

# Review Essay: Empathy and Morality

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## Introduction

Many of us will find it intuitive that there exists an important link between the ability to feel for others on the one hand and the ability to care for them and attend to their needs on the other—that is, between a capacity for empathy and a capacity for morality. But spelling out the details is hard to do. Not only must we say something about what having these distinct capacities amounts to; there is also the problem of specifying how precisely empathy enables morality. Does empathy provide cognitive or epistemic support, insofar as it enhances a person's moral sensibilities? Or does it simply provide motivational support by way of raising the likelihood of morally praiseworthy behaviour? We may also ask questions in the other direction: to what extent (if any) does a capacity for morality implicate or enhance a capacity for empathy?

While empirical research can shed light on these questions, studies to date have been hampered by a theoretical slipperiness in the relevant terms. 'Empathy' has been associated with a broad—albeit importantly linked—class of emotional responses, each of which require different psychological preconditions and constitute distinct elements of our emotional lives.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, some have gone so far as to recommend that we abandon the concept of 'empathy' altogether, since it fails to pick out a single well-defined capacity in cognitive research (McGeer 2008b, p.285). The problem is amplified once we appreciate that the term 'morality' has proven even less amenable to definition. We may, for instance, choose to understand morality in terms of morally praiseworthy behaviour (however motivated), morally motivated behaviour (however dim someone's grasp of moral concepts), or (more cognitively) as involving some heavy-duty conceptual mastery of moral notions or principles. Getting clear on just what the morality of the empathy-morality link amounts to is equally important if we hope to make any progress on the question of how the two are connected.

The contributors to *Empathy and Morality* are well aware of these definitional issues and aim to make headway in understanding the empathy-morality link by doing important

<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to Victoria McGeer and Edward Elliott for insightful comments on a previous draft of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> Human infants, for example, are capable of 'emotional contagion', a rudimentary form of empathy which Maibom considers in her introduction to the volume (p.4). As Gruen and Andrews note in their contribution, this constitutes a kind of mimicry which doesn't require advanced cognition (p.195). By contrast, what's often termed 'cognitive empathy' involves taking on the perspective of another in order to gain insight into their inner emotional life—this species of empathy does depend upon a more sophisticated psychology (ppp.195-6).

conceptual work on the nature of these capacities while simultaneously drawing on a wide range of empirical data from pathology to phylogeny. Unfortunately, there is insufficient room here to remark upon each of the individual contributions. In this review, I will examine issues which emerge from the intersection of empirical study and philosophy, including the implications of different conceptions of empathy and morality for investigations into the empathy-morality link and the significance of pathological conditions associated with a deficiency in empathy.

## Getting clear on ‘empathy’

As editor, Heidi Maibom sets the tone for the conceptual-cum-empirical work of the volume by telling us (almost) everything we want to know about empathy. Covering a remarkable range of ground, she raises important substantive and methodological questions related, but not limited, to taxonomising the empathy-related emotions, identifying different psychological pathways to empathy, exploring the empirical significance of pathological conditions associated with empathy deficiency, identifying the different behavioural outputs of different empathy-related emotions, weighing the contributions of both phylogenetic and ontogenetic accounts of empathetic development and even debating the experimental measures of empathy used in contemporary research. While all of these issues deserve attention, I will here focus upon those that seem most fundamental

### Is empathy morality’s friend or foe?

One issue that Maibom highlights concerns the psychological limitations of the empathetic emotions, and whether or not these limitations compromise the potential contribution empathy makes to moral thought and action. A number of contributors weigh in on this debate, generally drawing attention to the positive role that empathy plays in moral life. But even they are careful not to overstate their case. Hoffman, for example, acknowledges that the empathetic emotions have important weaknesses, including the fragility of empathetic motivation (p.93), the susceptibility of empathy to a ‘here-and-now’ bias (p.94), and the difficulty of extending empathetic feeling to large groups (p.81). Ugazio, Majjdandžić and Lamm likewise acknowledge important limitations, noting that empathetic emotions are prone to in-group biases (pp.169-70), and can function as tools of manipulation and intimidation (p.171).

Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the literature abounds with many empathy ‘foes’. A well-known opponent is Jesse Prinz, who not only argues that empathy is unnecessary for moral judgment or motivation, but also denies that empathetic emotions ought to be cultivated in order to enhance moral capacities. Against the necessity thesis, he draws attention to instances in which we are perfectly able (and indeed, willing) to deliver moral verdicts in the absence of empathetic feeling, including victimless crimes, crimes against animals and crimes against oneself (Prinz 2011, pp.218-20). Prinz also argues that empathy’s effectiveness in motivating moral behaviour is exaggerated; empirical evidence suggests that guilt and reward are far more effective elicitors of moral action (Prinz 2011, p.226). Although Prinz concedes that empathy may play an epistemic role in guiding moral judgment, he insists

that it is nonetheless unreliable in this regard and carries the danger of profound moral error (Prinz 2011, p.224). This is substantiated by the well-established fact that empathy is susceptible to various biases. Accordingly, Prinz argues that the cultivation of empathy is ill-advised, for it will likely lead to ‘nepotism, negligence, and moral myopia’ (Prinz 2011, p.229).

A number of contributors resist Prinz’s stand—and in a variety of ways. Kauppinen, for instance, gestures towards the potential moral significance of corrected empathetic responses, arguing that empathetic reactive attitudes such as empathetic anger (that is, anger felt on behalf of others) may play a foundational role in explaining and vindicating many of our moral verdicts when these attitudes are regulated by reference to an ideal (p.98); Ugazio, Majjdandžić and Lamm identify the moral importance of empathy in its dual-role as a valuable epistemic tool and a motivation-enhancer (p.156); and Hoffman aims to demonstrate that empathy can influence legislation, and, by extension, political and economic institutions (pp.82-93).

Interestingly, Garrett and Graham’s response to Prinz appeals to ‘morally sufficient empathy’, a particular kind of idealised empathy that is fundamentally reflective and imaginative. Unlike more familiar forms of empathy, morally sufficient empathy reflectively takes into account what is best for every individual—it is ‘tantamount to assuming the equal worth of all persons’ (p.130). Since morally sufficient empathy amounts to regarding the worth of all others as equal to our own (p.136), Garrett and Graham argue that it carries the promise of combatting tribalism; that is, the tendency to prioritise the interests of our near and dear (p.135).

Garrett and Graham’s focus upon this particular variety of idealised empathy, however, seems to carry the risk of shifting the goalposts of the debate. As they note, Prinz argues that ‘an intellectual recognition of our common humanity’ is of better service to our moral ends than our empathetic capacities (p.136). It is difficult to see, however, how the positing of ‘morally sufficient empathy’ in any way answers to Prinz’s concerns. For morally sufficient empathy is not the common-or-garden empathy that takes centre stage in Prinz’s discussion. Far from being susceptible to various forms of bias, Garrett and Graham’s morally sufficient empathy is rather identified as a ‘power of identification with others...that can best respect our equal worth as persons’ (p.137). On this understanding, empathy begins to look less like the familiar, psychologically limited emotion with which Prinz takes issue and more like the intellectual recognition of our common humanity that he pits against it.

It does seem plausible, despite Prinz’s claims to the contrary, that empathetic emotions are indeed capable of occupying an important role in our moral lives. Although there may be issues with Graham and Garret’s line of resistance, other more promising defences of empathy remain available. A particularly nice articulation of empathy’s valuable role in moral thought and action which appreciates the psychological limitations of the empathy-related emotions is found in Ugazio, Majjdandžić and Lamm’s contribution, where they argue that empathy serves as both an important epistemic tool and a motivation-enhancer in moral life.

Thus, explorations into empathy’s moral credentials seem to do better insofar as they respect the psychological limitations of the empathetic emotions. Rather than attempt to transform empathy into something that is not—as an emotional pathway through which

we can come to appreciate the equal worth of all persons—it seems that we should instead aim to become more aware of empathy’s fundamental limitations so that we can exercise it with due care in moral matters.

