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Senior Honors Project

Empathy: What is it, What is it Good For?

Abstract: Many people believe that empathy is necessary for being morally “good”, such that empathy is fundamental to our moral sense. Yet, there is much debate about what empathy is and whether or not it is, in fact, a good thing. My goal is to explore and evaluate this debate. In the first part of the paper, I discuss common misconceptions of empathy and provide a taxonomy of different sorts of empathy. I will then address whether empathy is good by evaluating the arguments for and against empathy from David Hume, Michael Slote, Jesse Prinz, Paul Bloom, Peter Goldie, and Denise Cummins. I will argue that empathy is a poor moral guide because it is subject to various biases, easily manipulated, and unreliable. I will therefore conclude that it is unclear what empathy is, in fact, good for and that better alternatives for moral guides exist.

Empathy is widely regarded as a good thing. As Paul Bloom writes, “people tend to believe empathy is an absolute good, something that people can never have enough of” (Bloom 2017, p15). They tend to believe that many evils in the world stem from a deficit of empathy leading people to make poor decisions, especially when dealing with moral issues. Thus, it is argued that humans would benefit from more empathy. One example of this view is when President Barack Obama said in a speech before his presidency that it is important to “see the world through the eyes of those who are different from us” (Obama 2006). Obama was therefore

calling for more empathy in American politics and believed that this would help us solve the most pressing problems facing the country. When you to empathize with the child who is hungry, the steelworker who has been laid off, or a family who lost everything after a storm, it becomes harder to ignore these situations and that leads you to act to help those in need (Bloom 2017, p18). Some moral philosophers, most notably David Hume, have even based their entire philosophical theories on the idea that empathy and sympathy are vital tools used to cultivate our moral sentiments.

Despite this enthusiasm for empathy, there are many common misconceptions about what empathy actually is. According to Peter Goldie, “empathy is understood in so many different ways - not only in philosophical and psychological theorizing, ... but also in our everyday discourse...” (Goldie 2017, p302). Empathy is often regarded as an emotion, but others classify empathy as a process or activity. Some also consider “empathy” and “sympathy” to be synonyms while others draw distinctions between the terms. Hence, although many people believe empathy is essential to human moral decision making, it is not always clear what they are referring to. Also, despite popular opinion, several philosophers, including Jesse Prinz, Bloom, and Goldie have recently argued that empathy is, in fact, a bad moral guide. These philosophers believe that empathy is not necessary for moral judgement and also is unreliable, subject to biases, and short-sighted. Because of this, these philosophers argue for alternatives to empathy, including reason and compassion due to the belief that these alternatives are less biased.

In this thesis, I will discuss the different definitions and accounts of empathy and provide a taxonomy of the different types of empathy in an effort to clarify what we are referring to. I

will then address whether empathy is a good moral guide. I will argue that, because of the inherent biases that empathy is subject to and the overall unreliability of the process, it is not.

1. What is Empathy?

1.1 Definitions of Empathy - Surveying Different Definitions

Much has been published on empathy, yet many have failed to adequately define what empathy actually is. The sources I have selected do define empathy, albeit in slightly different ways.

Paul Bloom (2017) states that many people consider empathy to be an emotion such as kindness or compassion, thus when one feels empathy towards another person, they are feeling the emotion of compassion towards that individual. Yet, it is important to understand that it is misleading to say that one “feels” empathy, for this phrase assumes that empathy is the *outcome* of a process instead of a process itself. This error causes the miscategorization of empathy, for empathy is, in fact, the process that may eventually lead to an emotion, but not an emotion itself.

Before further analyzing the process of empathy as defined by notable academicians, it is also necessary to understand an initial reason to distinguish between empathy and sympathy. There is a difference between feeling *for* someone (sympathy) and feeling *with* someone (empathy). For example, when you see someone trip and fall, you may feel badly or embarrassed *for* that person. This is drastically different from feeling *with* that person, meaning you actually *feel* the embarrassment that the person feels. Due to this distinction, empathy is typically recognized as a form of perspective-shifting, a process of inference in which the empathizer comes to share an emotion with another person. Scholars have also recognized that empathy can

operate at different levels of complexity, those being lower-level empathy, middle-level empathy, and upper-level empathy.

