helps us to correct or affirm the attitudes that we find ourselves experiencing. I will begin by examining the case of inappropriate attitudes.

Strawson identifies two methods by which we dispel the reactive attitudes. I gestured at these methods in §2. Taking up an objective stance towards someone stops us from relating to her as a participant in interpersonal relations. Because we no longer relate to her as a participant, we stop responding to her attitudes and actions with the reactive attitudes. Thus, we can dispel a reactive attitude by viewing the target of our attitude as one who is to be “handled in our own interests, or our side’s, or society’s—or

rise to moral sentiments, my account is importantly different in several respects. First, my account does not involve or turn on whether the agent—with whom we empathize—is empathizing. Second, my account allows for cases in which agents can demonstrate ill will or malice without failing to be sufficiently empathetic. Third, my account does not claim that the experiences involved in empathizing somehow constitute or resemble moral judgments. My claim is that empathizing causes us to experience an echo of the thoughts and feelings that represent regard or lack of regard involved in others' responses, and this experience contributes to the cognitive base that triggers the reactive attitudes and judgments of moral worth. Put otherwise, my account keeps conceptually distinct the experience involved in empathizing and the experience of the reactive attitudes. By keeping these distinct, my account can explain how we sometimes experience the reactive attitudes and moral judgments without empathizing.

⁴⁴ The language of ‘disqualifying’ and ‘dispelling’ comes from Bennett [1980]. For example, Bennett states, “Usually when a kind of intellectual operation dispels a kind of feeling, it does so by disqualifying it, showing it to be inappropriate—as when fear ebbs upon the discovery that there is no danger, and pride evaporates when one realizes that the applause was ironical [28].

even theirs” [54]. We also dispel the reactive attitudes by disqualifying them. We disqualify a reactive attitude by discerning that it is premised on a mistaken view of someone’s conduct. For example, I feel indignation in response to what I see as a friend’s malicious action. When I come to realize that she does not actually feel malice or ill will, I stop feeling the indignation. Discerning the actual nature of her conduct dispels the attitude because it reveals that the attitude fails to meet its internal criteria.

Strawson notes that disqualifying and dispelling reactive attitudes plays an important role in interpersonal relationships. We interact with one another in complex ways, and we often have multifaceted intentions and plans that we do not make explicit. Because of this complexity and lack of full disclosure, we sometimes mistake the nature of each other’s conduct. Our mistake can result in us experiencing inappropriate reactive attitudes. Moreover, we often have expectations that prime us to respond negatively or positively to one another’s conduct. In some cases without any conscious consideration or deliberation we pass judgment and our judgment takes the form of inappropriate reactive attitudes. This propensity for experiencing inappropriate attitudes negatively impacts the quality of our interpersonal relationships. Therefore, disqualifying and dispelling inappropriate attitudes is an important part of participating in relationships with others. As Strawson states, “Since things go wrong and situations are complicated, it [the offering of explanations and the correction of inappropriate attitudes] is an essential and integral element in the transactions which are the life of these relationships” [51, parenthetical statement is mine].

Empathy helps to disqualify and dispel inappropriate reactive attitudes by helping us to better discern the thoughts and feelings that characterize others' conduct. When we empathize with someone who is interacting with another, we imaginatively take up the agent's view of the situation and we experience an echo of how she thinks and feels about that situation. This process helps us to discern how the agent has the other person in view, and how she is thinking and feeling about that person. By coming to better appreciate her attitudes towards the person, we come to better appreciate aspects that contribute to the moral quality of her conduct. In this way, empathizing might change how we view the quality of another's conduct. It can cause us to recognize that we were mistaken in reacting to another's response as if it involved a certain degree of ill will, goodwill, or disregard.

Moreover, the experiential character of empathy is particularly valuable in helping us to overcome the at times stubborn character of our affective attitudes. For example, in cases where we are in the throes of a strong emotion, or in cases where we have a personal incentive or prejudice to judge someone negatively or positively, then it can be psychologically difficult to dispel inappropriate reactive attitudes. For example, sometimes it is hard to stop feeling resentment even when a person offers a legitimate excuse. Empathizing, however, causes us to experience an echo of the thoughts and feelings that characterize another's conduct, and this can be psychologically potent. Suppose that we feel indignation. If we empathize and we experience thoughts and feelings that express no ill will (or perhaps we even experience states that express goodwill), then we are vividly presented with that which makes our reactive attitude

inappropriate. We experience the quality that negates the very premise of our reactive attitude. In doing so, the inappropriateness of our reactive attitude is impressed upon us. A detached belief can also reveal that our attitude is inappropriate but it is not as potent at dispelling attitudes that are affective in character. This fits with how people tend to offer excuses for their conduct. They provide an explanation, but they also ask others to try to see it from their point of view. They believe that if others take up their perspective and appreciate how and why they acted as they did it will help dispel feelings of indignation and resentment.

For example, suppose that my brother is a police officer who cares deeply about the people he has sworn to protect. I know that he has a kind disposition, and I am cognizant of the dangers he faces on a regular basis. My sympathies with my brother color the way in which I think about the tension between police and the BLM. I become defensive when I overhear friends discussing police violence and the militarization of the police. I feel irritated when I hear colleagues planning to protest the police union and its resistance to reform. I think that they are displaying insufficient regard for the valiant service of people like my brother. When I see them angrily protesting at the union headquarters I become indignant. My indignation, however, is premised on a mistaken view of their conduct. My colleagues are concerned about systemic injustice and the wellbeing of members of their community. They protest not out of ill will but because they see it as a means of drawing public attention to a social crisis. Empathizing with my colleagues can help me to disqualify and dispel my inappropriate attitude. By taking their perspective, I view the situation in light of a different set of concerns and I experience an

echo of their thoughts and feelings. This process helps me to appreciate how their conduct is characterized by thoughts and feelings that display goodwill. I experience a rich representation of that which undermines the premise of my reactive attitude.

Finally, in much the same way that empathizing helps us to disqualify and dispel reactive attitudes, empathizing also helps us to affirm and sustain reactive attitudes. Our reactive attitudes are affirmed and sustained when we recognize that another's conduct expresses the ill will, goodwill, or indifference premised in our attitudes. Because empathy helps us to appreciate the thoughts and feelings that characterize another's conduct, it helps us to appreciate how and why that conduct expresses ill will, goodwill, or indifference. For example, we initially experience indignation at an agent's cruel remarks, and then we empathize with that agent and experience an echo of his malice, the experience will affirm and reinforce our initial reaction. In this way, empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes by moving us to affirm and sustain reactive attitudes that are appropriate.

3.3 The Support of Empathy: The Third Way

Of course we are not alone in making judgments about the moral worth of attitudes and actions. If others discern that someone's conduct expresses ill will, goodwill, or indifference, then they too are liable to experience reactive attitudes. Some of their reactive attitudes are and will be responses to the moral quality of our conduct. In order to recognize what those attitudes indicate as worthy of praise or blame, we need to appreciate how others view the situation such that they think and feel as they do. The

third way then in which empathy benefits moral agents is that it helps us to appreciate the nature of others' reactive attitudes.

My claim in this section is not the Darwallian point that empathy helps to constitute the second-person standpoint from which we recognize others' claims as authoritative [Darwall 2011, 2006]. My claim is simpler and connected to the theoretical point that I've been making in the previous two sections: empathizing helps us to appreciate the thoughts and feelings that someone has about another person with whom they are interacting. Our reactive attitudes are one way in which we interact with one another; they involve approving and disapproving of conduct. Therefore, in order to appreciate others' reactive attitudes, we need to appreciate how others view an agent's conduct such that they approve or disapprove of that conduct. For example, a friend experiences gratitude for a stranger's helpful behavior. In order to fully grasp our friend's attitude, we need to appreciate how she views the stranger's conduct such that she discerns it as expressing goodwill. Empathy can help us to do this. By taking up her perspective, we view the action in light of her interests and concerns, and we feel an echo of her approbation for the stranger. This experience helps us to appreciate how she sees the stranger's conduct such that she feels gratitude; we better appreciate how and why she feels the way that she does.

Sometimes we struggle to appreciate why people feel the reactive attitudes that they do. For example, I recognize that my colleagues feel indignation about my unwillingness to join the protest, yet I fail to appreciate what it is about my conduct that they view as expressing a lack of regard. If all I recognize about my colleague's attitude

is that they disapprove of my choice, then I fail to grasp an important aspect of their response. I do not grasp on what their attitude is premised. Empathy can be especially valuable in these cases. By taking up my colleague's perspective, I entertain different beliefs, concerns, and values, and I can come to appreciate an alternative view of the situation. I imaginatively construe my conduct in light of their beliefs and concerns, and I experience an echo of their thoughts and feelings. This helps me to appreciate how they view my choice as offensive in a particular way. They see my conduct as expressing an indifferent disregard for the black community, and therefore, they experience indignation. Regardless of whether their attitude is appropriate or not, empathizing helps me to better appreciate how and why they feel as they do.

As noted in the preceding sections, empathizing does more than just help us to discern the nature of others' responses. It also involves a psychologically potent experiential aspect. Empathizing with others' reactive attitudes communicates feelings related to approval and disapproval. We experience an echo of the censorious withdrawal of goodwill and esteem when we empathize with an indignant colleague. This is significant because, as Strawson notes, as participants in interpersonal relations we are particularly sensitive to how people think and feel about one another. Therefore, experiencing an echo of another's reactive attitude can move us to reconsider from our own standpoint the evaluative character of someone's conduct. It can move us to reexamine the thoughts and feelings that characterize an agent's conduct, and thereby alter our judgment about the moral worth of that conduct. The experiential aspect involved in empathizing is especially potent when we are the targets of others' reactive

attitudes. We care deeply about how others regard us, and so feeling another's withdrawal of goodwill and esteem is psychologically significant. It can move us to evaluate the moral worth of our own attitudes and actions.

3.4 The Significance of Empathy's Support

In our everyday interactions with others empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes. It helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feelings such that we experience appropriate reactive attitudes about the moral worth of their conduct. It helps us to disqualify and dispel our reactive attitudes when they are inappropriate and affirm and sustain our reactive attitudes when they are appropriate. It also helps us to appreciate others' reactive attitudes such that we better recognize what those responses indicate about the moral worth of someone's conduct. Moreover, the support that empathy provides is such that without it we are less adept at participating in the moral community.

To see this last point, consider agents who cannot empathize. These agents lack a resource for understanding the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. They cannot employ their own imaginative and emotional machinery to reenact the way in which others are thinking and feeling about a situation in virtue of seeing it from a particular perspective. Although they might have other resources at their disposal, they are less well equipped to improve their understanding within the context of an unfolding social situation. In virtue of this we would expect these agents to have a harder time interacting with others in cases where others view and respond to a situation differently than they do. This fits with the findings from recent literature on empathy and autism. High-

functioning autistics are described as impaired in their empathic abilities, and researchers claim that these impairments make it difficult for autistics to appreciate and respond to others' thoughts and feelings [e.g., Shoemaker 2015, Kennett 2002].⁴⁵ Jeannette Kennett illustrates this difficulty by quoting Jim Sinclair,

I have to develop a separate translation code for every person I meet...Even if I can tell what the cues mean, I may not know what to do about them. The first time I ever realized someone needed to be touched was during an encounter with a grief-stricken, hysterically sobbing person who was in no condition to respond to my questions about what I should do to help. I could certainly tell he was upset. I could even figure out that there was something I could do that would be better than nothing. But I didn't know what that something was [2002: 352].

As Sinclair suggests, the difficulty in understanding others' thoughts and feelings and the inability to see the world from another's point of view creates challenges for interpersonal interactions. It can be harder for autistics to know what is the right thing to do in a particular situation. Researchers claim that we should take these challenges into account when judging the moral worth of autistic individuals' conduct. For example, David Shoemaker argues that the difficulties in understanding others' thoughts and feelings mitigates or exempts autistics from being fully accountable for their conduct

⁴⁵ Not everyone agrees that autistics suffer from empathic impairment, see the works-in-progress by Dana Fritz and Nathan Stout for arguments along these lines (Shoemaker references Stout's work at 2015: 168).

[2015: 166-72]. However, what researchers don't discuss and what I wish to emphasize is that the difficulties autistics face in appreciating others' thoughts and feelings also creates challenges for how *they* are able to make and recognize judgments of moral worth. For example, take the cases I presented in §3.1 of my colleague and my student protesting in front of the police headquarters. Although they are both protesting, my student's conduct merits blame in a way that my colleague's conduct does not. There is a morally relevant difference in how each agent is thinking and feeling about the situation. Autistic individuals would have a much harder time tracking this sort of difference because of the difficulties they face in appreciating the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. As a result, it would be difficult for them to have appropriate reactive attitudes in response to both my colleague and my student.

These sorts of cases, however, are not uncommon in moral life. We encounter many complex cases in which subtle differences in agents' thoughts and feelings impact the moral quality of their conduct. In order to respond appropriately with the reactive attitudes we often need ways of coming to better appreciate others' thoughts and feelings. Similarly, we often need to better appreciate others' thoughts and feelings in order to correct our attitudes and to recognize what others' reactive attitudes indicate as worthy of praise or blame. Empathy is valuable because for most of us it is an available resource that helps us to do this very thing. It helps us to appreciate how others see a situation such that they think and feel as they do. This improvement makes an important difference because it enables us to interact with others in ways that are sensitive to a greater degree of particularity and nuance. It makes possible more sophisticated dealings with the

reactive attitudes. Because the reactive attitudes play such a central role in how we interact with others as members of the moral community, it makes possible a more sophisticated participation in the moral community.

The ability to empathize does not guarantee success when dealing with the reactive attitudes. Sometimes we try to empathize but fail to accurately take up another's perspective. Other times we try to empathize but fail to appreciate relevant aspects of another's thoughts and feelings. Moreover, empathy is not the only resource that supports the reactive attitudes. We have other psychological tools such as inductive and abductive reasoning that also help us to understand others' responses. Furthermore, I am not claiming that empathy is conceptually or psychologically necessary for dealing with the reactive attitudes. It is consistent with my account that for any occasion in which we would have, disqualify, or register a reactive attitude, it is theoretically possible that we could do so without first empathizing on that occasion.⁴⁶ However, if we consider the nature of human psychology we see that we often have limited access to others' mental states, we often view situations from different perspectives than other people, we have a limited time in which to respond, and despite these limitations we often react to others' attitudes and actions anyways. Because of these features of human psychology we face challenges in appreciating and responding appropriately to others' conduct. These challenges make it more difficult for us to deal with the reactive attitudes. Empathy equips us to better face these challenges. It is a resource that helps us to appreciate the thoughts and feelings that contribute to the moral worth of others' conduct, and this helps

⁴⁶ I will discuss this issue in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

us to have, correct, and register the reactive attitudes. Therefore, even though empathy is not a magic bullet that alone overcomes all the challenges, it makes us more proficient in our dealings with the reactive attitudes. This proficiency facilitates a more sophisticated participation in the moral community.

4. WORRIES

There are critics of empathy who deny that it is a beneficial resource for moral agents. These critics will have doubts about the account I develop in this chapter. In this section I address two initial worries regarding the support of empathy for dealing with the reactive attitudes. In the following chapter I address three putative reasons to doubt that empathy produces understanding that helps us to make sound moral judgments about what we ought to do.

4.1 Empathizing Makes Us Less Liable to Disapprove

The first worry is that empathizing with someone makes us less liable to have attitudes of disapproval in cases where such attitudes are appropriate.⁴⁷ We are less likely to have disapproving attitudes because we take up the beliefs and concerns of agents in such a way that we become overly understanding or sympathetic to their position. For example, I see a friend rudely ignore a colleague's philosophical contributions. Empathizing with my friend causes me to imagine what it is like to have his interests and concerns. Because I imaginatively adopt his interests and concerns I search for reasons to

⁴⁷ This worry was expressed in different forms by audience members to presentations I gave at the Graduate Center of the City University New York, the University of Toronto, and the 2015 Meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association.

excuse his actions instead of feeling indignation and blaming him for his response. This worry suggests that we struggle to sufficiently step back from others' standpoints after empathizing. As a result, even if empathizing helps us to appreciate the nature of others' responses, it does not do so in a way that helps us to have an appropriate moral reaction.⁴⁸

There are several things to say in response to this worry. First, as mentioned in Chapter 1, empathy involves a self-other differentiation [Coplan 2011, Hoffman 2000, Deigh 1995]. When we empathize we remain aware of the distinction between our self and the other person, and we recognize that we are reenacting how the other thinks and feels about a situation. This feature of empathy means that we do not completely identify with the other person when empathizing. Because we do not completely identify with the other person, we do not entirely share his concerns and beliefs regarding the situation. As a result, we can step back and distance our self from his view of the situation and his corresponding thoughts and feelings. With this distance we can evaluate, reflect on, or simply react to the nature of the other's response. We can appreciate how his behavior expresses ill will and come to experience indignation.