### Moral principles overridden

One particularly interesting rejection of the empathy-morality link is found in Charles Batson’s contribution to the volume. Batson builds upon his earlier work wherein he has famously defended the empathy-altruism hypothesis, a posited a link between empathetic concern<sup>3</sup> (an emotionally-rooted attitude) and altruism (a motive) (p.46).<sup>4</sup> Although Batson believes that there is evidence for an important connection between empathetic emotions and altruistic motives, he denies that there is similarly evidence for a link between these emotions and specifically moral motives.

Batson’s interesting thesis is the claim that empathy-induced altruism qua motive is neither immoral nor moral, but is rather amoral (p.47). This is premised upon an understanding of altruism and morality as distinct motives, where motives are individuated by their ultimate goals. Whereas altruistic motives are ultimately aimed at increasing another’s welfare, moral motives for Batson are ultimately tied to promoting moral principles, standards or ideals (p.46). Thus, in order to count as morally motivated, it is not enough that an action be consistent with a moral principle; Batson specifies that the action must be carried out in order to promote this principle (p.54). In support of his thesis, Batson alerts us to the fact that empathy-induced altruism is capable of producing immoral behaviour. The results of the studies which Batson presents are taken to support the claim that empathy-induced altruism can motivate an individual to violate her moral standards when it produces a stronger motivation than the motivation to perform right action (p.47).

Batson seems right to recognise that empathy can motivate us to engage in behaviour which, on reflection, we would declare morally wrong. Unfortunately, it is far from clear that this claim is supported by the results of his studies. There is an important distinction to be drawn between acting in conflict with moral principles and acting in conflict with moral principles that we would reflectively judge to have merited precedence in the case at hand. Absent any support for the claim that empathetically-induced altruism led Batson’s experimental subjects to be guilty of the latter, it is unclear whether he is justified in drawing the conclusion that this motive resulted in immoral action at all. For allowing particular moral principles to be overridden or ignored in light of other considerations is not only commonplace, but often morally recommended. Kohlberg’s (1981) Heinz dilemma is a familiar example. Here, principles regarding property rights seem to be overridden by principles pertaining to the duties we have to our loved ones. Accordingly, the observation that empathetically-induced altruism can lead us to act in conflict with our moral principles

<sup>3</sup> Batson uses empathetic concern to designate a range of emotions including ‘sympathy, compassion, tenderness, sadness, distress, concern and grief’ (p.42). Following Maibom, empathetic concern seems best construed as *sympathy*, an empathetic emotion marked by its focus upon the welfare of another and a coarse-grained matching of emotion (for example, sadness when the other is negatively affected and happiness when the other is positively affected) (p.6).

<sup>4</sup> Batson offers a motivational definition of altruism, according to which it consists in a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing the welfare of another (p.43).

need only constitute a cause for concern—or only amount to immoral action as Batson claims—if those very moral principles ought to have taken precedence by the experimental subjects' own lights.

Unfortunately, there is a conspicuous lack of evidence for this stronger and more interesting claim in a number of Batson's studies. That is, it is far from clear that these studies provide good reason to regard empathy as an obstacle to acting in accordance with those moral principles which we would reflectively judge to have merited precedence in the case at hand. In the 'partiality in social dilemmas' study, for example, Batson and colleagues found that participants who were made to experience empathy for another individual chose to allocate more resources to this person than to the group, thereby reducing the collective good. These results were taken to support the claim that empathy experienced in social dilemmas can lead individuals to abandon the utilitarian principle of the greatest good for the greatest number (p.50). It may be, however, that the empathy experienced actually had the function of motivating subjects to act in accordance with altogether different moral principles, such as those which pertain to our duties to privilege the allocation of resources to those in need. If it this consideration which subjects would reflectively endorse as meriting precedence in that context, then it looks as though the empathetically-induced altruistic motives actually served to generate moral rather than immoral action.

The fact that empathy can incline a subject to act in conflict with particular moral principles, then, is far from a cause for moral alarm unless we have first established that that subject judges the very moral principles which empathy overrides as those which ought not to have been overridden. The upshot is that it is neither surprising nor obviously worrying that empathy-induced altruism has the potential to inspire actions which conflict with particular moral principles. The more worrying claim, that empathetically-induced altruism leads subjects to act in conflict with their all-things-considered moral verdicts, while not at all intuitively implausible, is nonetheless not obviously supported by Batson's studies.