Frans de Waal (2006) proposes a model of empathy called the Russian Doll Model. A Russian Doll is a hollow, wooden figurine split at the middle containing another smaller wooden figurine split at the middle such that you can continue taking the figurines apart and revealing smaller ones until you arrive at the smallest one. De Waal believes that empathy has many similar layers, such that the inner layers are evolutionarily older and therefore more widely distributed in the animal kingdom. As the layers go further out, the more cognitively complex the capacities become, and the less widely distributed they are. He considers the innermost and smallest doll, which is at the root of all other forms of empathy, to be emotional contagion. Emotional contagion is considered an automatic, involuntary, and unconscious process of emotion matching between individuals (de Waal 2006, p39). One of the most common examples of unconscious matching between individuals is seeing someone yawn and, in turn, yawning yourself. While this is not the matching of an emotion, the mechanisms that produce the contagious yawning are thought to be the same as those in emotional contagion. Studies suggest that people who do not yawn when they see another person yawn are less capable of showing forms of empathy. People with autism and others known to have difficulty recognizing emotions in others tend to display less contagious yawning (Franzen, Mader, & Winter 2018). The most easily understood example of pure emotional contagion is a baby hearing another baby crying and, in turn, crying itself. This is thought to be the product of mirror neurons in the baby's brain that normally fire when the baby is itself distressed, firing automatically in response to the other baby's crying.

De Waal believes that emotional contagion is the basis for all other forms of empathy and that no other emotional transfer can happen without the subject who empathizes with another possessing this mechanism. The middle doll, that which contains the smaller doll (emotional contagion), is what de Waal calls cognitive empathy. Cognitive empathy is the capacity to assess the situation another person is experiencing and understand the reasons for another's emotions as a result of that situation. This involves *recognizing* an emotion in another, such as understanding that someone is angry, and then being able to understand why that person is angry. The distinction between emotional contagion and cognitive empathy is that emotional contagion is an automatic and involuntary process whereas cognitive empathy involves reasoning about the mental states of others. This reasoning is also known as "mind reading". Someone subject to emotional contagion may not realize that they are distressed as a result of another's individual distress. However, in cognitive empathy, the subject has the ability to recognize an individual's distress and reason about why that person is feeling distressed.

Finally, the largest and outermost doll, containing emotional contagion and the cognitive empathy, is what de Waal calls attribution. When attribution takes place, one tries to fully adopt another's perspective. For example, if you see an angry person, you may try to imagine what it is like to be that person and *experience* that individual's anger in that moment. Thus, attribution, or what I prefer to call "perspective-shifting", following Peter Goldie (2011), is a step further than cognitive empathy due to the emotions of another actually being adopted instead of just reasoning about what the other's emotions are.

Paul Bloom (2017), like de Waal, recognizes that processes like emotional contagion are at the root of our empathetic capacity, but sees empathy as putting yourself into another person's

shoes and feeling what you think another person is feeling. For example, say you have a friend named Jessica, who is going through the grieving process because her grandmother recently died. Bloom would then define empathy as the process of imagining yourself as Jessica and feeling those same emotions associated with death, including the grief and sadness that Jessica experiences. He specifies that empathy is not merely feeling kindness and compassion towards another (Bloom 2017, p24). So you do not just feel compassion for Jessica, but you go through the process of imagining yourself being her and therefore feeling the emotions she feels.

Jesse Prinz (2011) believes that empathy is the process through which we experience the emotion that we believe another person to have. Typically, this is based on inferences coming from what we observe of another person, or what we imagine would be the reaction to external conditions that typically produce that emotion (Prinz 2011, p215). Using the example of Jessica, Prinz's account of empathy would involve observing Jessica, using what you know about situation, coupled with your own reasoning, to imagine what you believe Jessica to be feeling and feeling it yourself.

Peter Goldie (2011) also considers the lowest and most primitive form of empathy to be emotional contagion. However, Goldie distinguishes between two different types of higher-level perspective-shifting: empathetic-perspective shifting and in-his-shoes perspective shifting. Goldie argues that the distinction between these two different types of higher-level empathy has been ignored in previous discussions of empathy as perspective-shifting, such as de Waal's and Bloom's. Empathetic-perspective shifting is a process through which one consciously and intentionally shifts one's perspective in order to imagine *being* another person and thereby shares the thoughts, feelings, decisions, and other aspects of that other person's psychology. This would

be similar to how Bloom defines the process of empathy, where you would imagine *being* Jessica, and therefore would attempt to share the thoughts and feelings of your friend. By contrast, in-his-shoes perspective-shifting is the process where one consciously and intentionally shifts one's *own* perspective in order to imagine what thoughts, feelings, decisions, and so on that one would have if one were in another person's circumstances (Goldie 2011, p302). Here, you would see Jessica grieving her grandmother, and envision yourself in her situation, and imagine what emotions you would feel if you were in that same situation.