Second, we are not restricted to empathizing with only one person in a situation. If we are worried that empathizing with an agent does not produce an adequate view of a situation for the purposes of moral appraisal, then we can also empathize with the person

⁴⁸ One might question whether this is in fact a worry. Perhaps being less liable to blame others or communicate disapproval is a desirable result. In responding to the worry in this section I do not mean to suggest that blaming others or signally disapproval via the reactive attitudes is *always* the optimal thing to do. However, I do assume that some attitudes and actions are wrong and merit blame and that the reactive attitudes are sometimes an appropriate way in which we attribute blame. My intent in this response, therefore, is to show that empathy does not undermine blaming others in cases where we think it is constructive to blame them.

most affected by the agent's conduct. For example, in addition to empathizing with my friend who is ignoring a colleague, I can also empathize with the colleague. Empathizing with the colleague helps me to appreciate how she thinks and feels about my friend's behavior. I can feel an echo of her hurt feelings and resentment for my friend. This process draws our attention to and makes salient evaluative features of the situation in such a way that it can elicit reactive attitudes in us. However, empathizing with the person most affected by an action does not involve experiencing an echo of the agent's thoughts and feelings. We do not take up the agent's perspective, and as a result, the process is less effective at helping us to appreciate how the agent views the situation such that he thinks and feels as he does. This makes it harder for us to discern how his conduct expresses ill will, goodwill, or indifference. In addition to taking up the standpoint of someone in the situation we can also try to take up a more general point of view. For example, we could imagine how disinterested members of our community would think and feel about the agent's conduct. We could also try to inhabit the perspective of an idealized impartial spectator [Smith 1759/2002].⁴⁹ These sorts of imaginative activity—similar to empathizing with the recipient—would require us to think about concerns and interests that differ from the agent's concerns and interests. Therefore, even though empathizing involves imaginatively taking up the agent's concerns, interests, and point of

⁴⁹ One could reasonably question whether we ever achieve the ideal neutrality of seeing things from the perspective of an impartial spectator or disinterested members of the community. However, even if we cannot achieve such ideal neutrality, attempting to do so could still be beneficial. Trying to take up such perspectives can broaden or change what we see as significant compared to just viewing a situation from an individual's interested standpoint. What is more, the worry about our ability to take up a disinterested perspective could count in favor of empathizing with others. If we cannot truly see things from a disinterested standpoint, then perhaps the next best option is to see things from a variety of interested perspectives. Empathizing can help us to appreciate the view from different perspectives.

view, this is not a problem because we can step back from the agent's standpoint and we can take up other neutral or adverse standpoints.

Finally, it is worth highlighting how the focus of the worry is quite narrow. The worry is about whether empathizing helps us to make judgments of moral disapproval. This only applies to half of "the first way" (§3.1) in which empathy benefits our dealings with the reactive attitudes. Even if one is unconvinced by the rest of my reply to the first worry, the worry gives us no reason to think that empathizing would not help us to make judgments of moral approval. When I take up the standpoint of someone engaged in helping behavior I come to better appreciate how her conduct expresses goodwill. There is no pull to the thought that previously identifying with her interests or concerns would then prevent me from feeling approbation. Instead, it seems that coming to better appreciate the nature of her thoughts and feelings would make me more liable to feel approbation.

4.2 Calm, Considered Evaluations Versus the Reactive Attitudes

The second worry is that judgments of moral worth that involve strong affective states are inferior to judgments that involve calm, considered evaluations. The reactive attitudes—as the name suggests—can be quick reactions instead of careful, deliberate responses. They often involve emotional arousal and a focus on short-term goals. They can cause us to lose sight of relevant considerations, considerations we might not overlook when making carefully reasoned judgments. As a result, perhaps empathy is not

a valuable resource for moral agents because it makes us more liable to experience the reactive attitudes instead of calm, considered judgments of moral worth.

There are several things to say in response to this worry. First, as Strawson carefully illustrates, the reactive attitudes are an essential aspect of participating in interpersonal relationships with others. They are not the sorts of thing we can completely turn off while actively engaging in those relations. We turn them off by stepping back from the relationships as ones in which we have normative expectations and in which we hold each other accountable to those expectations. Strawson observes that though we sporadically step back and have objective attitudes it would be greatly impoverishing to the quality of our lives to continuously do so. It would mean giving up on the personal transactions that characterize human life. This is particularly true of the relationships we participate in *qua* moral agents. As I suggested at the end of §2, it looks morally impermissible for us to do either of these things. It would be wrong if we stopped caring about how we treat one another, and part of caring involves at least sometimes reacting to things with feelings of approval and disapproval. Second, it is not a case of either/or regarding the reactive attitudes and calm, considered responses. Even when we experience the reactive attitudes, we can always proceed to reflect on the situation and form a calm, carefully weighed judgment. Similarly, even after calmly deliberating about a case we can experience reactive attitudes after considering the nature of someone's response. Third, social interactions are messy, complex things. In many cases we see someone respond in a way that causes benefit or harm yet we do not immediately appreciate the nature of the interaction. Often talking to the participants or calmly

deliberating on the case is an effective strategy. However, not all cases are amenable to such a strategy. Sometimes it is impossible to question the participants, and sometimes a situation calls for a prompt evaluative response to a person's conduct. For example, we see a colleague appearing to bully another colleague. We should respond quickly and we should censure such behavior in the given situation in order to publicly express a condemnation of such conduct. In such a case we do not have time to reflect endlessly or investigate all of the relevant facts. Nevertheless, the degree to which our colleague's behavior expresses ill will is relevant to what is an appropriate response. Empathizing with our colleague can quickly help us to better appreciate the thoughts and feelings that characterize his action and thereby avoid an inappropriate judgment. In this sort of way, empathizing can help us to navigate the complexities of a social setting and thereby improve our initial evaluative responses.

In short, there are reasons to believe that the reactive attitudes can perform beneficial evaluative and communicative functions.⁵⁰ These functions are consistent with us also making calm, deliberate judgments. Thus, it is plausible that both the reactive attitudes and calm, deliberate judgments are effective means of participating in the moral community; they just provide different ways of doing so. However, even if one thinks that the best way to balance the contributions of the two forms of moral activity is to minimize our reactive attitudes, that person should still think that empathy supports making, correcting, and recognizing judgments of moral worth. We are going to experience the reactive attitudes, and insofar as we have those attitudes they should be

⁵⁰ For more on these functions see Macnamara 2015, Wallace 2011, 1996, and Gibbard 1990.

appropriate, we should disqualify and dispel ones that are inappropriate, and we should do our best to understand others' reactive attitudes. Empathy, as I argue in §3, helps us to do these three things. Therefore, even if we should aim to minimize the reactive attitudes in our lives, empathy is still a valuable resource because it helps us to deal with the ways in which we encounter the reactive attitudes in moral life.

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Chapter 3: Defending Empathy

In the previous chapter I offer an account of how we can benefit from empathy as moral agents. I argue that empathy provides appreciation of others' thoughts and feelings, and that this appreciation helps us to make, correct, and recognize judgments of moral worth. Some philosophers, however, are skeptical that empathy is a beneficial resource for moral agents. In particular they argue that we have reasons to doubt that empathizing produces understanding that improves moral judgment. These critics tend to focus on moral judgment in terms of judgments of right and wrong. In this chapter, therefore, I extend my account by showing how empathy helps us to make judgments of right and wrong. I then defend this extended account by responding to three putative reasons to doubt that empathy produces understanding that helps us to make moral judgments. These putative reasons are that empathy only produces distorted representations of others' thoughts and feelings [Goldie 2011], empathizing causes levels of personal distress that interfere with understanding others' thoughts and feelings [Maibom 2010], and bias undermines the reliability of empathy as a source of understanding [Prinz 2011b, Maibom 2010]. I argue that we should reject each of these reasons, and therefore, they do not create a problem for my account of empathy as a beneficial resource for moral agents.

1. WHAT'S AT STAKE?

We can distinguish different kinds of moral judgments. In Chapter 2 I focus on judgments of moral worth by looking at the reactive attitudes. I note that we experience reactive attitudes related to disapproval when we discern that someone's conduct expresses a lack of regard for others, and we experience reactive attitudes related to approval when we discern that her conduct expresses goodwill and regard. These judgments are related to our practices of praising and blaming. We can distinguish these judgments from judgments about right and wrong. These latter judgments consider what we morally ought to do (or ought not to do). They involve determinations about whether conduct is morally permissible, whether conduct violates a harm norm or moral principle, and whether the balance of moral reasons supports one form of conduct over another. Judgments of right and wrong are an important aspect of how we interact with others in the moral community.

Similar to judgments of moral worth, when we make moral judgments of right and wrong we often take into account others' thoughts and feelings. We take these attitudes into account because how others think and feel about a situation (and how they would think and feel) can be morally relevant. For example, if I am holding a snake and you are terrified of it, then your negative attitudes about the snake count as a consideration against my bringing it nearer. Similarly, if you are upset at the remembrance of a terrible event, then your feelings count as a consideration against my casually discussing the event. In both cases, your thoughts and feelings about the

situation are morally relevant to what I ought to do. Because others' attitudes can be relevant in this way, understanding what others are thinking and feeling (or would think and feel) is important when it comes to trying to make sound moral judgments—judgments that are based on and respond appropriately to the morally relevant features of a case.

As I show in the previous chapters, understanding the nature of others' thoughts and feelings can involve more than just identifying the types of mental states or the objects of their mental states. To understand the nature of their thoughts and feelings we sometimes need to appreciate how they view the situation such that they respond to it in the way that they do. We may need to appreciate how their thoughts and feelings are related to a view of the situation that is shaped by such things as their concerns, values, beliefs, and experiences. For example, suppose that my employer compliments a colleague's physical appearance with the intention of making her feel good about herself. The comments involve the kind of praise that he would find flattering if someone said such things to him. My colleague, however, is offended and she responds to the comments with indignation. In order to fully grasp my colleague's indignation, we need to appreciate how her view of the comments differs from the view of my employer. She views them as offensive because of her experience with unwelcome advances as well as her beliefs about gender dynamics and appropriate conduct in the workplace.

Critics agree that in order for us to make some sound moral judgments we often need to understand others' attitudes. What is contentious, however, is whether empathy is a beneficial resource for understanding others' thoughts and feelings. In the previous two

chapters I have offered reasons to think that it does. Empathy, I argue, uses our imaginative abilities to entertain alternative views of the situation, and it uses our own emotional machinery to provide a reenactment of how other people feel or would feel given their view of the situation. It is a resource that provides a rich appreciation of others' mental life, and it can do so on the fly within an unfolding social situation. As I explain in Chapter 2, this is valuable because of the complexity of social situations and the limited nature of human psychology. We often have limited access to others' mental states, we often view situations from different perspectives than other people, we often have a limited time in which to assess a situation, and despite these limitations we often need to decide what we ought to do. These challenges make it more difficult for us to make sound judgments about right and wrong. However, in much the same way that empathy supports judgments of moral worth, it also supports judgments of right and wrong.

By empathizing we can come to better appreciate how others think and feel (or would think and feel) about a situation involving our conduct. This appreciation helps us to recognize the impact of our conduct on others. This recognition, in turn, helps us to make a sound judgment about what we ought or ought not to do. For example, by taking up the perspective of my colleague, my supervisor could come to better appreciate how she thinks and feels about his comments. He could appreciate how she finds them offensive despite his good intentions and despite what he takes to be their flattering character. By coming to appreciate the nature of her thoughts and feelings and how those thoughts and feelings differ from his own, he is better positioned to recognize reasons for

which he ought not to make those comments. Consider another case. I see a colleague brusquely dismiss a student's philosophical suggestion. Shortly after dismissing the suggestion, my colleague endorses a very similar proposal made by a well-respected speaker. The manner in which I ought to address the situation depends in part on how the student would react to my drawing public attention to his insult of her. When facing such a case, I do not have time to endlessly reflect, discuss the issue with others, or calmly investigate all of the relevant facts. I need to better understand how she would think and feel, and I can employ different resources in trying to do so. For example, I could consult heuristics about typical human behavior, or I could imagine how *I* might react in a similar circumstance. These sorts of resources, however, are not oriented around the student's particular perspective. They provide information about how people tend to respond or how I would respond; they do not provide a nuanced representation of how *she* is thinking or feeling or how *she* would think and feel if I spoke up. Empathy, in contrast, provides a means of representing her attitudes about the situation given her perspective. Therefore, by empathizing, I might come to appreciate that unlike myself or other students she would resent a public address of the insult. The attention would make her feel exposed and vulnerable in virtue of her status as a student. In this way, empathizing could help me to recognize morally relevant considerations and thereby make a sound judgment that takes those considerations into account.

Although I use individual examples in developing my account, my account is not ultimately about how empathy works in isolated cases. It is about whether empathy helps us in general to make sound moral judgments. Take the virtuoso moral judge, what

enables her to consistently make sound moral judgments? Based on my account, we should expect that she would sometimes empathize with others in order to navigate complex social relations because empathy would help her to appreciate the subtle and personal nature of others' thoughts and feelings. Moreover, I am not arguing that we cannot make moral judgments without empathy; rather I am arguing that empathy makes us more adept at appreciating relevant features connected to others' mental life. In doing so, it helps us to make sound moral judgments. Finally, I am not claiming that all sound moral judgments require that we understand the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. It is plausible that some judgments don't require this level of interpersonal understanding. However, even if that's the case, it is implausible that only an insignificant number of judgments require such understanding. This is all that my account needs here; empathy is a beneficial resource because it provides understanding of others' thoughts and feelings that helps us to make sound moral judgments.

However, some philosophers question whether empathy is beneficial. They identify three putative reasons to doubt that empathy produces understanding of others' thoughts and feelings that helps us to make moral judgments. If these putative reasons are correct, they undermine my account of empathy as a beneficial resource. The benefits that I identify here and in Chapter 2 rely on empathy producing a certain sort of understanding. If empathy does not produce this understanding, then it does not support moral judgment in the ways I claim. If it does not support moral judgment in the ways that I claim, then I have not yet shown that empathy is a beneficial resource for moral agents.

2. THREE PUTATIVE REASONS TO DOUBT THAT WE BENEFIT FROM EMPATHY

In this section I present the putative reasons to doubt that empathy provides beneficial understanding of others' thoughts and feelings, and I explain why we should reject each one.

2.1 The Problem of Distortion

The first putative reason comes from Peter Goldie [2011, 2000]. Goldie argues that empathy can only produce in us mental states that are a distorted model of another person's mental states. Because empathizing only produces a distorted model, it does not effectively help us to understand the nature of the other's thoughts and feelings. Therefore, his argument indicates that empathy does not produce understanding that helps us to make sound moral judgments.

Goldie begins his challenge by discussing the features that contribute to a person's perspective. He calls these features "agent-specific characterizations" [2011: 308-09]. These characterizations include emotional dispositions, intellectual ability, moods, history, and values. He claims that these features affect the way we think and feel. They are part of what shape the first-person perspective from which we respond to the world. Goldie argues that our thoughts and feelings are only properly understood in light of our first-person perspective. This means that a full understanding of our thoughts and feelings involves reference to the agent-specific characterizations that shape our perspective. For example, a modest agent has attitudes that express and fit with a modest disposition. It is in virtue of this disposition that the agent responds to a situation in a

modest way. According to Goldie, in order to think about and fully grasp the nature of the modest attitudes, we must appreciate how they arise from a particular disposition [309]. However, Goldie argues that in having a modest thought the agent does not typically attend to her disposition. It does not show up in the content of her occurrent thoughts about the world, but nevertheless, it shapes her occurrent thoughts. He claims, “the typical role of these dispositions is passive or in the background in the sense that our conscious thoughts and feelings that feature in our deliberations are shaped by, but are not directed towards these dispositions” [309].

Goldie argues that the background nature of agent-specific characterizations creates a problem for empathy. He claims that to accurately take another’s perspective and match their thoughts and feelings we must take the other’s characterizations into account. We must recognize that the modest thought arises from a modest disposition. This is problematic because it means that we need to focus on the characterizations in a way that the other person does not. We must bring the characterizations into the foreground of thought. As a result, the mental states we experience fail to match the other’s mental states. As Goldie puts it:

This typical role of characterization...simply cannot be matched through empathetic perspective-shifting onto another. A, cannot, as part of a consciously willed project, keep B’s characterization in the non-conscious background...And this produces a fundamentally distorted model of B’s thinking [2011: 309].

Goldie describes this problem as a “conceptual problem” [2011: 303]. He thinks that it derives from the nature of empathy. When we empathize we attempt to produce a copy of the other’s mental states, but the process cannot produce these states. It can only produce a distorted model of another’s thoughts and feelings. It is distorted because we are focusing on the agent-specific characterizations whereas the other person is not. This problem, he argues, undermines the value of empathy as a resource for interpersonal understanding. Because empathizing only produces a distorted model, we fail to gain accurate understanding of the nature of others’ thoughts and feelings. If empathizing does not help us to understand others’ thoughts and feelings, then it does not help us to make sound moral judgments as I argue in Chapters 2 and 3.