## Getting clear on 'morality'

### Insights from metaethics

As I have noted, conceptual issues often bedevil the investigation into the empathy-morality link. This is not only due to difficulties with taxonomising and empirically isolating the empathy-related emotions; it also concerns the 'morality' end of this link.

Consider, for instance, Batson's definition of 'moral motivation' in terms of an ultimate desire to promote a moral principle. From a meta-ethical perspective, this definition not only appears unnecessarily narrow; it also seems to render much of moral motivation a *moral vice*, to borrow a phrase from Michael Smith (1994, p.75). Many have pointed towards instances in which we fail to act from the ultimate desire to promote a moral principle and seem all the *morally better* for it. A familiar example is that of a man who chooses to save his wife over a stranger (Williams 1976). On Batson's view, the man only counts as morally motivated if he acts from the ultimate desire to promote a moral principle. Yet, as many philosophers argue, this motive appears to *detract* from the man's moral character, for it suggests that he doesn't

have the appropriate kind of love and concern for his wife. This is just to say that we often tend to think of morally good people as having a *direct* concern for the people they love rather than a derivative concern which is rooted in their motivation to do what is right (Smith 1994, p.75). Importantly, this direct concern seems far more likely to stem from our empathetically-induced altruistic propensities than from moral motives as Batson defines them.

Accordingly, it seems that Batson is too hasty in dismissing the moral relevance of empathetically-induced altruistic motives. Moreover, it seems that this is owing to an important ambiguity in what is meant by ‘moral motivation’. More narrowly, it can be taken to mean what Batson means: to be motivated by some moral principle. More broadly (and arguably more importantly), however, it can be taken to mean: to be motivated by morally relevant concerns, however these are conceptualised.

Interestingly, moral motivation in the latter, broader sense may even include actions that are performed against the moral principles that one has come to endorse. Mark Twain’s Huck Finn offers an excellent example. Huck has come to regard slavery as a standard form of ownership, and so, famously suffers from a guilty conscience when he fails to turn in his friend Jim, a slave whom he helps to escape. Ultimately, Huck fails to act in accordance with the moral principles with which he is familiar; his sympathetic feeling for his friend wins out against his conscience.

Most of us would be inclined to believe that far from leading Huck astray, his sympathy and compassion rather play a valuable epistemic role in guiding him towards right action. This suggests a further important role for the empathetic emotions; they may often serve as a potential educative device, gradually allowing us to recognise the moral principles that we ought to endorse.

### Insights from moral psychology and primatology

Getting clear on the ‘morality’ of the empathy-morality link is of considerable importance for those wishing to gain further insight into the relationship between empathetic and moral capacities. Unfortunately, certain trends in ethical thought seem to carry a particular danger—that of divorcing the project of defining morality from relevant empirical findings in primatology and moral psychology.

In their contribution, Gruen and Andrews challenge ‘the standard view’ in ethics. The standard view claims that adopting an authentic ethical perspective necessitates a detachment from one’s own social relationships, desires and interests. Thus, the moral point of view is one of impartiality—or, to borrow Gruen and Andrews’ terminology, ‘the point of view of the universe’ (pp.207-8). They argue that the tendency to view impartial perspective-taking as central to moral agency has important consequences for investigations into the empathy-morality link.

In particular, the idea that a detachment from one’s immediate interests, relationships and desires is central to authentic moral agency may function to emphasise the moral importance of particular varieties of cognitive empathy (such as perspective-taking) while downplaying the valuable role of other species of empathy in our moral lives. Gruen and Andrews are concerned to underscore the essentially entangled character of empathy—that is, the fact that

we typically experience empathy in virtue of our entanglement with particular individuals and systems of meaning (p.208). The standard view's emphasis upon particular dimensions of morality, however—notably, those dimensions linked to Kantian autonomy—may lead us to wholly ignore the moral significance of these familiar empathetic experiences (p.209).