1.2 A Taxonomy of Empathy

In light of what was discussed in the previous section, here is my account of empathy. Emotional contagion, is the lowest-level form of empathy. It is the unconscious emotional matching that takes place between individuals. I do not believe that the process referred to as cognitive empathy should be considered empathy. One empathizes with another only one shares the emotion of the one being empathized with, or when some degree of perspective-shifting takes place between the individuals. The relationship between this recognition of emotion in another is vital for perspective-shifting to take place, but the process of the recognition itself is not empathy because of the lack of emotional matching.

Finally, following Goldie, I propose that there is a distinction between two different types of perspective-shifting: empathetic perspective-shifting and in-his-shoes perspective-shifting. This distinction is crucial due to the difference between imagining being another versus imagining what it would be like for you to be in another's situation. With these distinctions set between definitions, I will now evaluate arguments for and against empathy.

2. The Good and Bad of Empathy

2.1 What Is Empathy Good For? - Arguments For Empathy

David Hume (1739) is a moral philosopher who largely bases his ethical theories on the idea of the passions and sympathy. It is first important to note that, despite Hume using the word ‘sympathy’ in his theory, the core idea is that “sympathy” is not the name of a specific emotion or sentiment. Instead, sympathy refers to the experience of another person’s emotional state, whatever that emotion might be (Prinz 2017, p215). Thus, some scholars use the words “sympathy” and “empathy” interchangeably when referring to Hume’s theory. In this paper, because Hume’s notion of sympathy is similar to what I consider to be empathy, I will use the word “empathy” when discussing the theory.

According to Hume, reason is a slave to the passions, which are also known as emotions, sentiments, or feelings. When you make a moral judgement, that judgement is not arrived at via some process of reasoning or reflection. Rather, it is constituted by the positive or negative feeling you have as a reaction to the specific thing or act. Hume would say that “to believe that something is morally right or wrong consists in having a moral approbation or disapprobation of it” (Prinz 2017, p215). For example, if I saw someone attempting to steal from a child, I would have the feeling of anger in response and that sentiment would be what constitutes my judging it to be wrong.

Reason, while being a slave to the passions, is the tool that allows one to collect data on a situation while it is happening and the likely consequences it will produce, as well as allows us to determine why we approve or disapprove of something after having an emotional reaction to it. Yet, it is important to note that for Hume, only the passions have the ability to morally motivate

people to act; reason alone cannot motivate you to do anything. Reason's purpose is just to collect information about a situation and try to understand it.

Hume is also an empiricist; he believes our knowledge comes solely from experience. Hume's theory of empathy holds that the process of empathizing operates via an associative inference from observed or imagined expressions of emotions (such as facial expressions) or external conditions that are known from experience to correlate with the presence of particular emotions (Prinz 2017, p215). For example, say you learned to associate anger with certain facial expressions: scrunched up eyebrows, wrinkled nose, and mean eyes. When you see these features in someone, you infer that person is angry. The only way you knew about this anger was through previous experience. This associative inference is then followed by oneself experiencing anger.

A common interpretation of Hume's theory of empathy holds that the target of empathy is the moral *patient*—the person to whom an action is happening, such as the victim of an act of violence or theft, or the beneficiary of an act of altruism. It is through empathizing with the patient that one comes to a moral judgment about the goodness or badness of the act: sharing the distress of a victim leads one to disapprove of the act that caused the distress; sharing the pleasure of a beneficiary of altruism leads one to approve of that act. Empathy is vital in this process because it is what leads to the sentiments which allow for the judgement of an act. Hume's theory set a precedent for empathy playing a crucial role in moral decision making and many philosophers have since adopted similar theories.

Michael Slote (2017) is another advocate of empathy and agrees with some of Hume's points on empathy. Like Hume, Slote is a sentimentalist, who believes that morality is grounded in sentiments and feelings, and holds that empathy provides us with a way to perceive the moral

virtue or vice of people around us. However, Slote's theory of empathy focuses on the "agent": the person performing the act rather than the "patient", who benefits or suffers as a result of the act. Slote argues that, when we are "warmed" by another, we are, in a basic way, approving of their actions. Similarly, if someone "chills" us, we disapprove of their action. Empathy is the process through which we are warmed or chilled: when we empathize with a person's motives we are warmed by them, but when we fail to empathize with a person's motives we are chilled. For example, if you were to view a person littering and felt "chilled" by the motives, that would be because you lack empathy with the wrongdoer. From this, just as you can empathetically register the pain of another, you can also register the moral goodness or badness of someone's actions or attitudes dependent on how you feel in response to that person's motives (Slote 2017, p846).

