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The Moral Significance of Empathy: A Scottish Sentimentalist Perspective

By Xiaolong Wang

Abstract: Which feature of human nature accounts for moral motivation? From a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective, the answer lies in our fellow feelings: empathy, the capacity for sharing what other people feel; and sympathy, the capacity for feeling concern for other people's well-being. Recently, disagreement has emerged within Scottish Sentimentalism on which of the two fellow feelings does the real work in motivating moral acts. Paul Bloom famously argues that sympathy is sufficient for moral motivation with the help of theory of mind (or often called mind reading), and thus concludes that empathy is not necessary from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective. I argue that Bloom's conclusion is too quick. With the latest views of the complicated nature of empathy, I argue that empathy is necessary for forming sympathy due to its three contributions that theory of mind cannot make: the appreciation of other people's suffering given their situation, the empathic perspective-taking that breaks the boundary between self and others, and the phenomenal knowledge of how bad other people's suffering feels. Hence, empathy is indirectly necessary for moral motivation by virtue of being directly necessary for sympathy (because sympathy is a direct necessary condition for moral motivation according to Scottish Sentimentalism). Therefore, I conclude contra Bloom that empathy is necessary, though indirectly, for moral motivation from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective.

1. Introduction

Philosophers and moral psychologists have long been interested in the nature of moral motivation. Which feature of human nature accounts for our moral motivations? Does reason, sentiment, intellectual intuition or something else motivate us to do moral things? Moral sentimentalists¹ contend that sentiments are essential for moral motivations, but disagree on which sentiments are of fundamental importance. An influential camp of sentimentalism about moral motivation argues that the sentiments essential for moral motivation are our two types of fellow feelings: empathy, the sentiment of sharing what other people feel, and sympathy², the sentiment of feeling concern for other people's well-being (at the first approximation).³ Since this camp is founded by the eighteenth-century Scottish sentimentalists such as Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith, let us call this camp the *Scottish Sentimentalism about moral motivation*⁴ (hereafter, Scottish Sentimentalism), though it is also defended by many contemporary philosophers and moral psychologists⁵.

Recently, disagreement has emerged within Scottish Sentimentalism on which one of the two fellow feelings is necessary for motivating moral behavior. The eighteenth-century sentimentalists put a strong emphasis on empathy. However, in the recent decade, the significance of empathy to moral motivation

¹ Moral sentimentalism is a general view of the importance of sentiments to morality. In this paper, I use moral sentimentalism in a narrow sense, meaning the particular sentimentalism about moral motivation. So, I will not discuss sentimentalist accounts of other moral phenomena, such as Shaun Nichols's sentimentalism about moral judgment, or Justin D'Arms and Daniel Jacobson's sentimentalism about moral concepts, etc. See respectively Nichols, Shaun. *Sentimental rules: On the natural foundations of moral judgment*. Oxford University Press, 2004, and D'Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "Sentiment and value." *Ethics* 110, no. 4 (2000): 722-748.

² Contemporary philosophers tend to use 'sympathy,' 'pity,' 'compassion,' 'concern' interchangeably, while contemporary psychologists prefer 'empathic concern.' For the sake of convenience, I will use 'sympathy' throughout the paper

³ Other sentiments of potential moral importance include self-blame emotions such as guilt and shame and other-blame emotions such as contempt, anger, disgust. See Schroeder, Timothy, Adina L. Roskies, and Shaun Nichols. "Moral motivation." In Doris, John M., and Moral Psychology Research Group. *The moral psychology handbook*. OUP Oxford, (2010), at 122

⁴ As I said in Note 1, I will not talk about sentimentalism about other moral phenomena in addition to moral motivation, and so accordingly, I will also not talk about Scottish Sentimentalism about other moral phenomena, such as Scottish Sentimentalism about moral judgment, the view that empathy and sympathy are fundamental to moral judgment. See Slote, Michael. *The ethics of care and empathy*. Routledge, (2007).

⁵ See Hoffman, Martin L. *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice*. Cambridge University Press, 2000, and "Empathy, Justice and Social Change." In *Empathy and Morality*, edited by Heidi L. Maibom, 71-96. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; Batson, C. D., Klein, T. R., Highberger, L. & L, S. L., 1995. Immorality from empathy-induced altruism: When compassion and justice conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Volume 68, pp. 1042-54; Simmons, Aaron. "In Defense of The Moral Significance of Empathy." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17, no. 1 (2014): 97-111; Persson, Ingmar, and Julian Savulescu. "The Moral Importance of Reflective Empathy." *Neuroethics* 11, no. 2 (2018): 183-193; Jefferson, William. "The Moral Significance of Empathy." PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2019.

has received severe criticism from within the camp of Scottish Sentimentalism, which started by Jesse Prinz's challenge in 2011⁶ and matured as Paul Bloom's monograph *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion*⁷ came out in 2016. The common line of argument in the criticism is that for motivating moral behavior within a sentimentalist picture, only sympathy should be promoted while empathy should be completely abandoned because empathy is not only unnecessary but also detrimental to moral motivation.