Moreover, as Gruen and Andrews highlight, the aspects of morality associated with Kantian autonomy seem to constitute but one dimension of moral life; Shweder's community dimension, together with Haidt's dimensions of Care/Harm and Fairness/Cheating, are similarly significant aspects of our moral experience. Interestingly, it is these additional dimensions—or the precursors thereof—that are found in the social lives of nonhuman apes (p.209). An overly narrow construal of morality then, may pose an additional threat: that of failing to capture central dimensions of moral experience and important continuities between human and nonhuman moral capacities.

Interestingly, Batson's definition of moral motivation as an ultimate desire to promote a moral principle seems to be a manifestation of this problematic trend. The tendency of advocates of the standard view to emphasise aspects of morality associated with Kantian autonomy seems to be manifest in Batson's discussion of moral motivation, wherein he appeals to insights from Kantian moral theory (p.54). Although in Batson's case, this does not give rise to a focus upon the moral significance of cognitive empathy, it does, following Gruen and Andrew's prognosis, appear to overlook the potential moral significance of entangled empathy, which results from the particular relationships that we enter into with others.

Of course, none of this is to deny that Batson is right to distinguish moral motives from empathetically-induced altruistic motives. To appreciate that the two needn't constitute a package deal, we need only follow Gruen and Andrews and look to our great ape relatives. Although many believe that chimpanzees are capable of particular forms of empathy (Flack & de Waal 2000; de Waal 2006), few seem willing to grant them a capacity for full-fledged moral motivation (Korsgaard 2006; Joyce 2006). Empathy not only seems insufficient for moral motivation, but also positively unnecessary. We can all recall cases where we have felt no empathy whatsoever for a person in need but begrudgingly come to their aid because it is the right thing to do.

Nonetheless, while this seems plausible with regard to specific actions, it may fail to hold true with regard to developing any moral motivation at all. Many have been keen to point out that empathy plays a central role in moral development. Kennett and Fine, for example, enlist the insights of Hoffman (2000) among others to argue that moral learning in children is facilitated by cultivating a capacity for empathy (Fine & Kennett 2004, p.429). Thus, while there may be cases in which empathy is unnecessary for moral motivation, it is plausible that the empathetic emotions nevertheless play a crucial role in the very process of becoming a moral agent.

In summary, construing morality or moral motivation in overly narrow terms carries a number of worrying implications. As Gruen and Andrews highlight, such a definition will likely fail to capture both important continuities between human and nonhuman psychology

and familiar dimensions of moral life. It would be fruitful for further investigations into the empathy-morality link if these important insights were taken into account.

## The empirical significance of pathology: psychopathy

Another issue Maibom raises in her introduction concerns the empirical significance of psychopathy, a mental disorder that is commonly thought to be marked by a deficit in empathy and (some argue) a deficit in rationality. In her contribution, Marsh argues that research into psychopathy makes for a particularly valuable investigation into the psychological underpinnings of our moral capacities because it allows for the careful study of individuals who, according to her assessment, display deficits in moral understanding and behaviour ‘in the absence of other major cognitive impairments’ (pp.138-9). Marsh further suggests that we should shift the discussion from questions of how psychopathy impacts upon moral judgments more generally to an exploration into which kinds of moral judgments are affected by the disorder (p.141).

In keeping with this suggestion, Marsh begins by observing that the differences between the moral verdicts of psychopaths and non-psychopaths are most pronounced in moral judgments that crucially depend upon responding to a victim’s fear or distress (pp.146-7). She further notes that studies reliably indicate that psychopaths have an impaired capacity to experience fear as well as an impaired capacity to recognise this particular emotion in others (p.147). Drawing on these results, Marsh speculates that psychopaths’ impaired empathetic responsiveness to others’ distress may be due to the fact that their diminished or absent capacity for fear renders them unable to recognise or comprehend fear in others. And it is this empathetic impairment that renders them incapable of forming the appropriate concerned response (p.152). She concludes that these results suggest a difficulty in interpreting psychopaths’ moral reasoning deficits as somehow connected with a more general deficit in rationality (p.154).