Slote argues that "empathy helps to put us cognitively in touch with what others are feeling and does so more directly than by any form of argument or inference" (Slote 2017, p843). As per this definition, Slote also believes that empathy, in addition to playing an important role in moral understanding, brings epistemological benefit to those who employ it. Slote argues that empathy helps humans learn facts about the world, which is something he believes has not been adequately discussed in the philosophical literature. He begins this argument making the connection between empathy and open-mindedness. Epistemologists view open-mindedness as an important epistemic virtue. This is the ability to be genuinely receptive to new ideas or other views. According to Slote, this requires some form of empathetic capacity (Slote 2017, p844).

To elaborate on the epistemological importance of empathy, Slote uses the example of a child, who will be referred to as Simon, who has a parent who is afraid of bears. The fear that

Simon's parent feels, through empathy, is picked up by Simon. Thus, Simon also fears bears. From observing this fear in his parent, whether the parent having a physical aversion to bears or the parent explicitly telling the child that bears should be feared, the child can, supposedly, through empathy, acquire the knowledge that he should also be afraid of bears. Empathy, according to Slote, is therefore a valuable way of learning about the world in addition to non-empathetic processes including perception, induction, and abduction.

Slote then states that we should not take this knowledge "too seriously" because sometimes beliefs can be unjustified. For example, if Simon's parents actually were scared of something extremely unthreatening, like puzzle pieces, then Simon's new found fear of puzzle pieces would not be justified. Thus, empathy is not always a reliable route to knowledge. However, Slote compares it to perception which is also not always reliable. Yet, this fact does not undercut that most perceptual beliefs are justified. For example, while perception may lead us astray when we view an optical illusion, it does not mean that we should disregard all knowledge we gain from perception. This is similar with empathy; just because some beliefs derived from empathy are not true, we still should not disregard it as an important route to knowledge.

2.2 What is Empathy Good For?- Arguments Against Empathy

Because people compare empathy to words like "kindness" and "compassion", it tends to be taken for granted that empathy is inherently a good thing. However, Prinz (2011) believes that empathy is not all that it is cracked up to be and argues against what he takes to be the broadly Humean view of the role of empathy in moral judgment and action. While Hume makes it clear that empathy is a precondition for sentiments of both approval and disapproval, Prinz claims it is

not always clear in which sense. One understanding of the claim, according to Prinz, is that approval (or disapproval) is *constituted*, in some way, by empathetic emotions. For example, when you think of the pleasure in some group of people, you experience empathetic pleasure. The pleasure becomes a component of approbation, which is a pleasure that we take in from the character or action that has produced that happiness. Thus, approval is just empathetic pleasure being directed outward onto the source of observed well-being (Prinz 2011, p217).

While it is difficult to find contemporary scholars that advocate this version of the Humean claim, Prinz explains that Michael Slote comes close. Slote believes that approbation is constituted by empathy *with* the person who performs the action, rather than the beneficiary of the action. Thus, if a person gives food to the needy, the approbation consists in empathy for that person's motives, not empathy with the needy. Prinz calls this theory the "agent empathy" theory and distinguishes it from the "patient empathy" theory he attributes to Hume.

Prinz agrees that moral judgements are constituted by emotions, but disagrees with the view that the emotions resemble the emotions of the agents or patients of an action under consideration. If you give money to a homeless person on the corner of your street, it is presumed that the homeless person will feel gratitude towards you. If a third party watches this interaction between you and the homeless person, the observer would most likely feel admiration towards you, not the gratitude that the homeless person feels. Admiration cannot be regarded as an empathetic response to the recipient of your generosity (Prinz 2011, p217). This problem for the "patient empathy theory" becomes even stronger when we consider disapproval of an action. If you consider seeing person A pickpocket person B, yet B is not aware of the fact that A took their money, B could not have an emotion that you would be able to empathize with. Yet, you

would presumably still disapprove of A's pickpocketing anyway, despite there not being the possibility of an empathetic exchange. You cannot pick up the anger of the person pickpocketed because none exists. Thus, if the anger towards the pickpocket is not empathetic, it cannot be that disapproval in this case is constituted by an empathetic emotion.