In this paper, I will raise an objection to the prominent skeptic view about the significance of empathy to moral motivation developed by Bloom, and argue that Scottish Sentimentalism must need empathy to explain moral motivation, though in an indirect way. In section 2, I will introduce Bloom's objection to the significance of empathy and his view of the importance of sympathy. In section 3, I will raise an objection to Bloom's view, arguing that he does not have the resource to explain where sympathy comes from. In section 4, I correct Bloom's mischaracterization of the nature of empathy and argue contra Bloom while sympathy can solely generate moral motivation, sympathy itself cannot be generated without empathy, and so empathy is indirectly necessary for moral motivation from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective. In section 5, I will consider three anticipated objections, and I will conclude in section 6.

2. Bloom's Skepticism About Empathy and Support for Sympathy

Among historic and contemporary philosophers and psychologists who are in favor of Scottish Sentimentalism, the concepts of empathy and sympathy have been used to refer to various fellow-feeling-related phenomena, so unsurprisingly, Bloom starts his argument with stipulations of what he means by empathy, sympathy, and other fellow-feeling-related concepts.

First, Bloom uses the concept of *empathy* to refer to "the act of feeling what you believe other people feel – experiencing what they experience."⁸ So, in Bloom's view, empathy is an affective mental state in which the empathizer experiences a feeling that is similar to what he thinks the empathized person is feeling, where the feeling that Bloom focuses on is mainly the negative feeling of physical pain and emotional distress. Second, Bloom distinguishes empathy as an affective state from theory of mind as a cognitive state⁹. By *theory of mind*,

⁶ See both Prinz, Jesse. "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?." *Empathy: Philosophical and psychological perspectives* 1 (2011): 211-229, and "Against empathy." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 49 (2011): 214-233.

⁷ Bloom, Paul. *Against empathy: The Case For Rational Compassion*. New York: HarperCollins, 2016.

⁸ *Supra* note 7, at 3.

⁹ Bloom uses 'theory of mind,' 'social cognition,' 'social intelligence,' 'mind reading,' 'mentalizing' interchangeably. (*Id.*) Bloom even thinks that 'theory of mind' is the cognitive form of empathy – namely 'cognitive empathy' that is contrasted with 'affective empathy.' But given that Bloom has clearly said that "The notion of empathy that I'm most interested in is the act of feeling what you believe other people feel— experiencing what they experience," (*Id.*, at 13) I will

Bloom means the act of understanding what's going on in the minds of other people without any contagion of feeling. That said, by theory of mind we read the thoughts, desires, feelings of other people without necessarily feeling the similar mental states in our minds, which thus makes this process of mind-reading cognitive rather than affective. Third, as most Scottish sentimentalists do, Bloom makes a distinction between empathy and *sympathy*¹⁰. To empathize with other people's feelings is to share or mirror their feelings, no matter whether their feelings are positive or negative. For example, if you are distressed, I would also feel similar distress on my end if I empathize with you. If you are happy, I will also feel happy in a similar way when empathizing with you. By contrast, instead of mirroring other people's feelings, to sympathize with other people is to feel concern for their well-being, generating a feeling of worry about their unhappiness and a feeling of wanting them to be good (physically, mentally, economically, etc.).

With these concepts in hand, we can get into Bloom's argument for his view that Scottish Sentimentalism should abandon empathy and promote sympathy. As I read Bloom, the argument has three main premises.