## Psychopathic incompetence: affective and cognitive

Although Marsh is right to emphasise the impoverished affective inner-life of individuals diagnosed with psychopathy, it seems mistaken to downplay the irrationality which accompanies—and likely stems from—their particular emotional deficit in experiencing, recognising and responding to fear. A good deal of evidence tells against a portrait of the psychopath as lacking ‘major cognitive impairments’: psychopathic subjects often exhibit behaviour which is ‘impulsive, disorganised and self-destructive’ (Kennett 2002, p.354), they are notably impaired in their capacity to make effective prudential judgments (Elliott 1992, p.210), and most never complete their education or establish successful careers due to difficulty in investing mental effort (Maibom 2005, p.237). Various tell-tale signs of practical irrationality are a consistent finding of experimental investigations into the disorder (Hare, 1993; Blair et al., 2001) and this would seem to provide good reason to resist an understanding of the psychopath as a moral monster with intact cognitive functioning.

Of course, such studies need not speak against the thesis of sentimentalism—the view that emotions are essential to moral competence—to which Marsh believes empirical



investigations into psychopathy lend support. For there is good reason to believe that emotion plays an important role in practical rationality. Antonio Damasio's (1994) work with patients who have sustained damage to their orbitofrontal cortex provides evidence that particular cognitive impairments can stem from emotional impairments. The cognitive deficits found within the psychopathic population, then, are likely linked to emotional deficits.

### Autism: a problem case for the posited link between psychopathic immorality and empathetic deficiency

The strategy of recruiting empirical investigations into psychopathy in support of the claim that empathetic emotion is essential to normal moral functioning is not new (Glannon 1997; Mei-Tal 2004). Marsh offers a fresh implementation of this strategy, one which attributes the empathetic deficiency of psychopaths to their incapacity to experience or recognise fear. A different pathological population, however, has recently raised questions regarding the viability of this familiar strategy: individuals with autism. High-functioning adults with autism appear to hold strong moral convictions and display normative concern despite the fact that they are in many respects remarkably worse off than psychopaths with respect to their empathetic capacities—particularly with regards to their perspective-taking abilities (McGeer 2008a, p.233). Unlike other work which has sought to draw a link between psychopathic moral deficiency and empathetic deficiency, however, Marsh's particular strategy, in emphasising the psychopaths' diminished capacity to experience rather than merely recognise fear, may prove less vulnerable to this line of response.

The fact that moral sensibilities seem able to subsist in the absence of empathetic capacities has certainly inspired many to look elsewhere for the root of the psychopath's moral failing. Kennett for example, identifies the key difference between psychopaths and individuals with autism in the latter population's capacity to remain receptive to reason. She argues that it is not a lack of empathy which primarily explains the psychopath's moral indifference, but a diminished or absent capacity to consider the reasons available to him and to act accordingly (Kennett 2002, p.354). Kennett's appeal to the autistic population—in addition to evidence which seems to support a portrait of the psychopath as not only amoral or unemotional, but positively irrational—may spell trouble not only for the link which Marsh seeks to draw between the psychopath's empathetic deficits and his moral deficits, but also for the thesis of sentimentalism to which she believes this link lends support. For one may take autistic moral agency, together with evidence of psychopathic irrationality, to point in the direction of a rival thesis (rationalism), which understands moral responsiveness as responsiveness to reason.

Importantly, Kennett's interpretation of autistic moral agency need not spell too much trouble for the sentimentalism which Marsh seems to favour. For an alternative view of moral sensibility in individuals with autism is available which identifies the bedrock of their moral competence in their unique emotional profile. Victoria McGeer argues that autistics display a passion for order which stems from the fear and anxiety that they experience in response to their social world; rules and routines carry the promise of rendering an otherwise

mysterious environment more approachable (McGeer 2008a, pp.239-40).<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, autistic moral agency may be the output of a strong emotional need to abide by moral rules. Importantly, McGeer emphasises that it is because individuals with autism are affectively invested in such rules that they are motivated to act in accordance with them; they have a strong emotional interest in living in an orderly and predictable world (McGeer 2008a, p.246).