It is also possible to feel disapprobation towards victimless crimes. For example, say a person decides to use a cat as an instrument for masturbation. You could disapprove of the act because typically humans consider bestiality to be wrong, yet this need have nothing to do with empathizing with the victim; for all you know, the cat could enjoy it (Prinz 2011, p218). Another example can be found in the popular show, *Game of Thrones*, where the character, Jaime Lannister, and his sister, Cersei Lannister, have an incestual relationship. While the couple does not find anything wrong with their sexual relations with one another, they still decide to hide it from the public because they know others will think it is wrong. In this instance, both members of the relationship are consenting adults and there are no victims of the action, yet a majority of people would still consider this to be wrong.

Some might argue that Slote's "agent empathy theory" addresses the issue of the victimless crime. In the *Game of Thrones* example, we can explain why we disapprove of the incestual relationship with the fact that we do not empathize with their motives and are therefore "chilled" by the act. Yet, it still does not explain why we approve or disapprove of all situations. Prinz uses the example of helping someone in need. The person helped will feel gratitude, but if you approve of the action, you will not feel gratitude but instead, admiration towards the action. These emotions of gratitude and admiration are obviously different, thus the admiration cannot be regarded as a an empathetic response to the recipient of your generosity (the moral patient)

nor can admiration be regarded as an empathetic response to the motives of the person giving the help (the moral agent) (Prinz 2017, p217). This feeling of admiration must come from elsewhere.

Another concern Prinz has with Hume's theory is the claim that moral praise is often caused by contemplating societal happiness: virtues such as justice "acquire our approbation because of their tendency to the good of mankind" (Prinz 2011, p221). Prinz argues that it is difficult to empathize with the collective and it is understood that you are less likely to empathize with two victims suffering from the same ailment rather than just one. Thus, empathy is not likely to play a role when you are able to be concerned for a group of people so presumably that concern must come about in some other way.

Despite Prinz finding these concerns with empathy, both with the fact that it is not necessary for moral judgement and that it has a number of biases, Prinz recognizes that empathy is important but we should not limit ourselves to it as our moral guide. Prinz argues we should instead put our efforts towards emotions such as concern when making our judgements. Empathy is a process of sharing emotions with another whereas concern is a negative sentiment caused by the recognition that someone else is in need. For example, if you see those sad commercials with dogs on TV, empathy causes you to feel distressed. However, this *distress* might not actually lead you to help but only want to insulate yourself from the emotion thus you change the channel instead of whipping out your checkbook. Whereas, seeing this commercial and instead feeling outraged, pissed off, sad, or concerned about the conditions shown that the dogs are in, these emotions will make you more likely to donate money. The emotion of concern is not held to similarity or proximity because it is not a form of emotional mimicry, but instead allows for us to make moral decisions without the worry of the biases empathy has.

Aside from determining whether empathy is necessary for moral judgement, both Prinz and Paul Bloom (2017) also evaluate whether empathy is the best process for determining moral judgement. Both believe empathy to have a “dark side” that causes empathy to be more negative than positive in certain situations, despite the fact that empathy is typically regarded as a good thing.

One of the first biases that Bloom and Prinz point out is the fact that empathy unfairly favors those with whom we have the opportunity to feel empathy over those we do not. This is known as the “identifiable victim bias” (Bloom 2017, p24). Both Bloom and Prinz refer to the example of a psychological experiment in which participants were told about Sheri Summers (Batson 1995), a fictional ten-year-old girl who has a fatal disease that will kill her if she does not get treatment, for which she is low on the waiting list.

In the study, two groups of participants were asked whether she should be moved up the waiting list for treatment. Giving Sheri the treatment would mean that another child would not get the treatment. One group of participants, Group A, were given the details of the situation and then asked to imagine “how she feels”, whereas the other group of participants, Group B, were only given the details of the situation and told to try to be objective. Participants were then asked whether Sheri should be moved up the list. Most participants in Group A said that she should be moved up whereas most in Group B said that Sheri should wait her turn. Bloom argues that the results of this experiment show that empathy can clash with considerations of fairness. Surely, Sheri had no more right to be moved up the list than any number of other patients also on the list about whom participants were not informed. As Bloom says, “empathy resonates to the suffering of the identifiable victims but is largely silent when it comes to both further costs and statistical

benefits” (Bloom 2017, p25). Empathy was a poor moral guide in this situation for it was morally arbitrary to move Sheri up on the list. Had the participants heard of any other child on the list, they would have arbitrarily moved that child up and ignored Sheri.