First, drawing on the influential psychological studies of empathy by C. Daniel Batson, Bloom argues that though empathy can generate altruistic motivation which is sometimes morally unproblematic, empathy in fact often motivates altruistic behavior in a morally objectionable way due to its biased nature. To begin with, it is sometimes questioned that empathy cannot lead to altruistic motivation because empathy with other people's distress can bring us personal distress, which tends to motivate us to distance ourselves from the distressing situation instead of being moved to help. But Batson shows that this is not the case because in his experiments, subjects are motivated to help the sufferer when empathizing with them even if it is way easier to avoid the situation than offering help.¹¹ However, Bloom argues that altruistic behavior is not equal to moral behavior because altruistic behavior can clash with significant moral considerations like justice and fairness. Further, he argues that empathy-based altruistic behavior is often morally objectionable in such a way because empathy is often biased like a spotlight and thus innumerate: we are more likely to empathize with the sufferers who are physically or relationally closer to us and so ignore those who are in more severe suffering and more urgent need from a larger populational perspective. For example, in one of Batson's experiments, for a ten-year-old girl named Sheri Summers who had a fatal disease and was waiting in line for treatment, subjects are motivated by their empathy (induced by experimenters) to help move her to the front of the line to alleviate her pain as

not use 'cognitive empathy' when reformulating Bloom's argument to avoid conceptual confusion. For a more detailed exploration of 'cognitive empathy,' see Spaulding, Shannon. "Cognitive empathy." In *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of empathy*, pp. 13-21. Routledge, 2017.

¹⁰ Bloom uses 'compassion' and 'concern' most often while only using 'sympathy' and 'pity' for several times in his book. For convenience, I will stick to 'sympathy' in this paper.

¹¹ See Batson, C. D., Klein, T. R., Highberger, L. & L, S. L., 1995. Immorality from empathy-induced altruism: When compassion and justice conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Volume 68, pp. 1042-54.

soon as possible even if they were told that ahead of Sheri there were other children who were presumably more deserving, which is obvious injustice to other children.¹²

Second, Bloom further argues that Scottish Sentimentalists should not worry about abandoning empathy because sympathy combined with theory of mind is sufficient for moral motivation. To be motivated to help others within a sentimentalist picture, one needs to 1) know what others need or suffer and 2) feel the motive to help satisfy their need or alleviate their suffering. Empathy is able to motivate us to help (though often in a morally objectionable way) because it makes us 1) know what others feel by generating a similar feeling on our end, and 2) feel the motive to help others which comes from the similar feeling we have on our end¹³. But according to Bloom, these two jobs of empathy can be smoothly taken over by theory of mind and sympathy respectively. By theory of mind, we 1) read what others need or suffer from their behavioral, linguistic, facial cues without necessarily having a similar mental state. By sympathy, we 2) feel the motive to help others because sympathy itself is a feeling of concern for other people's well-being and a feeling of wanting other people to be good.

Third, the combination of sympathy and theory of mind can not only take over the function of empathy but also do better than empathy. According to Bloom, on the one hand, although both empathy and sympathy can be affected by spotlight bias, sympathy is more diffuse and tamable than empathy. Sympathy is more diffuse in the sense that we can form concern for a large number of people or an abstract issue such as environmental protection which is hard to be empathized with. Sympathy is more tamable in the sense that it is less immune to voluntary self-control while more compliant to the guidance of reason. On the other hand, similarly, theory of mind can provide us with the knowledge of what's going on in others' minds from a distanced perspective that does not get us emotionally involved too much in the sufferer's distress so that we are less likely to be biased due to the strong empathic emotions.

3. The Problem For Bloom: Where Does Sympathy Come From?

In the last section, we have seen that Bloom argues that Scottish Sentimentalism should replace empathy with sympathy plus theory of mind because the latter is sufficient for moral motivation and can even motivate moral behaviors in a more controllable, rational and non-biased way. Although I seriously doubt this is the case¹⁴, I argue that even if empathy turns out to be more untamable, irrational and biased, Bloom's view is still problematic, and thus Scottish Sentimentalism cannot abandon empathy in explaining moral motivation.

A starter to see how Bloom goes astray is to consider a significant but

¹² *Id.*

¹³ I will explain how this is so later in section 4.

¹⁴ For similar objections to Bloom in this direction, see Persson and Savulescu (2018), and Zaki, Jamil. "Moving Beyond Stereotypes of Empathy." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 21(2) (2017): 59–60.

unanswered question in Bloom's view: where does sympathy come from?¹⁵ If sympathy is the act of feeling concern for other people, how could we be concerned about someone who has nothing to do with us? Perhaps Bloom could reply that though we tend to sympathize with those who are closer to us, we could extend our concern to strangers through moral reasoning. For instance, maybe we can generalize from our concern for people of importance to us to reach an idea that all persons are worthy of our concern.¹⁶ However, this still does not answer where our previous concern for people close to us comes from, namely what makes us sympathize with people close to us.