We should reject Goldie’s argument because it depends on a bad inference. Goldie moves from the idea that empathizing does not produce a copy of another’s thinking and feeling to the idea that empathizing does not provide understanding of the other’s thinking and feeling. He attempts to justify this move by pointing out that we can only have a distorted model of the other’s mental states. This attempted justification, however, does not support the inference. Having a distorted model does not preclude understanding. As I mention in Chapter 1, empathy does not require that we experience identical states. It only requires that we have similar or congruent states. Having similar states provides understanding because they still resemble much of the other’s thoughts and feelings. Similar to the other’s states, the resembling states are about features of the situation. Therefore, experiencing these states helps us to appreciate how the others’ thoughts and feelings represent a meaningful response to a particular situation. Put

otherwise, in order for empathy to produce understanding, the mental states we experience must *correctly* resemble the other's mental states. Correctness, however, can be distinguished from precision. We do not need to experience precisely the same states in order to better understand the nature of the other's thoughts and feelings. The process allows for some distortion. We can have states that are slightly distorted from the other's mental states while still gaining understanding.⁵¹ As other theorists note, it is difficult to specify when a state is "similar enough" that it correctly resembles the other's state. Several theorists claim that such specification is not built into the concept of empathy [e.g., Morton 2011: 319, Snow 2000: 69, and Sober and Wilson 1998: 233]. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to attempt to provide such specification. However, we can identify the kinds of features that are relevant to resemblance. For example, it is important that the two states have the same intentional object, appraisal, affective tone, and valence. These features matter because they are relevant to how states such as emotions constitute a rational response to a situation. Therefore, for an empathic observer to have an attitude that resembles another's response, the attitude needs to be similar in at least these ways.

The crucial question then is how attending to agent-specific characterizations affects resemblance: Does focusing on features of the other's perspective cause us to have states that fail to correctly resemble the other's states? Goldie provides no argument

⁵¹ This distinction between precise and correct resemblance applies to more than just the value of empathy. We value maps that involve a Mercator projection even though the maps are distorted. The Mercator projection causes landmasses near the poles to be represented as proportionately larger in area than they in fact are on the earth's surface. Despite the imprecision, we value the maps because they still provide beneficial understanding about geographical locations.

to show that it does. Moreover, there is reason to believe that such focus does *not* cause a distortion of the relevant aspects. To see why, we must distinguish two levels of intentional mental states involved in empathy. On one level we focus on the other's perspective and we try to understand her thoughts and feelings. In reference to this level we can describe some of our mental states as intentionally directed at the other person. On a different level empathy involves seeing the situation as if from the other's perspective. This activity causes us to have mental states that are intentionally directed at features of the situation. By referencing this second level, we can describe some of our mental states as about the situation. These descriptions of the intentionality are consistent. Our mental states are about both of these things when we empathize with others. Describing the intentionality in this way highlights how the states we experience will differ from the states of the other person. The other is responding to some situation and she can do so without thinking about the perspective from which she responds. She does not require the two levels of intentionality involved in empathy. Furthermore, the descriptions of the two levels of intentionality also highlight the way in which empathy leaves space for having resembling mental states. As empathizers we experience states that are nested in a larger intentional framework. There is nothing about the framework, however, that prevents those nested states from being structurally similar to the other's thoughts and feelings. Our states can resemble the other's states in terms of their intentional object, appraisal, valence, etc. In this way, the states we experience when empathizing can model the relevant aspects of how the other is thinking and feeling about the situation.

Goldie is right that the states we experience will not precisely resemble the other's thoughts and feelings. The intentional framework of the empathic process will always shape to some degree what we think and feel. This is in part because we cannot completely take up the other's perspective and leave our self behind while still empathizing. This distance, however, is important for preserving the sense that what we experience is a reenactment of another's thoughts and feelings. Despite the difference, empathy can produce states that are similar in relevant respects. By experiencing these resembling states we can come to better appreciate the nature of the other's thoughts and feelings. In short, Goldie's challenge fails. The structure of empathy does not prevent it from producing understanding that helps us to make sound moral judgments.

2.2 The Problem of Personal Distress

The second putative reason to doubt that empathy is a beneficial resource comes from Heidi Maibom. She argues that empathizing causes us to experience personal distress. This distress interferes with our ability to focus on the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. The distress can also create long-term negative effects in our psychology. These effects make us less adept at emotionally engaging with others. Both of these consequences, she argues, undermine empathy as a source of understanding for the purpose of making moral judgments.

Maibom describes personal distress as an acute, unpleasant experience. This experience is something we feel for our self. She explains that in many cases we experience distress because of egoistic considerations. For example, thinking about our

own potential or actual suffering can cause us to feel great discomfort. However, she claims that we can also experience personal distress because of others' suffering. She states, "S is personally distressed by O's experience of emotion E in C if S feels E—not for O, but for herself (S)—as a result of believing or perceiving that O feels E, or imagining being in C, OR as a result of believing that something bad has happened to O" [2014: 3]. One way in which others' suffering causes personal distress is by imagining how we would feel if in their circumstances. Maibom calls this an "imagine-self" process [2010: 38]. The imagine-self process involves imagining ourselves with our own psychology in the circumstances of the other person. This imaginative activity causes us to have an emotion and this emotion reflects our own beliefs, values, and concerns. When the emotion is a response to something bad, it often causes a feeling of personal distress [2010: 38]. Maibom acknowledges that the imagine-self process is distinct from empathy. The imagine-self process is about how *we* would think and feel given our psychology, and empathy is about how the *other* person thinks and feels given their psychology. Despite this difference, she argues that we should expect empathy to also cause personal distress because of the way in which it involves resemblance. If we empathize with someone feeling personal distress, then we can experience attitudes that resemble that distress. She argues that this leads to a problem. The problem is that there is no apparent mechanism for alleviating the distress after we stop taking the other's perspective. She worries that the distress produced by empathizing will lead to a full-blown, non-empathic episode of personal distress. This is a problem, she explains, because personal distress prevents us from understanding others' emotions. She argues that it does so in two ways.

The first way is that in particular situations personal distress draws our attention away from the other person. Instead of trying to appreciate the other's thoughts and feelings, we focus on our own discomfort and look for ways to make the discomfort go away. The personal distress undermines our responsiveness to the other's experience. Maibom claims, "And to the extent that personal distress motivates us to escape the situation, the danger of simulation [i.e., empathy] is that it may cause us to be *less* responsive to the plight of others" [2010: 38]. The second way is that experiences of personal distress can cause long-term negative effects. She argues that personal distress can lead to a harmful condition known as "vicarious traumatization" [2010: 39]. Vicarious traumatization, she explains, is a phenomenon in which repeated exposure to others' suffering causes subjects to develop the characteristics of traumatized victims. These subjects demonstrate decreased emotional engagement and concern for others. They become less responsive to others' experiences. The lack of responsiveness leads to a decrease in pro-social action. She claims,

However since certain types of perspective takings lead to exactly the kind of personal distress that Hoffman and others propose is the result of empathic over-arousal, there is reason to think that...it can also have more long-term damaging effects on the individual (vicarious traumatization)...and that...is going to increase the likelihood of the person *not* helping another in need [2010: 39].

Maibom's doubts about empathy call into question my account. If empathizing impedes our sensitivity and responsiveness to others' experiences, then it is not well suited to provide understanding that leads to the making of sound moral judgments. I argue, however, that we should reject Maibom's argument; empathizing is not susceptible to personal distress in either of the two ways.

Maibom is correct that both empathy and the imagine-self process involve imaginative activity that can result in affective attitudes. However, she fails to note that when we empathize we maintain a distinction between our self and the other person [Coplan 2011: 16, Hoffman 2000: 62-64]. It is this distinction that separates empathy from emotional identification. When empathizing we recognize that the attitudes we experience are a reenactment of the other's thoughts and feelings.⁵² They are attitudes that we attribute to the other's perspective. We do not take the empathic experience to represent thoughts and feelings that reflect our own standpoint and concerns. Because we remain aware that the attitudes model the other's response to the situation, there is a ready explanation for why empathizing may not involve the same amount of personal distress. The other's personal distress is about the evaluative significance of some object to her. When we empathize we come to have attitudes about this object. However, because we relate those attitudes to the other's standpoint, we recognize that the object is not something distressing *for us* or at least not in the same way. It might not be something that *we* are personally concerned about. Therefore, when we stop empathizing, we can

⁵² Martin Hoffman states, "[the empathic observer has] a cognitive sense of themselves as separate physical entities with independent internal states, personal identities, and lives beyond the situation, and can distinguish what happens to others from what happens to themselves" [2000: 63].

stop thinking and feeling about the object as something that has evaluative significance to us personally.

I am not denying that empathy can give rise to feelings of distress. It does so in at least two ways. The first is what I have been discussing. We can experience resembling attitudes that involve distress when we empathize with someone who is suffering. Second, empathizing can cause distress downstream. If we empathize with someone suffering and we come to better appreciate the nature of her response, then our understanding can lead to a feeling of intense negative affect *for her* and *her* predicament. Hoffman [2000] calls this “sympathetic distress” and Batson calls it “empathic distress” [2011: 19]. In either case the distress is conceptually and psychologically distinct from *personal* distress. Maibom identifies personal distress as a form of negative affect a subject feels “for herself” [2014: 3]. The distress caused by empathizing, however, is either attributed to the other or felt for the other and the other’s situation. Therefore, this distress lacks the self-directed quality with which Maibom characterizes personal distress. Furthermore, it is misleading to describe this distress as drawing our attention away from the other person. When we feel distress *while* empathizing that experience helps us to better appreciate what the other person is going through. It improves our understanding of the nature of her thoughts and feelings. When we feel distress *after* empathizing, the distress represents a concern for the other’s condition. It shows that we are invested in how the other person is doing. In short, Maibom’s comparison of empathy and the imagine-self process does not show that empathizing produces the sort of self-focused distress that obstructs understanding.

There are also reasons to question Maibom's view that empathy would lead to long-term effects such as vicarious traumatization. First, we do not need to empathize in every situation; therefore, the exposure to distress need not be a frequent occurrence. Second, many attitudes do not involve personal distress; therefore, many instances of empathizing will not produce resembling states involving personal distress. Third, it is unclear whether the non-personal distress produced by empathy can lead to over-arousal and vicarious traumatization in the same way as full-fledged experiences of personal distress. Maibom does not provide empirical evidence to show that it does.

Two final issues are worth mentioning. First, Maibom treats empathizing as something we do only in response to other's negative emotions. However, as I've suggested, we can empathize in response to a variety of attitudes and many of these attitudes will not involve personal distress. Therefore, even if she were right about the negative effects of personal distress, this would only create an issue for a restricted set of cases. For all of the other cases, empathy could still benefit moral agents by providing understanding of others' thoughts and feelings. Second, some people are more prone than others to experience personal distress, and some people are also better disposed than others to handle that distress. Presumably, this is similar for any distress caused by empathy. Some people will be better equipped than others to manage the distress. These people, as a result, will be more likely to gain understanding from empathy in cases involving distress. Hence, even if distress impacts the effectiveness of empathizing, the impact would vary from person to person.

2.3 The Problem of Bias

The third putative reason to doubt that empathy produces understanding that benefits moral judgment comes from Maibom and Jesse Prinz. They each argue that bias undermines the reliability of empathy as a source of understanding. If this is correct and empathy is not a reliable source of understanding, then—contra my account in Chapter 2 and 3—empathy would not be something that helps us to make sound moral judgments or recognize others’ moral judgments.

There are two ways in which bias purportedly undermines the reliability of empathy. The first is that bias causes us to empathize inconsistently across different situations. For example, Prinz argues that we are more likely to empathize with those who are similar to us (i.e., the similarity bias) and with those who are close in proximity and affection (i.e., the near and dear bias) [2011b: 227]. He suggests that because we are not disposed to empathize consistently in different situations, empathy, in general, is not a reliable source of understanding. It is not something that can effectively inform moral judgment across the disparate cases of moral life. The second way is that biases purportedly distort the accuracy of the empathic process. For example, Maibom argues that self-interest is the most problematic bias when empathizing. She claims that when we are particularly invested in something we have a tendency to interpret others’ thoughts and feelings in a way that “dovetails” with our own pursuits [2010: 43]. Our self-interest distorts our thinking such that we fail to appreciate how others in fact think and feel about a situation. She states, “...we often think of others as wanting, thinking, and feeling things because thinking of them that way serves some, not necessarily conscious,

interests of ours” [43-44]. Prinz identifies two similar examples. He claims that the degree to which we find others attractive or the degree to which we see others as members of an in-group impacts how charitable we are when trying to take up their perspective [2011a: 226]. We are more inclined to think about others’ ways of thinking and feeling in terms of uncharitable generalizations if we find them unattractive or see them as out-group members. Prinz takes this to show that bias causes us to mischaracterize others’ perspectives and because we mischaracterize others’ perspective we do not reenact how they think and feel about a situation. In this way, Prinz and Maibom argue that bias undermines empathy as a resource for understanding others’ thoughts and feelings.

It is not always clear which of these two ways Prinz and Maibom have in mind when discussing the problems that bias creates for empathy. Prinz at times seems satisfied to argue just for the first. For example, he tries to show that there are particular moral judgments for which we are better off not empathizing. He raises these examples to support his thesis that we do not need empathy in order to make moral judgments. At other points, however, Prinz seems interested in simply raising worries about empathy’s merits as a resource for moral agents; he suggests that empathy does not better equip moral agents to make moral judgments. I am responding to the latter thesis in this chapter. Maibom appears more interested in the second thesis. She claims that empathy is problematically susceptible to distorting influences, and thereby, moral agents should not rely on it as a resource for understanding others’ thoughts and feelings when trying to make judgments of right and wrong.

The first way in which they suggest (or at least Prinz suggests) that bias undermines reliability does not create a problem for my account. My account does not entail that we *need* empathy in order to make every sound moral judgment; nor does it entail that empathy is sufficient for making all sound judgments. It is consistent with my account that there are cases in which we make sound moral judgments without empathizing. For this reason, the fact that biases dispose us to not empathize in certain cases does not call into question the thesis that empathy is a resource that produces beneficial understanding of others' thoughts and feelings. It is this latter point that matters for my account. If empathy reliably produces relevant understanding, then it is something that benefits moral agents even if we don't empathize in all cases.

The second way in which they suggest that bias undermines reliability poses a more pressing challenge to my account. It indicates that empathy does not reliably produce accurate understanding of others' thoughts and feelings. However, there is a question here concerning scope: what do Prinz and Maibom take to be the range of cases in which the reliability of empathy is in doubt? An unsatisfactory answer would be that the reliability is in doubt when considering all cases involving others' thoughts and feelings. There are many cases in which we lack significant information about others' concerns, their beliefs, and their situations. This lack of information makes it difficult for us to take their perspectives, and as a result, we do not empathize in many of these cases. Because we do not rely on empathy in all cases, we should narrow the scope of cases we use to assess the reliability of empathy. In Chapter 1 I claim that empathy helps us to appreciate why others' think and feel about a situation in the way that they do. In these

cases, however, we have some familiarity with the situation and the other person. Therefore, I propose that we assess the reliability of empathy in terms of cases in which we have this sort of information. If empathy is unreliable in these sorts of cases, then we have reason to doubt that empathy produces understanding that helps us to make, correct, and recognize moral judgments.⁵³

Prinz and Maibom attempt to motivate their points about bias by appealing to empirical research on empathic accuracy. In particular they cite well-known studies by William Ickes. In these studies participants watch short videos of people experiencing emotions. Participants are then asked to identify the attitudes experienced by the subjects in the videos, and their answers are compared to self-reports given by the subjects [Ickes 2009: 58]. Based on these comparisons, the studies purportedly show that agents are “relatively bad” at correctly ascribing attitudes to others [Maibom 2010: 42]. Moreover, Prinz and Maibom suggest that the studies show that participants’ accuracy gets worse in cases where there is reason to suspect bias [Prinz 2011a: 2226, Maibom 2010: 42-3].⁵⁴ Despite this body of empirical research, pointing to such studies does not help Maibom and Prinz in making a case against empathy. First, the studies often fail to specify the exact phenomenon being examined. For example, Ickes [2009: 57-58] argues that the studies measure what he calls “empathic inference” which he identifies as the ability to

⁵³ This move to assess reliability in terms of a restricted set of cases is not unique to empathy. For example, we don’t rely on perceptual experience in cases in which we know there’s an illusion, and we don’t rely on testimony in the context of certain board games. If we wanted to assess the general reliability of these resources, we would do so in regards to the cases in which we actually rely on the resources to produce understanding.

⁵⁴ For example, Prinz states, “It has also been found that empathetic accuracy — which includes the ability to identify someone else’s emotions, and, thus, perhaps, to mirror them — increases when the target is viewed as attractive (Ickes et al. (1990))” [Prinz 2011: 226].

infer others' mental states. It is unclear how this phenomenon overlaps with empathy where "empathy" is understood as a process of taking another's perspective and experiencing resembling states. This ambiguity is significant because as I explained earlier there are important differences between phenomena like the imagine-self process and empathy. We should not expect such phenomena to have the same levels of accuracy. Therefore, it is unclear what these studies show about the accuracy of empathy in particular. Second, many of the studies involve cases in which observers know almost nothing about the other person or the relevant situation [e.g., Ickes 2003 and 2009: 58]. These experiments thereby do not clearly resemble the cases in which we would actually empathize.⁵⁵ Third, we can be mistaken in identifying and reporting our own mental states. Hence, using self-reporting as the basis for measuring accuracy is problematic. There could be cases where the observer accurately describes the other's attitudes, but her description is judged inaccurate based on a mistaken self-report. Fourth, the studies usually measure the rate at which subjects accurately identify another's emotion type. Empathy, as I explained above, is not simply about trying to identify emotion types. It is about trying to understand the nature of others' thoughts and feelings and why they respond in the way that they do. In short, these studies are a poor guide to determining empathy's reliability at providing understanding of others thoughts and feelings.