Some might respond that the issue here is not the increased empathy for Sheri, but rather the lack of empathy for others. Bloom would agree with this point and this is precisely why he thinks empathy is problematic; in practice, empathy is much more likely to be triggered for an identifiable victim and our empathizing with that individual tends to crowd out concern (empathetic or otherwise) for others. This is the reason why we need to be cautious of empathy as a moral guide.

Another bias Bloom and Prinz point out in empathy is called the ingroup bias or what Prinz calls “similarity bias” (Prinz 2011, p227). We tend to empathize with those who look like or have characteristics similar to us. These similarities can range from physical characteristics such as eye color, hair color, age, race, gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, etc., to something as minute as having similar interests as us. Bloom uses the example of a European study (Hein, et al. 2010) that tested male soccer fans. Participants received an electric shock and then would watch another man also receive a shock. When the other man was described as a fan of the same soccer team that the participant liked, participants manifested a “more empathetic neural response” (Bloom 2017, p25). If the man was described as a fan of the opposing team, the empathetic neural response from participants was reduced.

Similar to the ingroup and identifiable victim bias, empathy also tends to be short-sighted. You are more likely to feel more empathy towards the homeless person sitting on the corner of your street rather than a suffering person an ocean away. This example is also

closely linked to charity and charitable donation, where Prinz states that empathy may lead us to recklessly support programs that we prefer rather than those that actually need our support (Prinz 2011, p229). A common example is the suffering of a white American girl. Her suffering is more salient to other white Americans than the suffering of thousands of faraway strangers, thus she is given donations of thousands of dollars worth of toys, and presents. Yet, the money spent on these gifts could have made a greater impact elsewhere, such as given as a donation to the thousands suffering in Yemen. Yet, empathy tells us “that could have been us” or find certain causes to be more detrimental than others. Another example of this phenomenon is funding and donations for cancer research. Almost everyone knows someone who had cancer, thus we empathize with those who we know and give time and money to charities that fund cancer research. Yet, cancer research, due to the empathetic draw, is overfunded relative to other forms of medical research. It would be better for us to give money to research other diseases like malaria, that kills thousands of people. The issue arises because this disease does not get as much attention in western countries like the United States because citizens of the U.S. do not typically experience malaria, nor empathize with people who suffer from malaria because there is less similarity between individuals.

Another bias that can be found with empathy is that it is harder for us to empathize with groups of people as opposed to identifiable individuals. Imagine the first example used in this paper of your friend Jessica losing her grandmother. Now try to empathize with Jessica where you feel the grief, loss, and pain she is feeling because of her loss. Similarly, now try to do that while also empathizing with Sheri, feeling the nervousness, hope, and fear that she has as she waits on the list to get treatment for her disease. It is very difficult to empathize with these two

people at the same time and becomes continuously more difficult to the point that it is nearly impossible when you keep adding more people to the example. This shows why we are more likely to feel empathy towards a single person than thousands of people, such as those who might be suffering from famine and wars.

Bloom argues that these biases make empathy a poor guide for deciding how to act, yet Bloom claims that it can still be an important motivational tool. He argues that “we can decide the right thing to do based on a cost-benefit analysis or certain moral principles, but then empathy can step in and actually make us do it” (Bloom 2017, p26). For example, say you know you should donate money to the humanitarian crisis in Yemen. While your morals or reason tell you that you should do this, empathy can step in and actually make you complete the action by, for example, you empathizing with a girl in Yemen that you see suffering on the news. You can even motivate others to do the same through the use of empathetic appeals.

Empathy, though, can be exploited to motivate us to make us do things that do not help. Just as we can motivate others to do good through empathetic appeals, we can be made to do wrong if others invoke our empathetic appeals. For example, atrocities can be allowed and accepted by the public if those committing them invoke empathetic appeals. American President Donald Trump is well known for convincing Americans to not accept Mexican citizens into the country by telling stories of how Mexicans immigrants are taking Americans’ jobs or are responsible for horrible crimes on identifiable Americans. Thus, he allows an entire group of people to be condemned from entering the country by causing Americans to empathetically favor the American whose job was taken or who was the victim of a crime.