It seems that the most available resource for Bloom's sentimentalism to explain the source of sympathy is theory of mind that he uses together with sympathy to explain moral motivation. Again, theory of mind refers to our ability to read what's going on in others' minds without feeling similar mental states in our minds. So, theory of mind appears to be able to promote sympathy by helping us see that others are in pain or distress, which gives us reason to feel concern for the sufferers.

However, theory of mind itself is never sufficient to generate sympathy for other people. Consider the most extreme case: psychopathy, a mental disorder associated with traits such as persistent violent and antisocial behavioral tendencies, impaired emotion systems, boldness, selfishness, etc.¹⁷ It has been established in abnormal psychology that psychopaths have no trouble in their capacity for theory of mind: they do well in reading other minds through bodily cues, which is often a means for them to exploit other people effectively for egoistic purposes.¹⁸ However, psychopaths systematically lack sympathy for other people even if they can recognize their pain and distress, which means theory of mind is not sufficient for sympathy for other people.

Then, what deficiency explains the lack of sympathy and moral concern in psychopaths? Although it seems psychologists have not explored the cause of psychopaths' lack of sympathy in particular, there is a rich literature on what deficiency of psychopaths explain their failure to understand moral right and wrong, which I think can shed light on what causes lack of sympathy in psychopaths, given that their failure to understand moral norms is often characterized (perhaps from a sentimentalist perspective) as knowing what is

¹⁵ Persson and Savulescu (2018) also recognize this problem of Bloom's view and propose empathy as the solution to it. However, my view in section 4 differs from their proposal in two important ways. For one, we disagree on what real empathy is. For another, we disagree on how empathy is necessary for empathy.

¹⁶ See Gopnik, Alison. *The Philosophical Baby: What Children's Minds Tell Us About Truth, Love and the Meaning Of Life*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009, at 209.

¹⁷ Maibom, Heidi. "Psychopathy: Morally incapacitated persons." *Handbook of the Philosophy of Medicine* (2017): 1131-1144.

¹⁸ See Felisberti, Fatima Maria, and Robert King. "Mind-Reading in altruists and psychopaths." In *Neuroscience and Social Science*, pp. 121-140. Springer, Cham, 2017. Richell, Rebecca A., Derek GV Mitchell, C. Newman, A. Leonard, Simon Baron-Cohen, and R. James R. Blair. "Theory of mind and psychopathy: can psychopathic individuals read the 'language of the eyes'?" *Neuropsychologia* 41, no.5 (2003): 523-526.

morally right and wrong in an undedicated way, namely without being concerned about living up to that moral knowledge. As Heidi L. Maibom¹⁹ recently surveyed, although there has not been a unanimous agreement among psychologists on what is responsible for psychopaths failing to understand moral right and wrong, a popular view claims that the deficient emotions are the real answer, of which the best candidate is often thought to be the *deficient empathy* of psychopaths.

Enlightened by these psychopath studies, I think that empathy is a good candidate for answering Bloom's unanswered question about where sympathy comes from. But although these psychopath studies *suggest* a close relationship between empathy and sympathy, the discoveries are not decisive.²⁰ Hence, I must provide a philosophical argument for the significance of empathy to sympathy that does not rely on the current controversial psychological studies.

4. Why Is Empathy Necessary for Sympathy

To see how empathy is necessary for sympathy, we need to first correct Bloom's mischaracterization of empathy. Recall that by 'empathy' Bloom means feeling what one believes other people feel, namely an affective state in which the empathizer experiences a feeling that is similar to what he thinks another one is feeling. This characterization lowers the bar of empathy too much. Consider the following case.

John and Amanda are roommates. One day, John excitedly told Amanda that his boss assigns an important design task to him so that he got the precious chance to impress his boss and get a promotion. However, whenever Amanda comes back home, she sees John relaxing instead of working. She asks John when he expects he can finish the design, and John always says to finish it on the next day. One night in the next week, John comes to Amanda's room to complain in deep frustration that his boss does not like his work and the promotion is finally offered to his colleague. John's emotional distress is so strong that it evokes interpersonal emotional contagion, and thus Amanda feels a similar episode of distress affected by the emotional contagion. However, despite the felt similar distress, Amanda does not think John's frustration makes sense because in her eyes, John is responsible for his failure given that he did not make enough effort to work on the design.

For this case, no matter whether John has made enough efforts to finish the task, would we like to say that Amanda is empathizing with John's frustration when having a similar feeling of frustration? I think we would not. The basic attitude of Amanda is to deny John's distress as an appropriate response to his situation. In other words, Amanda is averse to John's distress instead of appreciating it. As a result, we can expect that Amanda would not show any

¹⁹ *Supra* note 17, at 1118.