Furthermore, there appears to be an unstated premise in Prinz and Maibom's case against empathy. They both argue that biases undermine the accuracy of empathy, and

⁵⁵ This is worth noting because some studies [Ickes 2003] suggest that we are significantly better at recognizing the mental states of people we know than those belonging to strangers.

therefore, it is unreliable. Because it is unreliable it is not something we should lean on when trying to make sound moral judgments. This argument presupposes that there is some alternative resource to empathy that is not equally affected by bias and that we could replace empathy with when trying to make sound moral judgments. However, Prinz and Maibom provide no empirical evidence to indicate that bias creates a unique problem for empathy, and to the best of my knowledge no such evidence exists. This is part of a larger problem: they cannot establish the baseline for the reliability of empathy in cases without bias. Without this baseline and the baseline for other resources we have no means of comparing how bias effects the reliability of different resources. As a result, we cannot yet determine whether alternative resources would be better off than empathy when faced with cases involving bias. So why might Prinz and Maibom think bias creates a unique problem for empathy?

One possible explanation is that empathy involves sophisticated interpretation about how others' view situations in light of their unique perspectives. Because a perspective consists of a complex constellation of features, there is a lot of interpretive space for biases to distort the process. Moreover, biases can have an impact without our recognizing that they are doing so. This is problematic for empathy because if we cannot determine whether we are correctly taking another's perspective, then we cannot determine whether we are reenacting how that person views the situation or how she thinks and feels about the situation. If we cannot determine that we are reenacting how that person thinks and feels, then we cannot trust that we are gaining understanding about

the nature of the other's thoughts and feelings.⁵⁶ However, this possible explanation of Prinz and Maibom's thinking does not give us sufficient reason to think that bias creates a unique problem for empathy. The biases that they mention are cognitively upstream from empathy. As a result, we should expect that other psychological resources face a similar problem. For example, the growing literature on implicit attitudes reveals that even non-emotional attitudes such as belief, judgment, and inference are all susceptible to bias [Brownstein and Saul 2016]. Therefore, if we have the relevant biases, then we should expect that even without trying to take the other's perspective the biases would impact how we think about the other person, her attitudes, and the relevant situation.

Moreover, the literature on bias also indicates that although biases can undermine epistemic resources such as evaluative judgment, no one thinks that we should give up on such resources. Instead, we just make efforts to minimize the possible effects of bias. For example, in judging the quality of an essay, we can use practices of blind review to decrease the likelihood that implicit bias distorts the evaluation. Similarly, there are things we can do to guard against the effects of bias on empathy. First, we can learn which biases we have and how those biases impact the way in which we see other people. This knowledge can help us to identify the situations in which empathy would be particularly susceptible to bias. When in those situations we can then avoid empathizing,

⁵⁶ They might also try to argue that empathy faces a special problem because it involves experiencing affective states, and affective states are more likely to misrepresent the world because of bias. However, this option is problematic for at least two reasons. First, empathizing does not involve just affective states. The affective states arise because of higher-order cognitions, and it is the cognitive elements that would presumably be compromised by bias. Second, it is a substantive thesis that bias makes affective states less reliable than non-affective states. Such a thesis would need a careful defense, but theorists such as Prinz are not interested in offering such a defense because of sentimentalist commitments.

or we can place less weight on the information that it produces. For example, given the deep-seated nature of racial stereotypes in North America,⁵⁷ white jury members should be skeptical about their ability to reenact the thoughts and feelings of an accused African American. Thus, they should also be skeptical about making judgments based on empathizing with the accused.⁵⁸ Second, we can try to appropriately motivate our empathizing. The appropriate motivation derives from curiosity about the other's response.⁵⁹ This curiosity presupposes that the response might be different than what we expect and that it is worth knowing the nature of the response. Curiosity moves us to keep updating and correcting our interpretation of how the other sees the situation. This helps us in trying to understand how the other actually thinks and feels and not how we would think and feel or how we expect her to think and feel. Empirical studies support the idea that increasing motivation to understand another's mental state improves accuracy of understanding.⁶⁰ For example, Klein and Hodges conducted studies in which some of the test subjects were offered a reward if they correctly described another's response. Those offered the reward outperformed the control group by 15% [Klein and Hodges 2001: 727].

⁵⁷ For more on racial cognition see Kelly and Roedder's [2008] excellent article.

⁵⁸ But perhaps they should be skeptical about any of their judgments regarding the guilt of the accused. For more on the difficult relationship between empathy and the law see Hoffman 2011.

⁵⁹ Jodi Halpern identifies curiosity as an essential characteristic of the empathic physician. Curiosity, she explains, helps physicians to remain focused on understanding the other's experiences, experiences that may differ from how they would feel. Halpern 2012: 236-37.

⁶⁰ Maibom [2010: 42] also makes note of these studies. As with the Ickes studies, there is an important question regarding how much these studies actually show about empathy as defined in this paper and the philosophical literature.

In short, bias challenges the accuracy of all of our resources for improving interpersonal understanding. It does not create a special problem for empathy. As a result, we should not respond to this challenge by giving up on empathy. Instead, we should take measures, as we do with other productive resources, to minimize the possible effects of bias. With these measures in place, we should expect empathy to support interpersonal understanding. Empathy enables us to reenact how someone thinks and feels in response to a situation, and this helps us to appreciate the nature of the other's thoughts and feelings. This appreciation is beneficial for moral agents because it helps us to make, correct, and recognize moral judgments.

3. CONCLUSION

Some philosophers question whether empathy is beneficial for us as moral agents. One way in which they do so is by denying that empathy is a resource that helps us to understand others' thoughts and feelings. If empathy does not provide relevant understanding of others' thoughts and feelings, then it does not help us to make, correct, or recognize judgments of moral worth or judgments of right and wrong. In this chapter I address three putative reasons—identified by prominent critics in the empathy literature—to doubt that empathy provides beneficial understanding of others' thoughts and feelings. In doing so, I defend my account of the way in which empathy is a beneficial resource for moral agents. However, questions still remain regarding the role of that resource in moral life. For example, is it in some sense necessary? Do we need empathy when making moral judgments? Are people who are incapable of empathy able

to make all of the same moral judgments? If not, where does this leave them compared to other moral agents? In the following chapter I explore these questions and how they are answered in the literature. I propose a novel account according to which empathy has an indispensable role to play in moral life.

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Chapter 4: The Necessity of Empathy

In the previous chapter I reject three putative reasons to doubt that empathy produces understanding that helps us to make, correct, or recognize moral judgments. By doing so I defend my account that we benefit from empathy as moral agents. Questions still remain, however, regarding the role of empathy in moral life. In particular there are questions about whether empathy is something we need as moral agents. For example, do we need to empathize in order to make moral judgments? Are people who are incapable of empathy able to make all of the same moral judgments? If not, how does that affect their status as moral agents? The way in which we answer these questions can change how we think about empathy. Instead of thinking about empathy as just a helpful resource, we might come to view it as something required by morality. In this chapter I examine the answers that philosophers offer in response to these sorts of questions. Some philosophers argue that empathy is not necessary for making moral judgments. Critics of empathy use these arguments as stepping stones for asserting that moral agents would do just as well without empathy [e.g., Prinz 2011b]. Other philosophers argue that empathy is necessary because it is a precondition for making all or some moral judgments [e.g., Mastro 2015]. There are problems with both lines of argument. I argue that although moral agents can make judgments without empathy, empathy is indispensable to moral life.

1. WHAT'S IN QUESTION?

Moral psychologists have recently begun to question whether empathy is something we need as moral agents. For example, in a pair of articles Jesse Prinz argues that people mistakenly believe that “empathy is somehow necessary for morality” [2011a: 211, 2011b].⁶¹ This mistake, he suggests, results in people overlooking problems with empathy, and it keeps them from recognizing that we would do just as well or better without empathy [2011b: 216]. Nancy Snow is more positive than Prinz regarding the value of empathy; however, she too denies that empathy is necessary for morality. She states, “Some philosophers believe that empathizing...can help us to understand the perspectives of others...these philosophers would have to admit, however, that empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient for morality” [2000: 74]. In a similar vein Jeannette Kennett [2002] states, “I think that empathy...is important to us as moral *agents*, but I am not sure how essential it is to moral *agency*” [2002: 345]. Heidi Maibom denies that people need empathy in order to have moral understanding or to make moral judgments about whether something violates a harm norm [2010, 2009]. She states, “neither the ability to simply ascribe psychological states to others nor the ability to imagine being in others’ positions are necessary for moral understanding or moral motivation” [2010: 36]. In contrast to these philosophers, Meghan Mastro argues that empathy is required by morality because we need empathy in order to make certain moral judgments. She states, “Thus, empathy is sometimes epistemologically necessary for morality because it is

⁶¹ Prinz actually titles one of his articles “Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?” His answer in the article is a resounding “No” [2011a].

sometimes necessary for forming justified beliefs about which act is the morally right one” [2015: 91]. Despite this breadth of literature, it is not always clear what is in question about the role of empathy in moral life when researchers deny or affirm that empathy is necessary. In this section I attempt to clarify the question; I hope to reveal what is at stake when researchers ask whether we as moral agents need empathy.

To begin, we should recognize that it is misleading to frame the question in terms of whether empathy is necessary *for morality*. We can distinguish two senses in which people commonly use the term “morality” [Gert 2016, Donagan 1977]. The first sense is descriptive in character. We use it to refer to a society’s set of customs and normative conventions. The “morality of a society,” in this sociological sense, can be read off of the codes of conduct put forward and followed by groups within the society [Gert 2016; Donagan 1977: 2]. The second sense of “morality” is normative in character. We use it to refer to a standard, such as a set of universal principles, by which we evaluate the customs and conventions of a society. When we use “morality” in this sense we recognize that the current mores of a society may be wrong or inadequate as guides to appropriate behavior [Gert 2016, Donagan 1977: 3]. Neither of these senses seems to refer to the sort of thing about which we would ask whether empathy is necessary. If we ask whether empathy is necessary for a system of mores or a set of universal principles, then our question does not appear to make sense. In what way would a set of norms need or depend on our empathizing with others? Note that this is different than wondering whether a set of norms requires agents to empathize. Instead, it is similar to wondering

whether counting is necessary for arithmetic. Perhaps counting is necessary for *studying* arithmetic, but it is confusing to ask whether it is necessary for arithmetic.

However, perhaps this is too fast. Suppose that someone argues for a constructivist account in which empathy generates the principles that constitute morality, we could then sensibly ask whether empathy is necessary for morality. However, this sort of question no longer tracks the literature. The researchers criticizing and defending empathy do not argue about whether empathizing constitutes moral principles or facts. It is not a meta-ethical debate.⁶² Instead, they argue about whether we use, are required to use, and should use our capacity for empathy when engaging in moral activity. They approach the topic from the standpoint of moral psychology and normative theory.⁶³

Therefore, we should reframe the question regarding empathy and necessity. It is not a question of whether empathy is necessary for morality, but a question of whether empathy is necessary for *being moral*. Or put slightly differently, it is a question of whether we as moral agents need empathy in order to perform the sorts of activities that characterize appropriate participation in the moral community. However, we can carve up being moral or moral activity such that they involve different elements. We can conceptually distinguish moral perception from moral judgment, and we can distinguish moral judgment from moral motivation and action. It is beyond the scope of this project to examine the role of empathy in relation to each element. In the previous chapters I

⁶² One notable exception is Michael Slote [2010]. He argues that empathy contributes to how we fix the reference of moral terms [Chapter 4 of *Moral Sentimentalism*].

⁶³ For examples of theorists that criticize or defend empathy in this way, see Prinz 2011a, Maibom 2009, Kennett 2002, Snow 2000 and Sherman 1998.

focus on how empathy supports judgments of moral worth and judgments of right and wrong. Therefore, in this chapter I build on my account by exploring the question of necessity in terms of whether moral agents need empathy for making moral judgments.

The question, however, requires further clarification because we can distinguish at least three senses in which empathy might be necessary for making moral judgments. The first sense is what we might call an “analytic condition.” Empathy is necessary as an analytic condition just in case empathy is built into the concept of moral judgment. For example, if a determination only counts as moral judgment if it involves a particular psychological underpinning and empathy is a constitutive part of that underpinning, then empathy would be an analytic condition for moral judgment. Moral agents would need to empathize every time they make a moral judgment because all moral judgments, by definition, would involve empathizing. The second sense is what we might call an “enabling condition.” Empathy is necessary as an enabling condition just in case it is something that makes it possible for us to make moral judgments. This sense of necessity does not require that empathy is part of the concept of moral judgment. Instead, it treats empathy as precondition for making all or some moral judgments. For example, if we learn what is right and wrong in virtue of empathizing with others, then empathy might be necessary as a developmental precondition for making some moral judgments. Finally, the third sense is what we might call a “normative condition.” Empathy is necessary as a normative condition just in case we need to empathize in order to satisfy the demands of morality when it comes to making moral judgments. This sense of necessity does not depend on the other two senses. Even if empathy is not necessary as an analytic or

enabling condition, we might be morally required to empathize with others when making some moral judgments.

If empathy is necessary in any of these senses, then it has a crucial role to play in moral life. It would be more than just a beneficial resource that helps agents to make moral judgments. Instead, it would be a resource that agents cannot justifiably choose to do without. Part of being moral would involve drawing on empathy as an available resource for understanding others; empathy would be an indispensable part of moral life. However, as we have seen, some researchers deny that moral agents need empathy, and some suggest that moral agents could do just as well without it. In the following sections I engage with accounts from the literature that imply that empathy is necessary for moral judgment and accounts that imply that it is not. This review of the literature will reveal instructive points regarding how to think about the necessity of empathy.

2. SLOTE'S HUMEAN SENTIMENTALISM

I begin my review by examining an account by Michael Slote that implies that empathy is an enabling condition for moral judgment. Slote's account is deeply inspired by the work of David Hume. Therefore, in setting up Slote's account, it is helpful to first consider what Hume has to say about sympathy (or what Slote calls "empathy").⁶⁴ Hume describes sympathy as a psychological mechanism by which our ideas about others' states are converted into impressions of those states. When we encounter someone experiencing a passion such as anger, we perceive the external expressions of that anger

⁶⁴ I will focus on Hume's view of sympathy as developed in the *Treatise* [1739/2000].

(e.g., the redness of their face), and from this perception we infer that he is angry.⁶⁵ Our mind, by way of sympathy, then enlivens this idea, turning it into an impression of anger. This impression corresponds to the passion of the other person, and by having the impression we experience some of the pain or unpleasantness of anger [1739/2000: 2.2.2-8].⁶⁶

Hume argues that the passions we experience because of sympathy are the basis for the moral sentiments. When sympathy causes us to have an impression of anger, the unpleasantness of this experience—through the associative principle of resemblance—causes feelings of disapprobation. Through the associative principle of cause and effect, this sentiment is then directed at the cause of the anger [3.3.1]. For example, we see someone who is upset at an offensive comment. Sympathy converts our idea of her emotion into an impression and we come to have a resembling experience. The unpleasantness of this experience then causes us to feel disapprobation about the offensive comment. Our disapprobation is a moral sentiment, and on the Humean account, moral sentiments are in effect moral judgments. Thus, empathizing (or what

⁶⁵ Hume also thinks that perceiving the typical causes of a passion can produce in us the idea of another's passion. He states, "When I see the *effects* of passion in the voice and gesture of any person, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms such a lively idea of the passion, as is presently converted into the passion itself. In like manner, when I perceive the *causes* of any emotion, my mind is convey'd to the effects, and is actuated with a like emotion" [3.3.1].

⁶⁶ It is worth noting here, and as I explain below, Hume and Slote actually have a broader conception of empathy than the one I identify in Chapter 1. Their conception allows for phenomena such as emotional contagion to also count as empathy. Examining their accounts, however, is still quite helpful. It reveals the problems that would arise if we treated my narrower conception of empathy as conceptually necessary. Adam Smith offers an account that is in many ways similar to Hume's but relies on a conception of empathy that more closely resembles the one I outline in Chapter 1 [see Coplan and Goldie 2011: x-xi for more on the differences between Hume and Smith's conceptions of sympathy (i.e., empathy)]. However, the recent literature on empathy and morality—in part because of Prinz—focuses on Hume's account and not Smith's.

Hume would call “sympathizing”) with the other’s anger gives rise to a disapprobative sentiment, and with this sentiment we pass judgment on the offensive comment.⁶⁷ The way in which Hume identifies moral judgment with sentiments ascribes to empathy a central role in the psychology of moral judgment. Our moral judgments consist of sentiments that are based on experiences of fellow-feeling, and our experiences of fellow-feeling are brought about by empathy. In this way, Hume’s account treats empathy as an enabling condition for moral judgment. John Deigh puts the point as follows:

In other words, the sentiments of approbation and disapprobation, esteem and blame, result from one's first being so connected to another's pleasure or pain and then taking the party or parties responsible for it as the sentiments' objects. Hume thus, in attributing this mechanism of connection to the human mind, gave an account of the phenomena of having feelings in common with another that we now typically explain as resulting from empathy. His explanation of how we make moral distinctions, distinctions between virtue and vice, in particular, thus

⁶⁷ In Book III, Part 3, Hume adds an extra layer to his account. He argues that we can sympathize with others from the “common point of view.” The common point of view is the perspective from which others would also sympathize and respond to another person’s character or actions. Hume introduces this point of view in order to explain the cohesion in people’s moral judgments. The common point of view corrects for variability in people’s sentiments that can arise in virtue of sympathizing from the individual or “peculiar point of view” [Hume 3.3.1.30]. He states, “But we shall easily satisfy ourselves on this head, when we consider, that every particular person’s pleasure and interest being different, ‘tis impossible men cou’d ever agree in their sentiments and judgments, unless they chose some common point of view, from which they might survey their object, and which might cause it to appear the same to all of them. Now in judging of characters, the only interest or pleasure, which appears the same to every spectator, is that of the person himself, who character is examin’d; or that of persons, who have a connexion with him.” For more on the common view and its role in Hume’s ethics, see Cohon 1997.

represents a view of moral judgment as requiring empathy” [Deigh Forthcoming: 4-5].