Empathy is also found to cause people be burnt out and can lead to empathetic distress. Bloom points to the study where a group of people were either given empathy training, where they were instructed to feel what others were feeling, and another group was given compassion training, where the goal was to feel positive and warm thoughts toward others without vicariously feeling their suffering (Singer and Klimecki 2014, p875). Those with the compassion training were found to have promoted prosocial behavior, resilience, and were better at coping with stressful situations. Those who had the empathy training, on the other hand, were found to be at risk for burnout and would try to avoid situations that caused distress (Bloom 2017, p27). This is similar to the example explained in the Prinz section of this paper, where the viewer of the sad puppy commercial would be less likely to whip out a checkbook because seeing the sad puppy would trigger extreme distress. The viewers of the commercial become avoidant of the situation due to the distress they picked up via empathy. It is through these biases that Prinz and Bloom find issues with empathy and what empathy is good for.

Peter Goldie's (2011) argument against empathy varies from those of Bloom and Prinz, for Goldie finds the issue with the process of empathetic perspective-shifting. As said by Goldie, "empathetic perspective-shifting is conceptually unable to operate with the appropriately full-blooded notion of first-personal agency that is involved in deliberation" (Goldie 2011, p303). I refer again to the example of Jessica. In empathetic perspective-shifting, you would attempt to imagine *being* Jessica. You *are* Jessica, who just lost her grandmother, and is feeling the grief, pain, and loss. Yet, in this instance, you will inevitably distort the perspective of the other person, thus leading you to make assumptions you are not entitled to make. Perhaps Jessica was not close with her grandmother and is not sad or had feelings and emotions that you have

never even experienced yourself. You imagining being Jessica and making this assumption of her emotions is ultimately going to lead to some sort of distortion of her emotions. This is important to understand from a moral perspective because misplaced confidence in our understanding of others' circumstances could motivate us to perform harmful or inappropriate actions.

Instead of empathetic perspective-shifting, Goldie recommends in-his-shoes perspective-shifting. Using this type of perspective-shifting you would, instead of imagining *being* Jessica, imagine how you would feel if you were in the *same situation* as Jessica. Thus, you would imagine that you had lost your own grandmother. Therefore, through that imagination of loss and the feelings you would associate with the death of your grandmother, such as sadness, grief, loss, etc. you can assume that Jessica is feeling the same emotions you would feel. The difference with in-his-shoes perspective-shifting is that the process is much more modest in its ambitions; you don't presume to know what the other person is feeling, you just use your own mind as a model and then draw from that.

3. Concluding Remarks

In light of the preceding arguments, I find myself leaning on the side against empathy. Just as Prinz does, I disagree with the claim that empathy is necessary for or constitutes moral judgement. I disagree because, as it has been shown, humans have adverse reactions to victimless crimes such as using your cat as a tool for masturbation or consensual incestual sex. While it may be the case that empathizing with the moral patient can teach you something, it is not what we always rely on for judgements of morality or immorality. Because of the multiple

arguments against empathy thus questioning its role as a moral guide or an aid to making moral decisions, it is also unclear what empathy is, in fact, good for.

Some might argue that Slote's (2017) "agent theory" addresses the issue of the victimless crime. However, Slote's theory still does not explain why we approve or disapprove of acts in all situations. For example, if the person using their cat as a tool of masturbation truly does not feel there is anything wrong with the act and that it is even, perhaps, good, regardless of the cat's emotions or feelings about the act, we could still say the act is morally wrong. This is supposedly because when we, according to Slote's theory, observe a wrongdoer, we lack empathy with that person and are therefore "chilled". I disagree with this point because I do not believe a lack of empathy with a person's motives cannot explain why we make the moral judgements we do in particular cases.

A proponent of Hume might respond to this theory stating that you can still empathize with someone yet disapprove of their acts. Yet, the disapproval comes from the fact that you empathize with the wrongdoer in the first place, for if you did not empathize with them, you would not care what they did. While I also do not agree you can necessarily lack empathy with a person, this Humean might confuse the terms empathy and sympathy that I distinguished previously. The reason a Humean would disapprove of their acts is not because you empathize, or feel the emotions of the wrongdoer, but instead because you sympathize, or feel bad for the wrongdoer.

A defender of Hume might also suggest that we could not have a sentiment of disapproval if you do not sympathize with either party and that without sympathy, you would have no more sentiments about the masturbation act than you would about a pebble on the street.