It would be interesting to see an integration of McGeer's broadly Humean take on the moral capacities of the high-functioning autistic population and Marsh's explanation of psychopathic moral deficiency in terms of a deficiency to experience or recognise fear. For unlike psychopaths, individuals with autism are not merely capable of experiencing fear and anxiety—rather, these emotions seem to constitute frequent experiences in their affective lives (Grandin 1995 in McGeer 2008a, p.240). Individuals with autism are commonly thought to be deficient in their empathetic capacities due to a diminished theory of mind. Yet some have argued that they are able to exercise a more immediate, emotional form of empathy (de Vignemont & Frith 2008, p.275). Thus, while not capable of cognitive forms of empathy (such as perspective-taking), many individuals with autism nonetheless seem capable of a form of emotional responsiveness—specifically, they are not insensitive to the distress of others (de Vignemont & Frith 2008, p.280).

This insight would likely be congenial to Marsh's thesis, for it points towards a more fundamental explanation of moral competence—indeed, one which she herself already seems to embrace—in terms of a capacity to experience rather than merely recognise particular emotions. The evidence from investigations into psychopathy and autism seems to suggest that particular emotions (fear and anxiety among them) help to facilitate the moral apprehension of others, albeit via different psychological pathways in individuals with autism and the normal population.<sup>6</sup> Within autistic moral agency, these emotions add motivational force to the adherence to moral rules (and potentially give rise to more immediate forms of empathy), whereas within the non-pathological population, they play a valuable role in imaginative and immediate empathy alike. Accordingly, these emotions seem to constitute important elements of psychological life within creatures that are capable of some form of moral agency. This suggests that moral competence may stem from a more basic psychological foundation than full-fledged empathy; perhaps from a capacity to be affectively tuned-in to the emotional lives of others or from a particular degree of emotional responsiveness. It would be a worthwhile project for future research to examine further how a limited capacity for immediate empathy and anxiety-fuelled rule-following interact within autistic psychology to produce a particular species of moral agency which is absent in psychopaths.

<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, McGeer resists approaching autism as a case of complete moral competence in the absence of cognitive empathy. Instead, she understands autistics' 'reverence or reason' as playing a compensating role rather than as a foundation of full-fledged moral agency (2008a, p.238).

<sup>6</sup> I do not mean to suggest the implausible thesis that moral agency is constructed solely upon the capacity to experience fear and anxiety. As other contributors to the volume note, personal distress can in fact decrease helping behaviour (Batson; Spinrad & Eisenberg; Hoffman; Kaupinnen; Ugazio, Majjdandžić & Lamm). Rather, the fact that a *deficiency* in these emotions impairs moral agency within the psychopathic population and that the *presence* of these emotions plays a compensating role (re: McGeer) in the autistic population gestures towards their potential moral significance.

## Concluding remarks

*Empathy and Morality* is a work of impressive scope and ambition and makes for a valuable contribution to the ongoing investigation into the empathy-morality link. Maibom's introduction offers an excellent overview of the prominent issues in the current literature. Unfortunately, there was insufficient room here to remark upon other highlights of the volume.

Among these were Spinrad and Eisenberg's contribution, wherein they suggest that temperamental regulation skills may constitute a third variable which explains the association between empathy and social competence in children (p.66). The guiding idea comes from research which suggests that a child's capacity to exercise effortful control over emotion and behaviour can affect the kind of empathetic emotion that they experience. Since not all empathetic emotions are correlated with prosocial behaviour, the child's capacity for temperamental regulation, in influencing the character of their empathetic response, may in turn influence the character of their resultant social behaviour (p.69).

Also fascinating was Hobson and Hobson's exploration into the relationship between empathy and developing an understanding of other minds. They offer grounds for a construal of empathy as a class of personal relations comprising both cognitive and affective components, which provides a foundation upon which we apprehend other persons as persons (p.174).

Many of the insights in *Empathy and Morality* will likely prove valuable for future research, providing an impetus for both further empirical investigations into the empathy-morality link and important conceptual work on the nature of empathetic and moral capacities. The book is a worthwhile and highly recommended read for anyone interested in the empirical support available for the link between a capacity for empathy and a capacity for morality— though it arguably makes more progress in clearing up what the former amounts to than the latter.

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