In his book *Moral Sentimentalism* Michael Slote claims to offer an account of normative ethics that “seems to be more Humean than anything that has appeared since Hume’s day” [2010: vii]. He states that his account is deeply indebted to Hume’s views of the sentiments and the role of empathy in generating those sentiments. However, despite this debt, he disagrees with Hume about how the phenomenology involved in empathy gives rise to sentiments of approval and disapproval. Slote proposes an alternative account that focuses on the qualitative character of agents’ experiences and not empathic experiences of pain and pleasure. He argues that when an agent feels concern for others, she experiences feelings of warmth. Conversely, when an agent lacks concern for others, she experiences feelings of chilliness. An agent, Slote explains, expresses her concern or lack of concern for others in her conduct. He claims that if we empathize with an agent whose conduct expresses concern for others, we can come to experience feelings resembling her feelings of warmth. When we empathize with an agent whose conduct expresses a lack of concern, then we experience chilliness resembling the agent’s chilliness towards others [Slote 2007: 31 and 2010: 34-37].⁶⁸ Slote argues that the warmth and chilliness that we feel when empathizing with agents forms the basis for our sentiments of approval and disapproval. When we feel warmth or

⁶⁸ Slote argues that the relevant sense of concern is also empathic in nature. Behavior that lacks concern for others arises when agents fail to appropriately empathize with those effected by their behavior [Slote 2010: Chapters 1-2].

chilliness about an agent's display of concern or lack of concern those feelings constitute a judgment of the agent's conduct. Slote states,

In particular, if agents' actions reflect...concern for (the well being or wishes of) others, empathic beings will feel warmly or tenderly toward them, and such warmth and tenderness empathically reflect the...warmth or tenderness of the agents. I want to say that such (in one sense) reflective feeling...also constitutes moral approval, and possibly admiration as well, for agents and/or their actions [34-35].

Despite offering an alternative account of the phenomenology, Slote follows Hume in ascribing a central role to empathy in the psychology of moral judgment. He agrees that moral judgment is based on sentiments that are brought about by empathizing with others. In doing so, he too makes empathy an enabling condition for making moral judgments.

Jesse Prinz identifies several putative problems with ascribing this central role to empathy. Discussing the Humean account of empathy and moral judgment, he states that many paradigmatic cases in which we feel approbation and disapprobation do not seem to involve empathizing [2011a: 214]. For example, when we judge that our own actions are morally blameworthy, we do not need to empathize with ourselves in order to feel disapproval. He also claims that we do not need to empathize with the agent or victim in cases where an action transgresses a clear deontological commitment. For example, when we judge that it is wrong to steal organs from five innocent patients and give them to one

patient, we do not empathize with any of the patients in order to make the judgment [2011a: 214]. Moreover, Prinz states that empathy involves the experience of resembling states; however, this phenomenological aspect, he claims, is not present in many of our moral judgments [2011b: 217-18]. For example, if you help someone in need that person feels grateful towards you. However, when I approve of your action, I feel admiration and not gratitude towards you. Prinz claims that my feeling of approbation towards you is not a resembling affective state. Because empathy involves feeling resembling states, he infers that I must not need to empathize in order to make the moral judgment. Finally, Prinz argues that Hume's account cannot explain moral judgments of disapproval in cases where no one is harmed. If no one is harmed, Prinz claims, then there is no one feeling displeasure. If no one feels displeasure, then there is no one to empathize with such that we come to feel disapprobation. For example, Prinz argues that in cases of bestiality there is no person harmed and thereby no one with whom to empathize. [2011b: 218].⁶⁹

These attempts by Prinz to identify problems miss their mark for several reasons. First, Prinz seems to have an overly narrow conception of the Humean accounts. As a

⁶⁹ Prinz [2011b: 218-19] raises an additional worry regarding Slote's account. He claims that it is unclear on Slote's account why we should think of judgments of disapproval as constituted by empathy. Prinz's worry is roughly as follows: when we disapprove of an agent we view a situation in a very different way than the agent, and thus we should not be described as empathizing with that person. For example, if we disapprove of a corrupt election official our disapproval involves a failure to agree with or see things the same way as him. Thus, according to Prinz, we are not empathizing with the politician. Nevertheless, we are able to pass judgment on the moral worth of his actions. Therefore, Prinz denies that Slote's account shows that we need to empathize when making moral judgments. This objection, however, relies on a misrepresentation of Slote's account. Slote does not think that we need to agree with how someone views a situation in order to empathize with that person. Instead, he would argue that empathizing with the official would cause us to experience something resembling the official's lack of concern for his constituents. This experience of a lack of concern is what causes us to experience chilliness towards the official. The chilliness constitutes our sentiment of disapprobation. In short, Prinz is mistaken in assuming that empathizing requires agreeing with the point of view we imaginatively takes up.

result, he overlooks theoretical resources available to Hume and Slote. For example, Hume could deal with cases such as bestiality in several ways. He could argue that in such cases we empathize with members of the community who are closely connected to the agent [1739/2000: 3.3.1.30]. Those community members interpret the act as disrespectful, and this causes them to feel displeasure. By empathy we come to experience resembling displeasure, and this gives rise to a sentiment of disapproval. Even in a case in which the community members do not learn about the bestiality, we could experience disapproval in virtue of imagining their response. Empathy converts the idea of their response into an impression, and our experience of that impression gives rise to disapprobation.⁷⁰⁻⁷¹

Second, Prinz's attempts to raise problems misfire because he mischaracterizes what the Humean accounts identify as the role of empathy in moral judgment. Slote and Hume identify empathy as playing a central psychological role in how we come to have the sentiments that constitute moral judgment. However, they do not claim that on every occasion in which we judge that something merits disapproval or approval we must first empathize on that occasion. They are not committed to empathy being an analytic condition for making moral judgments. The putative problems that Prinz identifies have

⁷⁰ Hume might also explain cases such as bestiality by arguing that bestiality is one of the instances in which we find an action immediately disagreeable. These judgments do not seem to require empathy as an enabling condition.

⁷¹ Prinz also claims that we do not need to empathize when making judgments from behind the veil of ignorance. He states, "consider the moral judgments one might issue from behind a Rawlsian veil of ignorance; you might decide it's good to distribute resources to the needy because *you* might be needy. Here there is no empathy for the needy, but rather concern for the self" [2011a: 214]. However, these idealized judgments are prudential rather than moral in character. One could argue that in order to make a moral judgment about an unfair distribution of resources we should empathize with the disadvantaged and appreciate their discomfort. Feeling the discomfort would cause us to feel disapproval of those people and actions that reify distributive injustice.

the following form: he describes a case that appears to involve moral judgment, and then he explains how empathy is not present in that case. He takes the cases as evidence that we do not need empathy when making moral judgments. However, even if these cases are examples of moral judgments made without empathizing on the particular occasions, they fail to undermine the Humean point that empathy produces the fellow-feeling upon which our moral sentiments are based. We may still need empathy as an enabling condition for those sentiments even if we can make some judgments without empathizing on the particular occasion [e.g., a judgment based on a memory of an earlier sentiment].

Finally, Prinz's attempts fail because they rely on a conception of empathy that differs from the one used by Hume and Slote. As mentioned in note 7 above, Hume and Slote conceive of empathy as a psychological mechanism that causes our perception or thought of another's affective states to produce similar affective states. This mechanism could include perspective-taking but it also includes less cognitively-involved phenomena such as mirroring and emotional contagion. This is a different conception of empathy than the one I've been considering in Chapter 1-3. However, by conceiving of empathy in this broad way, Slote and Hume could maintain that empathy frequently occurs without conscious deliberation and below the level of awareness. They can then claim that we often do not recognize we are empathizing when making moral judgments because we are frequently not aware that we are empathizing. In this way, they can explain away Prinz's challenges about phenomenology and experiencing resembling states. For example, Slote can argue that when I see you perform a helpful action, I empathize with you and feel the warmth of your empathic concern, and this experience

constitutes my feeling approval and admiration for you. However, because I do not reflectively register that I am feeling your empathic concern, I do not identify the experience underlying my judgment as empathic in character.

Prinz claims that he is also using a broad conception of empathy. He states, “The core idea, as I will use the term, is that empathy is a kind of vicarious emotion: it’s feeling what one takes another person to be feeling. And the ‘taking’ here can be a matter of automatic contagion or the result of a complicated exercise of imagination” [2011a 212].⁷² However, there are two reasons to doubt that Prinz holds true to this ecumenical conception of empathy. First, as we’ve seen, he presents putative problems that rely on a conception of empathy that operates at a high level of conscious awareness. Second, Prinz uses his criticisms of empathy in order to call into question whether we should empathize when making moral judgments. He suggests that we would be better off avoiding empathy in favor of using other psychological resources [e.g., 2011a: 228-29, 2011b: 230-31]. His questioning implies that we have some control over when and whether we empathize. Having deliberative control, however, suggests that the phenomenon is a higher-level psychological process such as perspective-taking.

Although Prinz’s challenges misfire, considering them offers an interesting takeaway. The takeaway is that it is implausible that the narrow conception of empathy I’ve been discussing in Chapters 1-3 is necessary as an analytic condition for moral judgment. There are too many cases in which we make moral judgments without it

⁷² Earlier in the passage he also rejects the idea that empathy necessarily involves imagining. He states, “the appeal to imagination seems overly intellectual. Imagination sounds like a kind of mental act that requires effort on the part of the imaginer. As Darwall recognizes, empathy in its simplest form is just emotional contagion: catching the emotion that another person feels” [212].

seeming necessary for us to empathize on that occasion. For example, I see someone swerving as they drive drunk down the street. I judge that their conduct is wrong and that they are blameworthy for their actions. It seems that I can make these judgments without empathizing with the agent or with any potential victims. Moreover, this could be the case even if one insisted that I needed to empathize on some prior occasion in order to have the relevant sentiments or to appreciate that driving while impaired is morally wrong. Because I can make a judgment without empathizing on the particular occasion, there seems to be space between empathy and moral judgment such that we should not view empathy as built into the concept of moral judgment.⁷³

⁷³ It is worth noting a problem that is particular to Slote's account. Slote claims that his account of moral judgment improves on Hume's account by grounding moral judgment in our empathizing with agents. He states, "The present approach also avoids the difficulties that Adam Smith attributed to the Humean approach to moral approval and disapproval. If approval and disapproval involve empathy with (the point of view of) agents, then there is no danger that we will morally approve or disapprove of boulders, houses, storms, or other things that can be useful or harmful to people. If we feel chilled or, possibly, repelled by certain people and that constitutes a disapproval of them, that is because those people are cold hearted toward others and our being chilled or repelled empathically reflects that (immoral) attitude/motivation on their part. But inanimate objects don't harm or hurt us as a result of having such motives or attitudes. So there is nothing for empathy to latch on to in what inanimate objects do in their (quasi)agential capacity, and our theory therefore makes it understandable, as indeed it ought to be, that inanimate objects are not the targets of moral approval and disapproval" [2010: 38]. However, by explaining moral judgment in virtue of empathizing exclusively with agents, Slote's account lacks the resources to offer straightforward explanations of some ordinary moral judgments. For example, we judge that disproportionate distributions of wealth are unjust, and we disapprove of a society losing biodiversity without just cause. We can make these judgments without focusing on individual agents who are causing these states of affair. Because we do not focus on individual agents, we do not empathize with anyone such that we experience chilliness resembling their lack of concern. Hume's account, in contrast, can tell a much simpler story by claiming that we empathize with those most affected by income inequality and environmental instability. Similarly, sometimes we judge that an action is wrong even though the agent performs the action with commendable intentions or attitudes. For example, we now recognize that certain forms of foreign aid (e.g., providing genetically modified seeds, youth service programs) produce social harm even when done by agents who demonstrate great empathic concern. We may judge that agents ought not to provide that aid even if we empathize with the agents and experience states that resemble their empathic concern. It is unclear on Slote's account how empathizing with the relevant agents is supposed to produce disapproval. I am not claiming that Slote lacks any resources by which to offer an explanation; rather, the point is that Hume can offer a more straightforward (and plausible) account by explaining how our empathizing with those negatively affected would give rise to sentiments that form the basis of our disapproval.

3. DARWALL AND BEING WITH OTHERS

Stephen Darwall proposes a very different account of the role of empathy in making moral judgments. He argues that moral judgments take into account what he calls “second-personal reasons” that we have in virtue of “being with others.” Genuinely being with others” involves what he calls “mutual accountability” [2011: 4]. To be with others, we need to see them as sources of accountability; we need to recognize that they can make normative claims upon us. We also need to recognize that we are sources of accountability for them. This is part of acknowledging each other as persons.⁷⁴ Darwall argues that this mutual accountability requires empathy.⁷⁵ It is by viewing things (including ourselves) from others’ perspectives that we recognize one another as unique subjects with authority. This recognition establishes the “second-person standing” [2011: 15]. We come to see ourselves as inhabiting a shared space in which we are one amongst others, and each has the authority to make claims of others. Darwall states,

Second-personal relating, I argue, requires a distinctive form of empathy, projective empathy, through which we imaginatively occupy others’

⁷⁴ “Person” is a theoretically significant term for Darwall. He states, “In *The Second-Person Standpoint*, I argue that person in this sense is a “second-personal concept” since it can be understood only within a network of concepts that involve the idea of second-personal address: the authority or standing to address claims and demands to others, legitimate claims and demands and the distinctive kind of reasons for acting they create (second-personal reasons), and answerability for complying with valid claims and second-personal reasons (Darwall 2006)” [2011: 14].

⁷⁵ Though Darwall refers to the relevant empathic phenomenon as “projective empathy,” he seems to have both self-oriented and other-oriented versions of perspective-taking in mind [see Chapter One for more on this distinction]. It is important for him that empathizing is at least in part other-oriented because it involves coming to see how the *other* given *their* beliefs, concerns, and prejudices sees us.

perspectives and view ourselves as if from their point of view. Projective empathy is thus an essential constituent of “being with” [2011: 1].

Mutual accountability requires responsiveness to a distinctive kind of reasons (i.e., second personal reasons). We recognize that others can make claims upon us, and these claims not only give us considerations regarding what to do, but they also make valid demands. For example, I am inadvertently stepping on someone’s gouty toe, and he asks me to step off, his request is a second-personal address. He both gives me a consideration in favor of removing my foot (i.e., it would relieve his pain) and makes a valid demand of me [2006: 7]. In order for me to recognize that his request is a valid demand (i.e., a second-personal reason), I need to recognize his authority to make such demands [8]. In other words, I need to relate to him second-personally. Because Darwall identifies second-personal reasons with moral reasons, he ascribes to empathy a crucial role in making moral judgments. We recognize moral reasons as such in virtue of being with others in the space of second-personal relating, and we enter into this space by empathizing with others. Therefore, in making moral judgments we are engaging in a rational activity that is intimately bound up with empathy.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ It is an exegetical issue whether Darwall thinks that every instance of moral judgment involves an act of empathizing such that we appreciate the authority of others’ demands or what they could validly demand of us. I am reading him as claiming that empathy is an enabling condition for being with others in the space of second-personal relating, but that we don’t need to empathize on each occasion in order to recognize others’ demands as authoritative. This seems like the most plausible view. However, if he does think that we only recognize something as a second-personal reason in virtue of empathizing on the particular occasion, his view is better categorized as implying that empathy is necessary as an analytic condition for making moral judgments. For my purposes, it is not that important which he actually believes. Either version would run into the issue I discuss below.

Darwall's account sets a demanding cognitive standard for making moral judgments. As Darwall states, relating to others' second-personally requires that agents imaginatively occupy others' perspectives. This is a complex imaginative activity requiring a high-level of cognitive sophistication.⁷⁷ The demanding cognitive standard entails that it is impossible for some people to recognize the moral reasons in virtue of which we make moral judgments. Some people cannot empathize with others because of the nature of their cognitive development (e.g., young children, some autistic individuals); thus, making empathy a precondition for second-person relating seems to entail that those individuals are incapable of making moral judgments. However, researchers [Prinz 2011b, Maibom 2010, 2009, Nichols 2004, Kennett 2002, Snow 2000] observe that many individuals who cannot empathize make what they and others regard as moral judgments. For example, Shaun Nichols claims that young children cannot imaginatively take up others' perspectives. Nevertheless, they can learn moral principles and societal harm-norms, and they can appeal to these norms in distinguishing right from wrong [2004].