Yet, Prinz would argue that we have internalized a norm from our culture that says the bestiality is wrong, such that we have learned to associate acts of bestiality, both real or imagined, with negative emotions like disgust. Thus, when we hear of a case of bestiality, we automatically feel disgust in response. It is that feeling of disgust that constitutes the judgment of wrongness. Empathy (or sympathy) has nothing to do with it. The reason we don't care about the pebble is because we haven't learned to associate any positive or negative emotions with the pebble even though we could, in principle.

Aside from his moral theory, one of the most significant issues I find with the theories for empathy is Michael Slote's (2017) claim that empathy has epistemological benefits. While it may be true that we can learn some things about the world via empathy, I find the chance of error to be high, in part due to the already present biases determined in Bloom and Prinz. Slote attempts to address this by arguing that just because there is a possibility for error does not mean we should cast the theory out entirely. Yet, in contrast to the example he uses previously of perception where perhaps we may occasionally be misled by an optical illusion, empathy has a much higher chance of being mistaken as concluded by the number of biases present, highlighted by Bloom and Prinz. We have no more reason to think it's going to lead us in the right direction than the wrong direction.

Due to Bloom's and Prinz's specific criticisms about empathy, it might seem as if he ignores all the ways that reason can also be biased and lead us astray. Thus, Denise Cummins (2013) suggests that reason, without empathy, can be just as dangerous, if not more so, than empathy. Because of this risk, Cummins argues that using reason alone to make moral judgements, without empathy, would lead to worse outcomes than employing empathy including

mass atrocities and inhumane practices. Cummins points to the examples of a number of societies and individuals who used reason to justify things like genocide, ethnic cleansing, suicide bombings. She claims that their lack of empathy and pure use of logic and reason caused both sets of groups to have their beliefs twisted and led to an overall greater harm (Cummins 2013, p1). Because of this harm that has previously taken place, Cummins therefore argues that the only way for reason to be good in humans is if it is paired with a feeling or emotion through the use of empathy. This use of empathy would allow people to make more just decisions when they care for the lives and feelings of others. The best way to make decision, in Cummins's view, is to find some similarities between ourselves and those who are suffering so that even though one may not look or act like us, they are still treated with the proper amount of human dignity (Cummins 2013, p2).

Cummins makes the mistake of claiming that Prinz and Bloom are arguing for "cold-hard reason" when they say that empathy is a bad moral guide. Yet, Prinz is clear that we should not scrap empathy, but instead be mindful of the emotions that are being collected through empathy and try to cultivate other emotions as our primary source of making moral judgements. Bloom would also disagree with Cummins and argue instead that we should employ reason in specific situations to determine what action we should take, and then empathy would be used as a motivator to complete the action.

In this section of the paper, the main type of empathy that has been evaluated as being a good or bad moral guide has been what I refer to previously as perspective-shifting. Yet, this would not answer the question of whether the emotional contagion, is a bad moral guide. I argue that we need to be cautious of of emotional contagion because we technically can't stop it. For

example, say you are riding the subway in New York City and a man wearing a hijab enters the car causing the people around you to audibly become uncomfortable and move away from him. Through emotional contagion, despite your feelings about this man wearing the hijab, you too become uncomfortable because of how the others on the subway react. This reaction is not justified because the only reason you feel the discomfort is because others around you feel it, not because the man has actually done anything to make you uncomfortable. But, if you are mindful of our emotions and where they come from, you have a better chance of avoiding the biases that might come with empathy such as feeling an emotion with someone only because that person is close to you or is similar to you. If you merely act on the emotions through this low-level empathy, you still can make decisions, just potentially bad ones. Thus, we need to better employ reason by reflecting on our inclinations and motives for the decisions we make.

While David Hume's (1739) moral theory states that "reason is a slave to the passions", I believe that reason has a larger part to play in moral theory than just to be the collector of evidence before a situation or the determiner of why we approve or disapprove of something. Instead, despite Cummins's criticisms to both Bloom's and Prinz's solutions to finding other moral guides than empathy, I would adopt a theory that more similarly resembles a combination of both Bloom's and Prinz's view. Emotions, instead of empathy, have a large role to play, yet reason must also be employed while making moral decisions. Having considered all of the ways in which empathy is biased, cultivating emotions other than those through empathy have a lesser chance of being biased, especially in regards to strangers. Emotions do not necessarily favor those of similarity or proximity to you like what happens in instances of empathy. Since it is impossible to get rid of empathy, though, the use of reason is necessary when being mindful of

the emotions that are picked up in empathy. The combination of reason and emotion would be a better moral guide than empathy.

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