⁷⁷ For example, suppose I fail to stop to help a stray dog, and I come to have negative attitudes about my own conduct. In order for my attitudes to count as a moral judgment, I need to see my conduct as something that fails to meet the valid demands that others would make of me given the context of mutual accountability. This requires the sophisticated ability to appreciate how others would view the situation and evaluate my inaction. Some philosophers would find Darwall's view of moral judgments as too cognitively demanding. For example, sentimentalists such as Prinz would argue that we could morally disapprove of an action without that censure being accompanied by higher-order 'moral thoughts.' In other words, he would deny that for disapprobation to count as a moral judgment it is required that we take up another's standpoint in order to recognize the moral reasons. In response, Darwall could admit that we do disapprove of actions without moral thoughts that involve the second-person standpoint, but he would deny that those attitudes are properly speaking instances of moral judgment. Darwall is stipulating that by moral judgments he means judgments based on second-personal reasons and mutual accountability.

Jeanette Kennett makes a similar point in discussing autistic individuals. She argues that high-functioning autistics suffer from empathic impairments. These impairments, she claims, can make it difficult for them to understand others' thoughts and feelings. She discusses the case of John Sinclair as an example. Sinclair has a difficult time recognizing when someone is suffering and what that suffering is about. He compensates by memorizing a set of bodily and behavioral cues that indicate when someone is upset. He also learns a series of pro-social responses that people tend to welcome when they are upset. Sinclair admits that sometimes these compensatory guides fail and he is left not knowing what will help or harm a person. For example, he describes one of his experiences as follows: "I could certainly tell he was upset. I could figure out that there was *something* I could do that would be better than nothing. But I didn't know what that something was" [2002: 352].⁷⁸ Kennett argues that empathic impairments can cause autistics such as Sinclair to fail to recognize morally relevant features of a situation. As a result, they may fail to make certain moral judgments that other agents might make. However, Kennett argues, their impairments do not make autistics entirely insensitive to the normative force of moral considerations. They still demonstrate regard for others' wellbeing, and they feel the force of considerations that bear on that wellbeing. She states,

⁷⁸ This is something that a non-autistic person might say as well. The point, however, is that a non-autistic person can take up the other's perspective in order to determine how to help. This empathic option can help the non-autistic individual to see ways in which to help.

Sinclair's realization that he should do something – that the other's distress provided a reason for action – and his eventual conclusion that touching might be appropriate, is clearly not here dependent on the operation of empathy, but rather on the application of a more explicit practical concern to do the right thing, whatever that should turn out to be, together with his hard-won realization that other people have needs and feelings different from his own. He has, it seems, a generalized moral concern, what we might call a sense of duty, or a conscience. His moral feelings are of a Kantian, rather than a Humean cast [2002: 352].

Kennett denies that we should think of autistics such as Sinclair as insensitive to moral reasons. Although their understanding of others is hard won and often leaves out relevant details, they are not absent moral feeling. They are still moved by moral considerations to do what is right and to disapprove of that which fails to show regard for others. Therefore, she argues that we should not think of their empathic impairment as making them unresponsive to moral reasons. She states, "Autistic people, though lacking empathy, do seem capable of deep moral concerns. They are capable...of the subjective realization that other people's interests are reason-giving in the same way as one's own, though they may have great difficulty in discerning what those interests are" [354]. Kennett concludes that instead of thinking that empathy is required for being moral and for making moral judgments, we should think of empathy as something that is beneficial but not necessary. She also claims, "Those who lack empathy may miss finding out about

things which *constitute* reasons for actions, but they need not thereby exhibit *indifference* to reason” [355].

In short, Kennett and Nichol’s points are instructive. They highlight how accounts such as Darwall’s face a serious issue: these accounts imply that certain individuals are incapable of making moral judgments despite appearances, beliefs, and self-reports to the contrary. This issue arises because the accounts entail that empathy is required as a precondition for moral judgment, and thereby, they commit themselves to the thesis that individuals who cannot empathize cannot make moral judgments. This is a large bullet to bite, and perhaps researchers could avoid biting that bullet by not making empathy a necessary precondition for responding to considerations as moral reasons. There are other accounts that run into a similar issue. I will now turn to two such accounts that argue that empathy plays a crucial role in the development of our ability to determine what makes something right or wrong.⁷⁹

4. DEVELOPMENTAL ACCOUNTS

There are two prominent accounts in the psychological literature that treat empathy as an enabling condition for moral judgment. These accounts suggest that empathy is involved in the development of our capacity for moral judgment. The first developmental view is by R.J.R Blair. Blair suggests that empathy is necessary for learning what is wrong about harmful actions. He claims that it is by empathizing with

⁷⁹ These views focus primarily on how we come to make judgments about what is wrong or what ought not to be done. They focus on this negative side of judgment because they emphasize the developmental importance of empathizing with others who are suffering or in distress.

those we harm while we are still children that we come to appreciate the qualitative nature of the harm.⁸⁰ This allows us to recognize that our actions have an aversive quality and to develop what he calls a “violence-inhibiting mechanism” (VIM) [1995: 2-3]. Psychopaths, Blair argues, lack the ability to empathize and as a result they do not learn how their actions have an aversive quality, and they do not develop a VIM. Blair explains that psychopaths learn *that* certain actions are wrong insofar as they are reprimanded for those actions, but they do not appreciate what makes it the case, independent of conventional rules, such that they ought not to perform those actions. Their lack of empathy results in moral blindness; they cannot appreciate how moral transgressions differ from conventional transgressions [1995: 20-21]. If they are blind to moral reasons as such, then they will not be able to determine what they ought or ought not to do based on moral reasons. In this way, their inability to empathize makes it the case that they do not develop the capacity to make mature judgments.

Martin Hoffman makes a similar developmental point. He argues that we experience empathic distress by empathizing with those we see suffering. This distress when accompanied with parental discipline and instruction leads to the formation of “prosocial moral scripts.” As we learn these scripts, we start to experience distress at the prospect of engaging in harmful actions and while seeing others perform harmful actions.

⁸⁰ Blair does not assert his view on empathy this definitively. However, Prinz—who picks up Blair’s account and uses it as his foil for the developmental significance of empathy—does take the view this strongly. He states, “It is not coincidence, some surmise, that psychopaths are decidedly deficient in this capacity. Lack of empathy is a diagnostic criterion for psychopathy, and there is an attractive story about how this deficit might eventuate in moral blindness (e.g., Blair 1995).” [2011b: 221]. I follow Prinz’s lead for two reasons: 1) I plan to address Prinz’s criticisms of the view; and 2) it is beneficial to consider what a strong developmental view of empathy would entail regarding empathy’s role in making moral judgments.

The feelings of distress cause us to look past just our egoistic motivations. It makes salient to us others' wellbeing as a relevant consideration regarding what others or we are about to do. It also causes us to experience anger and guilt when we perceive someone being harmed (by others or our self) without a good reason. In this way, according to Hoffman, empathy plays a crucial role in our moral development. It enables us to see how hurtful actions impact others in such a way that we can determine why agents ought not to perform those actions [2000: Chapters 5 and 6].

On straightforward readings of Blair and Hoffman, they argue that the development of the capacity for moral judgment requires empathy. It is by empathizing with others that we learn what is wrong about harmful conduct. This development enables us to make moral judgments based on considerations about the rightness or wrongness of certain actions. In this way, their developmental accounts imply that empathizing is a necessary precondition for becoming an agent who makes judgments in virtue of moral considerations. Prinz attempts to raise an objection to this developmental thesis. He argues that Blair—but his point applies to Hoffman as well—underestimates the alternative resources available for moral education [2011b: 221-22]. Prinz claims that children can learn that something is wrong by being subjected to a variety of punishments. For example, he claims, “she might be spanked, yelled at, sent to her room, or deprived of some privilege she enjoys” [221]. These punishments, he argues, can instill in children fear, sadness, and shame for their inappropriate behavior. Prinz also claims that children are disposed to imitate adults. If the adults demonstrate disapprobation towards attitudes or actions that harm others, then the children will also

express disapprobation towards acts that harm others [222]. Such methods, he argues, can teach children through association what sorts of conduct is wrong. Therefore, he concludes that children do not need to empathize in order to develop the capacity for making moral judgments about harmful conduct.

Prinz's objection overlooks an important aspect of Blair and Hoffman's accounts. The objection identifies alternative ways in which individuals can learn that certain conduct is wrong. Blair and Hoffman, however, are trying to explain more than this. They are trying to explain how agents develop such that those agents discern what makes certain conduct wrong. The difference here is between being able to determine that something is wrong and being able to determine why something is wrong. Their claim is that we learn to identify why something is wrong (at least in part) by empathizing with others being harmed or experiencing distress. By empathizing we come to appreciate how certain conduct impacts others such that it produces harm and negative experiences. This appreciation coupled with moral instruction helps us to see what is wrong about the particular conduct. Learning to see what is wrong in these particular cases enables development such that we cultivate the ability to identify why an action is wrong in other cases (or in general). Prinz's objection fails to show that we have alternative means of enabling this development.

However, there is an issue regarding Blair and Hoffman's accounts that is in the vicinity of Prinz's objection. The issue is that having the capacity to make a moral judgment does not require that one is able to appreciate the relevant reasons in virtue of which something is right or wrong. If an action is wrong in virtue of x , we do not need a

sophisticated appreciation of the moral quality of x in order to judge that it is morally wrong to perform that action. For example, children can judge that it is wrong to steal candy from the store even if they do not yet understand precisely why it is wrong. Perhaps their parents told them it was wrong because it doesn't belong to them, and they trust the moral guidance of their parents. In such a case the children judge that they ought not to steal the candy, but their judgment is not based on any deep understanding of the reasons in virtue of which the act is wrong. In making this judgment the children are not just parroting their parents. They are trying to determine for themselves the moral standing of the action. One of the considerations they take into account is that their parents say that stealing candy is wrong. The parents' testimony is not what makes the action wrong (i.e., a convention), but nevertheless, the testimony indicates to them that there is a moral reason to judge that stealing is wrong. The children take this into account when determining whether or not to steal the candy. In this way, even though they do not fully appreciate why the action is wrong, they can make carefully considered judgments regarding its moral standing.

This is similar to the case of Sinclair. Sinclair, like other autistic individuals, has empathic impairments, but he can learn heuristics that help him to recognize when others' are suffering and what tends to alleviate that suffering. Heuristics of this sort can then help him in determining what he should do and how that conduct will impact others. Nevertheless, there are cases in which the heuristics fall short and he does not fully recognize the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. In some of these cases, he does not fully appreciate the reasons in virtue of which he should do one thing rather than another.

Despite not being able to empathize and not being able to appreciate these reasons, he still has the capacity to make a moral judgment. He can judge that an action is wrong, and he can base that judgment on what he knows about the moral standing of the action given his available resources. Even though his judgment lacks sensitivity to certain reasons in virtue of his struggles at appreciating the nature of others' thoughts and feelings, his judgment is still a carefully considered determination about what he ought to do.⁸¹ In short, we can distinguish the question of whether agents have the capacity to make moral judgments from whether they are able to make those judgments based on a deep understanding of that which makes something right or wrong.

Deigh [Forthcoming, 1995] makes a related distinction while discussing psychopaths. He argues that if we understand moral judgment as the affirmation or denial of a proposition (or something that can be given a propositional structure) with moral content, then we can distinguish different forms of knowledge in virtue of which agents might make moral judgments. These forms of knowledge correspond to the level of sophistication or maturity with which agents understand what is right and wrong. For example, a low level of sophistication would involve merely having knowledge of the conventional moral standards observed in a community. In contrast, a higher level of sophistication would involve understanding the reasons for those standards and the ideals that give the standards meaning [1995: 748-49]. Deigh argues that psychopaths can

⁸¹ Heidi Maibom makes a similar point [2009]. She argues that individuals with frontal lobe damage are incapable of empathizing with others. Nevertheless, they are able to understand harm norms and identify violations of those norms. She takes this as evidence that empathizing cannot be necessary for making judgments regarding such norms. However, Maibom does not consider the relation between harm norms and moral reasons, nor does she consider the possibility that there is a class of moral judgments that require empathizing.

clearly make moral judgments based on less sophisticated forms of moral knowledge. They can affirm or deny propositions such as “stealing the candy is wrong.” However, it is unclear that they can make judgments based on mature or sophisticated forms of moral knowledge. He suggests the apparent failure to do so is connected to their inability to empathize.⁸² Because they cannot empathize with others, they do not fully appreciate how other people care about their own ends. This lack of appreciation results in them not being able to recognize that others’ ends matter in the same way as their own ends, and thereby, they lack a mature understanding by which they take into account the moral significance of others’ ends when making moral judgments.

There is a noteworthy difference between Deigh’s point about psychopaths and the point about children and autistic individuals. Similar to psychopaths, children and autistics sometimes fail to appreciate the reasons in virtue of which an action is wrong. This failure undermines their ability to make judgments based on a sophisticated or deep understanding of the moral nature of the action. However, as Kennett and Nichols point out, children and autistic individuals often demonstrate a genuine commitment to doing the right thing. In contrast to psychopaths, they seem to respect the authority or significance of moral reasons even when they do not fully recognize or understand the reasons in the particular case. They compensate then by using other resources to support

⁸² As mentioned in Chapter 2 some researchers argue that psychopaths’ inability to show appropriate regard for others or others’ ends is a result of emotional and evaluational impairments. They are impaired such that they experience the world as affectively and evaluatively flat. As a result, they do not see or experience things as mattering in the way neurotypical agents do, and they also cannot reenact others’ thoughts and feelings. Because they do not see things as mattering, for themselves or for others, they are not moved to show regard. In this way, their emotional and evaluational impairments are prior to their empathic impairments, and it is the former that cause the lack of moral regard [e.g., Shoemaker 2015: 161-62, Prinz 2011b: 221-22].

their understanding of the situation for the purpose of determining what they ought to do. For example, they defer to testimony or heuristics, and in doing so they make judgments based on morally relevant considerations. The considerations, however, sometimes represent a less direct and shallower understanding of the moral landscape of the case. For example, a parent's testimony to a child that an action is wrong reliably indicates that something is wrong about the action. If the child judges in part based on that testimony, then she is responding to the moral quality of the action but only indirectly. The child's judgment is based on an unsophisticated appreciation of that which makes the action wrong.⁸³

I wish to emphasize two significant points that we have learned so far in our study of the literature. First, there are individuals who do not empathize but who still make what we want to call moral judgments. This gives us reason to deny that empathy is necessary as an analytic condition or as an enabling condition for making all moral judgments. However, the second point is that these individuals, because of their cognitive condition, sometimes fail to understand or directly appreciate morally relevant considerations and this challenges their ability to make some sophisticated moral judgments. Based on this second point, empathy appears to be an enabling condition. It is something in virtue of which moral agents are able to make some moral judgments or at

⁸³ It is significant that we can distinguish what psychopaths are doing when they make moral judgments from what children and autistic individuals are doing in cases where they fail to recognize or properly understand the relevant moral considerations. One consequence is that we can then resist describing what psychopaths are doing as making 'committed' moral judgments while being able to describe what children and autistic individuals are doing as making 'committed' moral judgments. This is beneficial if one is hesitant to describe psychopaths as making moral judgments, but one thereby does not want to exclude autistic individuals from making moral judgments. See Kennett 2002 for more on this issue.

least judgments in a certain kind of way. However, there are different ways of understanding how empathy might function as an enabling condition. In particular there is one problematic way implied in the literature. The problematic way involves understanding empathy as a necessary epistemic precondition for making moral judgments in particular situations. The second point, therefore, requires further unpacking.

5. EMPATHY AS AN EPISTEMIC PRECONDITION FOR MAKING MORAL JUDGMENTS

Several researchers argue that empathy is an important epistemic resource. Some of these accounts are not problematic. For example, Karsten Stueber argues that empathy plays a central role in helping us to understand and evaluate the reasons upon which other rational agents act. By taking others' perspectives, we reenact having their beliefs and desires about a particular situation, and this helps us to understand and assess how those beliefs and desires could result in action. He examines the value of empathy by noting how it breaks down in cases of imaginative resistance. He argues that in these cases others' frameworks of belief and value are so different from our own that we cannot reenact or "resonate" with their thoughts and feelings [2011: 168]. As a result, in these cases we find that we cannot grasp, let alone evaluate, how the beliefs and desires they cite as reasons are supposed to support their actions. He claims, "Imaginative resistance thus reveals the central epistemic importance that empathy plays for our understanding of rational agents in a context where we try to make sense of the moral appropriateness of their reasons for acting" [156].

Adam Morton makes a similar point about the epistemic value of empathy. He argues that empathizing with others has “explanatory force” because it helps us to understand the ways in which others’ are motivated [2011: 318]. He claims, “We need it in order to negotiate our way around one another, with our diverse motives and characters. It is intrinsic to our efforts to get real explanations of why people do what they do” [318-19]. These real explanations, he clarifies, not only capture the agent’s desire (i.e., what is moving them to do the action) but also how that desire leads to the particular action. Morton argues that in many cases recognizing the agent’s desire is easy. It is much more difficult to understand how that desire interacted with other motives or had to overcome some psychological barrier such as inhibition in order to result in action. Empathy, he argues, helps us to deal with this difficulty. Reenacting another’s thinking and feeling about a situation helps us to appreciate the psychological process the agent went through in order for her motive to result in an action.⁸⁴ Morton states, “A has a grasp of what lay behind B’s action, based in part on his empathy. So here we have an important function for empathy: it can allow us to grasp how a person managed to act on the motives that she did...Sometimes, to go in one direction or the other we have to overcome some barrier or inhibition, based on fear, sympathy, disgust, or decency. Then empathy can be vital in allowing us to understand the barrier and how it was overcome” [319-20].

⁸⁴ Morton claims, “A has a grasp of what lay behind B’s action, based in part on his empathy. So here we have an important function for empathy: it can allow us to grasp how a person managed to act on the motives that she did...Sometimes, to go in one direction or the other we have to overcome some barrier or inhibition, based on fear, sympathy, disgust, or decency. Then empathy can be vital in allowing us to understand the barrier and how it was overcome” [319-20].

I briefly mention these two accounts in order to draw a contrast with a problematic position found in the literature. Stueber and Morton indicate that empathy supports interpersonal understanding, and we draw on this understanding when making certain judgments about others. In this way they suggest that empathy enables us to make moral judgments. However, their accounts do not entail that we *need* empathy in order to make those judgments on any particular occasion. They do not entail that empathy is the only means by which we can come to understand others thoughts and feelings such that we are able to make any particular moral judgments. By not committing to this stronger position, they leave open the possibility that we have alternative epistemic resources, and on any particular occasion it is at least possible that we could have come to know the morally relevant facts about others' thoughts and feeling by those other means. In this way their accounts stand in contrast to an account offered by Meghan Mastro. Mastro argues—in response to Prinz—that empathy plays a crucial role in our lives because it is “epistemically necessary” for making certain moral judgments [2015: 74].

Mastro begins her argument by highlighting the fact that when we try to determine what is the right thing to do we often need to take into account how our actions impact others. One of the ways in which our actions impact others is by affecting how others think and feel. However, as she points out, in many cases it is difficult to determine how actions make or would make others think and feel. She states,

We face morally difficult decisions all the time: What should I say to a friend who has just lost her spouse? Can I bail on my sister whom I was

supposed to meet at the movies tomorrow? Is it okay to throw out my 5-year-old's artwork? Am I obligated to leave my job so that my partner can accept his dream job across the country? Should I give up my career to take care of my terminally ill child? In many cases, what makes these decisions so difficult is that it is unclear how those involved will be affected by our choices...In many cases facts about how people are going to feel help determine which act is the right one. Unfortunately, knowing how others are going to be affected by our actions is difficult [2015: 83-84].

Masto claims that empathizing is something we can do to combat this difficulty. By taking others' perspectives and reenacting how they think and feel (or would think and feel) about a situation, we can come to better understand how an action affects (or would affect) them. This understanding puts us in a position to make a sound judgment regarding what we ought to do. She states, "But empathizing with others can help us be more informed and thus, in cases in which we want to do the right thing, make it more likely that we will do the right thing" [83]. Masto, however, does not just argue that empathy is a beneficial resource. She goes a step further and claims that sometimes empathizing is the only means for getting the information by which we can determine (or form justified beliefs about) what we ought to do. She states,

In fact, as most of us have experienced, in some cases, taking on the perspective of another is **the only way** that we could have come by this

morally important information. We simply could not have grasped the information without having shifted our perspective in this way. Thus, in some cases, **empathy is necessary** for doing the right thing because the agent wants to do the right thing, but empathy is **epistemically necessary** for identifying the right action: there is some relevant information (about how others feel or would feel if some act were to be performed) that is **accessible on that occasion only via empathy** [84-85, emphasis mine].

This position is problematic because it appears to rely on a claim about epistemic exclusivity. The position assumes that there are cases in which we can only determine what we ought to do if we know certain information and we can only know that information by empathizing. In these cases it is for some reason impossible for us to access the relevant information using any of our other resources for interpersonal understanding. However, on reflection it is unclear what would be the details of such a case. Which sort of facts about another's thoughts and feelings could be morally significant but unknowable by any of our other means? Mastro offers the following case as a putative example: "Denise wants to know whether she should give her friend Ed some space or begin organizing a fundraiser for him, empathizing with Ed would provide her insight into how Ed would feel if she were to take action" [85]. This brief example, however, fails to clarify how a case might involve epistemic exclusivity such that empathy is the only way to determine what is the right thing to do. In the case, as described, Denise could determine what is the right thing to do in virtue of testimony

about Ed's preferences or by reflecting on similar cases involving Ed. Empathy is not the only available means of taking Ed's attitudes into account. Masto appears to anticipate this criticism. For example, she states,

To be sure, there are some cases in which we might be able to gather the relevant information by some other means (by simply theorizing about the scenario, for example) but even in such cases, the kind of information we can get from empathizing with someone is, at least sometimes, a richer, deeper kind of information...In experiencing the affect of the target, the empathizer comes to know how it feels to feel like that, and in some cases such information is vital to recognizing that a particular alternative is the right one [85].

This response again fails to clarify why this information is only available by way of empathy or why we need this deeper kind of information to make certain moral judgments. She provides no examples of cases in which we are only able to make a moral judgment because we empathize with a person and come to experience a reenactment of how she feels. In the case of Denise and Ed, if someone tells Denise about Ed's preferences, or she infers that he wants to have space based on how he reacted in similar situations, then she can make an informed moral judgment. She does not need to feel a resembling response in order to judge what is the right thing to do.

Masto follows up the example of Denise and Ed by discussing how empathic impairments can make it more difficult for autistics to understand what others are

thinking and feeling. This difficulty, she notes, can make it harder for autistics to determine what they ought to do. Mastro takes these challenges as further evidence that empathy is sometimes epistemically necessary. However, examples of empathic impairment do not actually substantiate her thesis. The examples do not show that the relevant understanding is only accessible or available by way of empathy; rather, they show that empathy is a valuable resource for interpersonal understanding. They show that empathy helps agents to make informed moral judgments by helping them to understand others thoughts and feelings, and thereby, those who cannot empathize are less well equipped to navigate complex social situations. Put otherwise, the following two claims are consistent with the examples about empathic impairment: a) empathy is a beneficial resource because it better equips us to deal with the challenges of navigating complex social situations such that without we would have a harder time making informed moral judgments, and b) the understanding empathy provides *could* be produced by other psychological resources. In short, Mastro fails to defend the claim about epistemic exclusivity.⁸⁵

Moreover, the prospects for defending the claim look grim. We have many resources that provide insight into the nature of others' attitudes. For example, if I have a friend who is angry, I can know things about her thoughts and feelings based on testimony, my own past experience, inferential thinking, self-oriented perspective-taking,

⁸⁵ A more plausible variation of Mastro's position would be that in some cases empathy is the *de facto* only resource that would help the agent come to a timely understanding of another's thoughts and feelings given the constraints and challenges of the social situation. If this is her intended view, it does not square well with what she asserts when she claims that empathy is epistemically necessary for identifying the right action. Moreover, even if the position I present here is not in fact her intended view, it is worth clarifying what is wrong with such a view.

and other such processes. From these resources I could come to know that she is angry, what it feels like to be angry, the object of her anger, whether her anger is appropriate, what she is motivated to do, and what I can do to make her feel better. If it is *possible* that I could know all of these things without empathizing in the particular case, then it is implausible that there are significant features about others' thoughts and feelings that by their very nature are only epistemically accessible by way empathy. In other words, we should reject the view that we need empathy as an epistemic precondition for making particular moral judgments.⁸⁶

The lesson here concerns how we should understand empathy as an enabling condition. It is not that we need empathy because it alone can provide access to relevant insights on particular occasions. This is too narrow of a scope. Instead, as follows from Chapters 1-3, we should understand empathy as required in order for us to be certain kinds of moral agents or to participate in the moral community in a certain kind of way. Empathy enables us to be the sorts of agents who consistently or in general make moral judgments that are based on a deep or sophisticated understanding of the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. In this way empathy is necessary as an enabling condition in a diachronic or dispositional sense. To see this point more clearly, consider again the qualities that would characterize a virtuoso at moral judgment. A virtuoso would be an

⁸⁶ Masto could try to respond by developing her claim that the phenomenal quality of someone's attitudes is sometimes necessary for making a moral judgment regarding what we ought to do. However, even if that is true, it is still unclear why I *need* to experience a resembling attitude in order to make a judgment that takes that phenomenal quality into account. If I believe that an action unnecessarily causes pain to another, and that pain is bad, then I could judge that the action is wrong without needing to reenact the experience. Consider an analogy. I can pick between two desserts based on which is sweeter without having to taste the desserts or having to imaginatively reenact what the desserts taste like. I judge based on the phenomenal quality without having an occurrent experience as of the quality.

agent who could consistently make sound moral judgments across a variety of social situations. She would be able to navigate the complexities and nuances of interpersonal interactions such that she tracked the nature of others' thoughts and feelings and could identify the significance of those attitudes. She would be able to do this in cases where she had limited time with which to investigate the situation, and she would be able to do it in cases where she did not have access to reliable testimony. She would also be able to do it in cases where others view the situation in importantly different ways in virtue of having their own sets of values, concerns, and expectations. In short, she would be proficient at using various psychological resources in order to meet the challenges that arise when trying to understand others thoughts and feelings. Empathy is not the only resource she could use to gain interpersonal understanding, but it differs from the other resources in important respects. It uses her imaginative abilities to entertain alternative views of the situation, and it uses her own emotional machinery to provide a reenactment of how *other* people feel given their view of the situation. It provides a rich appreciation of others' mental life, and it can do so on the fly within an unfolding social situation. Given the nature of this resource and given the challenges faced by those with empathic impairments, we have reason to think that empathy is one of the beneficial resources with which the virtuoso would be proficient.⁸⁷ It would be one of the resources that equip her to consistently make judgments that respond directly to that which is morally relevant in others' thoughts and feelings. In much the same way that empathy equips the virtuoso to

⁸⁷ See Chapter 1 for the ways in which empathy is distinct from other psychological phenomena with which we respond to others' thoughts and feelings. Empathy is characteristic in that it reenacts how the *other* person sees and responds to a situation and that the process can operate above the level of cognitive awareness.

excel at moral judgment, it also equips those of us who are not virtuosos at moral judgment. As I argue in Chapters 1-3, it is a resource that enables us to gain a deeper understanding of others' attitudes and how those attitudes are morally relevant. In doing so it enables us to make judgments and participate in the moral community in more sophisticated ways.

6. NECESSARY AS A NORMATIVE CONDITION

Suppose that one accepts this account of empathy as an enabling condition, that person could still question whether we need to participate in the moral community in the more sophisticated way. He might deny that we are required to participate in that way, and therefore, we do not really need empathy. In this section I argue that we are required to try to participate in the moral community in the more sophisticated way, and, therefore, we also need empathy as a normative condition. The short version is as follows: morality demands that we aim for soundness in our moral judgments; empathy better disposes us to make sound moral judgments; therefore, we need to empathize in order to satisfy the demands of morality.

There are norms that govern our activity as moral agents. In virtue of these norms we ought to make moral judgments in certain ways. Not only should we make judgments that are true, we should also base our judgments on the right sorts of considerations. For example, if we judge that conduct is worthy of moral blame, our judgment should be correct and it should be based on the nature of that conduct. This is the case in part because of the norms of rationality, but it is also the case in virtue of the nature of

morality. Being moral agents involves being subject to moral imperatives that we do well or at least aim at doing well when engaging in moral activity. One way in which we do well is by attending to the impact of our conduct. If we fail to notice how our behavior causes others to experience harm, then we would be blameworthy for our inattentiveness. We would also be blameworthy if we do not attend to the quality of others' conduct. Our inattentiveness would indicate a lack of concern for the ways in which agents' show regard for one another. Another way in which we do well is by trying to put ourselves in a position as moral agents such that the judgments we make are sound in character. We are in the wrong and merit blame if we fail to make such efforts.

Having a duty to put ourselves in a position where we make sound moral judgments is consistent with it being the case that sometimes it is appropriate to withhold judgment. For example, if I do not have sufficient understanding of a situation, then it might be appropriate for me to abstain from judging the moral worth of an agent's conduct. Even if it is appropriate to sometimes withhold judgment, it is not appropriate or psychologically possible to always withhold judgment. Regarding judgments of moral worth, we would need to be morally callous or unconcerned about others' treatment in order to remain neutral when faced with someone acting maliciously towards others. Moreover, in many cases we do not choose to pass judgment on others; rather we find upon reflection that we have already made a judgment. It is important in such cases that we are able to correct or confirm our judgments based on the morally relevant features of the situation. Regarding judgments of right and wrong, in many cases it is not possible to

abstain from judgment because an agent deciding not to act is itself a judgment about what to do.

There are at least two things that we need to do such that we aim at making sound moral judgments. First, we need to employ the resources that we have that put us in a position to respond appropriately to morally relevant features of a situation. As mentioned earlier, the way in which others' conduct express ill will, goodwill, or indifferent disregard is often relevant to its moral worth. In order to grasp how others' conduct expresses ill will, goodwill, or indifferent disregard we need to appreciate the thoughts and feelings involved in the conduct. Similarly, the moral standing of our actions often depends on how our actions impact or would impact others. In order to grasp how our actions impact others we need to appreciate the nature of others' thoughts and feelings. Empathy, as I have shown, is one psychological resource that enables us to appreciate these features such that we gain an understanding of their moral relevance and respond appropriately. Therefore, empathy is one of the resources—amongst others—that we should turn to when trying to make sound moral judgments. The second thing we need to do is bound up with the first. We need to cultivate the psychological resources that support moral judgment. Because empathizing helps us to make sound moral judgments, we should learn to empathize well. For example, we should learn to recognize when empathizing is beneficial, how to identify and mitigate the threat of biases, and how to differentiate features of our own standpoint from the standpoints of others. Cultivating our empathic abilities will improve empathy's value as a resource that helps us to make sound moral judgments. Therefore, because morality demands that we aim at soundness,

and empathy puts us in a better position to make sound moral judgments, empathy is not something with which we can do away. We need it in order to satisfy a normative condition.

My account of the ways in which we need empathy implies that it has a role to play in pursuing a virtuous life. It seems plausible that being virtuous requires being disposed to make sound moral judgments. If we need empathy when trying to put ourselves in a position to make sound judgments, then it appears that we also need empathy when trying to become virtuous. This implication, however, faces an issue raised by Heather Battaly [2011]. Battaly observes that most people view empathy as morally praiseworthy. They think that being empathetic is a characteristic of being virtuous. Battaly notes that people have a pre-theoretical approval of empathy that resembles approval for virtues such as courage and generosity. However, she argues that when we examine the nature of empathy we see that empathy is not like other virtues. Therefore, she maintains that there is a tension between the nature of empathy and the way in which people praise it as if it were a virtue. This tension calls into question the role of empathy in the virtuous life.

Battaly identifies three ways in which empathy is unlike a virtue. First, she claims that we can choose not to empathize in cases where empathizing improves our moral response and still be considered excellent at empathizing [296-97]. In contrast, voluntarily abstaining from exercising a particular virtue would count against being virtuous in that way. For example, if situations call for courageous acts but we succumb to our fears, then we would no longer be considered courageous. She claims, “Failing to

perform virtuous acts, when the most salient cause is under one's control, does show that one lacks virtue" [293]. Second, she claims that empathy is different than a virtue insofar as we can deliberately make mistakes while empathizing [297-98]. If our goal is something other than appreciating the nature of another's thoughts and feelings, then we can intentionally err in imagining things from another's perspective. This does not show that we lack the disposition to accurately take up others' perspectives and reenact their thoughts and feelings. With the virtues, however, we cannot deliberately err when engaging in virtuous activity and still possess the virtue. She argues, "one cannot deliberately perform cruel acts, simply because one is bored with benevolent acts, and still possess the virtue of benevolence" [293]. Third, she claims that unlike with the virtues, empathy does not necessarily aim at the good [299]. We can excel at empathy and still use it for evil ends. For example, Bernard Williams observes that a sadist might be excellent at taking others' perspectives and use that excellence in order to be a more proficient torturer.⁸⁸ Battaly asserts that the virtues in contrast only manifest in conduct that aim at good ends. Based on these three differences, Battaly argues that we should think of empathy as a skill rather than a virtue. With a skill, she explains, we can forgo opportunities, deliberately err, and aim at bad ends without a diminishment in the skill. A skill does not require the upstanding motivation that accompanies virtue. However, because possessing a skill is not sufficient for possessing a virtue, Battaly claims that

⁸⁸ Bernard Williams makes this point in *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* when criticizing Hare's model of the World Agent. He states, "But one thing must be true is that the insightful understanding of others' feelings possessed by the [empathetic] person is possessed in the same form by the sadistic or cruel person; that is one way in which the cruel are distinguished from the brutal or indifferent. But the cruel person is someone who has no preference to give help (he is not someone who has a preference to give help but finds it outweighed by a preference for enjoying suffering). Yet he certainly *knows*" [1985: 91].

empathy does not merit the sort of praise we characteristically reserve for virtue. Therefore, she concludes that there is a real tension between our ordinary, pre-theoretical praise of empathy and its status as a skill.

My account can explain away the tension. Empathy helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feelings and this appreciation helps us to respond directly and appropriately to morally relevant considerations. In this way empathy is commendable because it enables us to better make sound moral judgments. Moreover, virtuous agents—in accordance with the demands of morality—aim at excellence in their moral activities. Because empathy puts us in a better position to make sound moral judgments, we need empathy in our pursuit of this excellence. Therefore, although empathy is not itself a virtue, we should think well of it because it enables us to make judgments that a virtuous agent would make and it supports our pursuit of the virtuous life.⁸⁹

In short, a close examination of the literature reveals that researchers have mischaracterized the significance of empathy. They are right that empathy is not necessary as an analytic condition for moral judgment; however, it does not follow that empathy is thereby some optional epistemic resource. It is not a tool that some moral agents use but that others could justifiably discard. Instead, empathy is necessary as an enabling condition and as a normative condition. Taking advantage of empathy as a psychological resource puts us in a better position to make sound moral judgments.

⁸⁹ Unlike Battaly, I do not think that we should describe empathy as a skill. It is better categorized as a capacity or psychological resource. It is something we can do skillfully, but that does not make the phenomenon itself a skill. This becomes clear if we think about individuals who cannot empathize because of cognitive impairments. Their problem is not that they are unskilled at empathy; their problem is that they lack the capacity to empathize, well or poorly.

Moreover, morality requires that we aim at this sort of improvement, therefore, as moral agents we need to include empathy in our dealings with others in order to satisfy the demands of morality. In this way, for those of us who are capable of empathizing, empathy is an indispensable part of moral life.

7. WORRIES

In the previous section I argue that moral agents need empathy both as an enabling condition and as a normative condition. There are two sorts of concerns raised in the literature that appear to create problems for my view. The first is that there are alternatives to empathy that provide similar support for moral judgment. If true, this creates a problem because it means that we have other resources that can satisfy the enabling and normative conditions identified above. The second sort of concern is that individuals who are incapable of empathizing can excel and aim at making sound moral judgments. This concern suggests that we do not need empathy in particular in order to satisfy the demands of morality. In this section I identify and respond to both sorts of concerns.

7.1 Alternative Resources

Jesse Prinz and Nancy Snow each deny that we need empathy as moral agents because we have alternative resources that can sufficiently match or replace the contributions made by empathy. For example, Prinz argues [2011a] that moral sentiments can function as evaluations of the moral worth of someone's actions. When we perceive a

bad action we experience an emotion such as guilt, anger, or shame. We experience this emotion because we have sentiments of disapprobation that we've learned to associate with actions of that type. Our emotional responses signal that the action is bad; he thereby claims that we do not need to take another's perspective in order to recognize that the action merits disapproval. He claims, "Morally significant actions can be recognized without empathy, even if those actions are ones that involve harm. We need not reflect on the harm to see that the action is bad...If this is right, then empathy is not a necessary precursor to moral judgment" [2011a: 215].

Snow is more optimistic than Prinz that empathy has a constructive role in moral life. For example, she acknowledges that empathy can make us sensitive to the emotional states of others, and this sensitivity can help us to respond to others in more nuanced and subtle ways. She suggests, for this reason, that empathizing can enable our responses to take on greater depth and richness in terms of their moral quality [2000: 74]. However, she still denies that empathy is necessary for moral judgment. She argues that we as agents can make moral judgments based on an awareness of others' needs, a familiarity with moral principles, and an understanding of how action types impact others' needs. We do not need to take others' perspectives and experience resembling attitudes in order to make these judgments. She asserts that high-functioning autistics—who she claims are incapable of empathizing—are able to determine when actions cause harm and transgress moral prohibitions. They can do this because they are aware of others' needs and they can identify action types that negatively impact those needs. When they perceive that a response is one that negatively impacts others, they appraise it as worthy of blame.

Because they can make these appraisals without reenacting others' experiences, she concludes that we should understand empathy as "instrumentally valuable, though not necessary or sufficient" for moral judgment [74]. She claims,

...all that is needed for the exercise of moral duty is perceptual awareness of the other's needs, conjoined with an appropriate moral response. Empathy with the other as defined here is neither necessary nor sufficient, though it might well enhance the moral quality of the response [77, note 21].

There are issues with both of these accounts. Prinz argues that our moral sentiments can replace empathy because we can train ourselves through association to respond to certain action-types with attitudes such as anger or guilt. Even if we grant Prinz that our emotions can constitute judgments and that we can train ourselves in the relevant way, his proposal does not explain how we come to appreciate that someone's attitude or action is as an instance of an action-type that merits a particular moral response. For example, I see a colleague give feedback to a student that makes the student cry. Did my colleague act inappropriately? The answer depends on features of the situation such as whether the colleague gave the feedback with a mean spirit or insufficient regard for the student's psychological health. It is possible in this case that other things happening in the student's life actually explain his reaction. If I do not recognize such features of the case, then I won't be able to determine whether this action is wrong or an instance of a type of conduct that merits blame. This sort of case, however,

is standard fare in our moral lives. We often encounter complexity and subtlety in social interactions that make it difficult to determine whether causing someone to cry is part of a morally wrong action. In some of these cases we need to reflect on the agent's thoughts and feelings and the nature of the harm in order to appreciate the morally relevant features. Moreover, as Mastro points out, even though some action-types are seen as morally bad, it does not follow that every instance of that action-type is morally wrong. She states, "Consider, for example, lying, stealing, or giving away money. Surely there are some tokens of these action-types that are wrong and some that are morally permissible" [83]. Prinz's account lacks the resources to deal with such complexity. His account of trained emotional responses could only work if moral life consisted of clear-cut paradigmatic cases of right or wrong action. Therefore, his account fails to offer a legitimate alternative to empathy. Mature moral agents are expected to handle more than the simple, straightforward cases. They need to pick up on the nuances that characterize particular situations, and these nuances often include subtle aspects of others' thoughts and feelings that are related to their perspectives.

Snow's account is more promising insofar as she recognizes that empathy can help moral agents to provide sophisticated responses to complex social situations. She actually ends her article by suggesting that we might have an obligation to cultivate instrumentally valuable resources such as empathy. She states, "Though this claim cannot be substantiated here, perhaps we have moral duties to hone and refine our empathic skills so that we are appropriately sensitive to the emotional needs of others. If so, empathy has roles to play in moral life that have thus far gone unnoticed by

philosophers” [75]. Given this line of thinking, it is possible that Snow would be sympathetic to the idea that we need empathy as a normative condition.

Despite this positive take on empathy, her account still understates the significance of empathy as an enabling condition. She appears to understate its significance because she focuses on moral judgment in terms of whether agents could identify that an action violates a harm norm. She argues that agents can determine whether an action violates a norm based on a familiarity with moral principles and an awareness of others’ needs and the ways in which action-types impact those needs. Although this might be true, it fails to take into account significant aspects of mature moral judgment. For example, we not only expect moral agents to identify whether an action is permissible or impermissible, but we expect them to appreciate differing degrees of moral worth. We also expect them to appreciate the reasons in virtue of which an action is right or wrong or merits praise or blame given the particular situation. These sorts of activities require that agents have a nuanced appreciation of a situation that goes beyond recognizing action-types. For example, some instances of lying are praiseworthy partially because of the way in which they involve compassion felt for others. Responding soundly to the moral worth of such actions requires us to take into account the nature of the agent’s thoughts and feelings. Empathy is something that helps us to appreciate the moral significance of others’ thoughts and feelings. For this reason, as I argue above, empathy is a resource that enables us to participate in the moral community in a more sophisticated way. Therefore, empathy is not just instrumentally valuable.

Instead, it is something that makes possible more nuanced forms of moral activity, forms of activity that morality requires we try to engage in.

7.2 Agents Who Cannot Empathize

Earlier I discussed examples of people who purportedly cannot empathize because of their cognitive development. Researchers argue that these individuals make what we want to call moral judgments [e.g., Prinz 2011b, Maibom 2010, 2009, Nichols 2004, Kennett, 2002, Snow 2000]. In §3 and §4 I claim that these arguments provide reason to deny that empathy is necessary as an analytic condition for moral judgment or as an enabling condition for making *all* moral judgments. However, I later argue there are two ways in which moral agents do need empathy: they need it to be the sorts of agents who make sophisticated moral judgments and to satisfy the demands of morality. At first glance, this appears to create a problem for my account. My account seems to imply that excelling at moral judgment and satisfying the demands of morality are tied to the ability to empathize, and therefore, agents who cannot empathize also cannot aim at excellence or satisfy the demands of morality. This implication would be problematic for two reasons.

First, it violates the principle of ought-implies-can. It suggests that some people are morally culpable for failing to do something that they are incapable of doing given their psychological capabilities. This would be a significant point against my account. Second, it is incongruent with glowing descriptions of the moral efforts made by many

high-functioning autistics.⁹⁰ For example, Jeanette Kennett describes Temple Grandin and Jim Sinclair as individuals that make a “heroic” effort to understand and respond appropriately to others [355]. She reports that Grandin, one of the leading experts on animal rights, carefully built a repository of experiences in her head that she would visit in order to catalogue and better understand others’ behavior [351-52]. Grandin uses this understanding to improve her efforts at moral judgment and her interactions with others. Given her efforts and upstanding character, it would be a bad result if my view implies that Grandin is failing to aim at excellence or failing to satisfy the demands of morality.

On a closer look, however, my account can avoid this problematic implication. In §6 I suggest that we are required to try to put ourselves in a position where we are better disposed to make sound moral judgments. I argue that in order to satisfy this normative condition we need to empathize because empathy is an available resource that provides a sophisticated understanding that helps us to make sound moral judgments. This argument rests crucially on the fact that we need to take advantage of available resources that enable us to excel. My account, however, is consistent with it being the case that not all of us have the same set of available resources. It is also consistent with it being the case that not all agents need to satisfy the demands of morality in the same way. It is plausible

⁹⁰ As mentioned earlier, I am following the standard assumption in the literature that high-functioning autistics are incapable of empathy. There may be reasons to question this assumption. For example, it is difficult to distinguish cases in which individuals are incapable of empathizing from cases in which individuals are simply have non-standard reactions to a specific kind of stimulus. However, I take it that the assumption lends support to theorists who are pessimistic about the role of empathy in moral life; therefore, by granting them the point, I hope to show that even if the assumption is true, it does not create a problem for my account. See the dissertation of Dana Fritz for concerns about assumptions in the literature regarding the lack of empathic abilities in autistic individuals. However, it should be noted that she has a broader conception of empathy than the one I use in this project.

that what it takes for moral agents to satisfy the demands of morality depends on their psychological capabilities. For example, if I am capable of empathizing and empathy improves my efforts at moral judgment, then I am required to include it among the resources with which I navigate moral life. If I fail to do so, then I merit criticism. In contrast, if my colleague is incapable of empathy, then she does not merit the same criticism by not empathizing. Empathy is not an available resource of which she is failing to take advantage. Morality still demands of her that she aim at making sound moral judgments, and she can do better or worse in satisfying this demand, but the degree to which she fulfills her duty and merits praise or blame depends on how she takes advantage of the resources that she has given her psychological capabilities.

Moreover, it is actually a good-making feature of my account that it creates space for acknowledging differences in psychological capabilities. We should resist the temptation to create a one-size fits all account of the psychology of moral judgment. Just because some agents are incapable of using a resource does not make it the case that the resource is something that other agents can dispense with. For those of us who are capable of empathy, it helps us do what we ought to do. It provides a rich understanding of others' thoughts and feelings such that we are in a better position to make and correct judgments that respond to morally relevant features of situations. This is not a resource that is simply beneficial or instrumentally valuable for those who can take advantage of it; rather it is required as a resource that enables agents to participate in the moral community in more sophisticated ways. Therefore, those of us who are capable of

empathy cannot justifiably ignore or try to do away with it. It has an indispensable role to play in moral life.

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Conclusion

On a daily basis we interact with others in a multiplicity of ways. We offer compliments and criticism, we share gossip and memories, we intimidate and protect, and we deceive and forgive. Although these social interactions are commonplace, they can make a significant impact on the quality of people's lives. As moral agents, we care about how these interactions affect others. For example, it makes a moral difference whether an action causes someone to experience benefit or harm. It also makes a moral difference what agents are thinking and feeling when they interact with others. We expect agents to display sufficient regard and goodwill for others, and we demand that conduct not express ill will, malice, or indifferent disregard. Thoughts and feelings, therefore, are an important aspect of our social interactions. They partially determine the impact of someone's conduct and the character of that conduct, and for this reason, we take them into account when we make moral judgments.

However, we face challenges in taking others' thoughts and feelings into account. Social situations can involve layers of complexity, and agents can respond to those situations in subtle, idiosyncratic ways. Moreover, we each have our own sets of values, concerns, and expectations that shape the way in which we view social situations, and these views can differ significantly from those with whom we interact. Understanding others' thoughts and feelings, therefore, can require that we come to appreciate

alternative ways of viewing a situation. This is not always easy or effortless, sometimes it requires deliberately considering how and why others' might view the world differently. Further complicating things is that in many cases we do not have limitless time with which to investigate how others' see the situation and sometimes it is not feasible or appropriate to ask agents about the nature of their thoughts and feelings. Given these challenges, it is sometimes an open question how others' view a situation and what is the nature of their thoughts and feelings. Despite such questions, we still feel compelled to make judgments about moral worth and judgments about right and wrong. Sometimes upon reflection we also recognize that without conscious deliberation we have already passed judgment. Being able to improve our understanding of others' thoughts and feelings, therefore, can help us to make sound judgments and to correct or affirm judgments that we have already made. Without such appreciation we would be less adept at participating in the moral community in sophisticated ways.

I have argued in this project that empathy is a process in which we imaginatively take up others' perspectives such that we see a situation in a similar way and reenact their thoughts and feelings about that situation. This process helps us to appreciate how they are thinking and feeling and why they have those attitudes about the particular situation. The understanding that empathy provides is beneficial for us as moral agents. For example, as I argue in Chapter 2, empathy supports our dealings with the reactive attitudes such that we are more liable to make sound moral judgments, correct inappropriate moral judgments, and to recognize others' moral judgments. However, not all researchers believe that empathy benefits us as moral agents. Several of these

researchers raise concerns that call into question whether empathy produces understanding that helps us to make moral judgments [e.g., Prinz 2011b, Maibom 2010, Goldie 2000]. For example, Goldie argues that empathy can only produce a distorted representation of others' thoughts and feeling, and he suggests that this imprecision shows that empathy is not a resource that helps us to make moral judgments. In Chapter 3 I address three of the prominent concerns in the literature. I show that the concerns about imprecision, personal distress, and bias do not give us sufficient reasons to deny that empathy is a beneficial resource for moral agents.

However, there are further questions about how we should characterize the role of that resource in moral life. For example, is empathy in some sense necessary for moral judgment? Researchers in the literature offer a variety of answers to this question; as I show in Chapter 4 many of their answers are instructive but ultimately unsatisfactory. Some accounts imply that empathy is necessary as a precondition for moral judgment [e.g., Darwall 2011]. However, this entails that individuals who cannot empathize do not make moral judgments despite appearances, beliefs, and self-reports to the contrary. Meghan Mastro asserts that we need empathy to make judgments because on some occasions morally relevant information is only accessible by way of empathy [2015]. Her argument, however, relies on a dubious claim about epistemic exclusivity. Finally, some researchers acknowledge that empathy is instrumentally valuable, but they deny that it is necessary or required for participation in the moral community [e.g., Kennett 2002, Snow 2000]. I argue that these latter accounts are correct in separating the concept of empathy from moral judgment and in recognizing that we can make some judgments without

empathy. However, the accounts still fail to adequately characterize the significance of empathy for moral agents. They fail to acknowledge that empathy enables a more sophisticated participation in the moral community and that we are required, if possible, to participate in this way.

Compare the role of empathy in moral life to the role of geometry in carpentry. Doing geometry can help carpenters to determine angles such that they know how to cut in a way that makes the pieces meet flush. In this way it is a resource that enables them to make accurate judgments based on the features of the particular case. Of course carpenters do not need to do geometry on particular occasions in order to make these judgments. They can use tools such as a speed square in conjunction with rules of thumb in order to gauge the approximate angles that are appropriate for the cuts. This often gets them close, and they can make additional cuts to fine-tune any noticeable imperfections. However, individuals who can do the geometry are able to avoid making approximate judgments and using a trial and error approach. It enables them to participate in carpentry in a more sophisticated way. This is particularly evident in cases where the situation gets more difficult. For example, it is more challenging to determine the appropriate angles to cut trim in cases where walls are not square and do not create 90 degree angles. The carpenter who uses geometry can more efficiently judge what is the right cut because he can base his judgment directly on the particular angles at which the walls meet. This point is even more evident in cases where the carpentry involves unique and very detailed work, e.g., the spiraling stairs at the Loretta Chapel in Santa Fe. Although it is conceptually possible that carpenters could create such a work without doing geometry, it

is *de facto* unfeasible for them to do so. If we wanted a beautiful, spiraling staircase, we would need to hire carpenters who are masters of the skills and resources of their trade. Their mastery—which involves being able to do geometry—is what enables them to participate in their craft such that they could build an excellent, one of a kind staircase.

In a similar way, empathy is a resource that puts us in a better position to make and correct moral judgments. It helps us to appreciate others' thoughts and feelings such that we can respond soundly to morally relevant features of a situation. This is instrumentally valuable, but it is also something that enables more sophisticated participation in the moral community. However, morality is unlike carpentry in an important way. Carpenters are not normatively required to aim at excellence in their craftsmanship. It is permissible for them to choose not to learn geometry and to prefer to work on less complicated tasks. Morality, in contrast, demands that agents aim at soundness in their moral judgments. We are required to use the available resources that enable us to better excel at moral life. In this way, for those of us who are capable of empathy, it enables us to do what we ought to do. Empathy is not a beneficial resource that we can justifiably disregard or try to do away with; rather, it is indispensable for moral agents.

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