²⁰ *Id.*, at 1119.

concern for John's loss of promotion or give any comforting words, but rather would be more likely to keep silent or even (perhaps mildly) blame John for insufficient efforts. Thus, in the first place, real empathy requires the empathizer to appreciate other people's feeling as appropriate (or fitting, proper) given their situation, which dates back to one of the founders of Scottish Sentimentalism Adam Smith²¹, and has recently become one of the latest consensuses on the conditions of empathy.²²

Further clarification about how we feel what other people feel in empathy is also needed. As we just saw in the John case, emotional contagion – the phenomenon where one's emotion is so strong that it directly passes to or bleeds onto another person – is unreliable for empathy because it is often independent of our evaluation of the appropriateness of other people's feeling. Then, what makes us feel what other people feel in empathy? The answer is a unique kind of perspective-taking, the act of imagining ourselves being other people and figuring out what we as them would feel in the given situation. For example, Amanda might imagine what she would feel if she becomes John in his situation. By imagining that she as John gets an important task from her employer, sets herself a goal of finishing the task beautifully and so getting a promotion, but later wastes time on weekdays and finally fails to impress her employer, Amanda can feel shameful because she thinks that she was too lazy to live up to her own standard. This is how imaginative perspective-taking can generate an empathic feeling. Notice that in this new scenario, we are entitled to say that Amanda feels empathy for John, but Amanda feels empathy for John not because she has a similar episode of distress with John affected by emotional contagion, but because she feels shame for John, which is a feeling that she believes to be appropriate for John to feel in his situation despite John did not feel it.²³

With these clarifications, we can see that real empathy is more complicated than some Scottish sentimentalists like Bloom characterize, which is probably the main reason why empathy is undervalued in generating moral motivation. As we see, empathy has an affective component of feeling an appropriate emotion. It has cognitive components of recognizing the empathized person's situation and imagining being the empathized person. It also has an evaluative component of figuring out what is appropriate for the empathized person to feel in her situation. So, we now get a mature view of what real empathy is:

Real empathy is to feel what one believes to be appropriate for other people to feel in their situation through imagining being them and figuring out what one would feel in their situation.

²¹ Smith, Adam. *The theory of moral sentiments*. Penguin, 2010.

²² See Maibom, Heidi Lene, ed. *The Routledge handbook of philosophy of empathy*. New York: Routledge, 2017, at 2.

²³ Hence, real empathy does not need a perfect affective match between the empathizer and the empathized. See Schwan, David. "Does Affective Empathy Require Perspective-Taking or Affective Matching?." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2019): 277-288.

With the correct view of empathy in hand, now we can get into the core question: for Scottish Sentimentalis like Bloom, how is empathy helpful in filling the gap between theory of mind and sympathy? I argue that compared to theory of mind, the contribution of empathy to the formation of sympathy is three-fold.

First, while theory of mind only gives us descriptive knowledge of what's going on in other minds, empathy involves an appreciation of the empathized person's feeling (if it is appropriate) in light of the given situation, which clears people's potential aversive or indifferent attitude to the empathized person's feeling due to an incomplete understanding of her situation. We can see how this is so by tweaking the Amanda-John case one more time. Other things being equal, suppose that it happens that Amanda comes back home whenever John is having a fast break between hard work. So, John in fact made a lot of efforts to finish the design task but Amanda mistakenly believes that he did not. Also, the fact is that John's boss does not like his work because of some bad discrimination, of which both John and Amanda are ignorant. Then, after John knows that he messed up and comes back to complain about his boss with Amanda, she recognizes that John is in distressful frustration by inferring from his behavioral, linguistic, facial cues. But due to her misunderstanding of the situation, Amanda fails to empathize with John in the sense that she does not appreciate his frustration. So, her aversive attitude to John's frustration remains all the time, which motivates her to tend to blame John and so blocks her from sympathizing with him.

Nonetheless, the appreciation of the empathized person's feeling is just a necessary condition that does suffice for sympathy. So, we should go on to find more features of empathy to explain the formation of sympathy for other people.

Second, while theory of mind provides us with the knowledge of what's going on in other minds in a distanced way, empathy relates other people's feeling to ourselves through the unique kind of perspective-taking so that it motivates us to be concerned about other people's feeling just like our own.²⁴ As we can see in the cold-blooded people (not necessarily psychopaths), there is a boundary between others and self lying in the gap between theory of mind and sympathy for other people. The cold-blooded people have no difficulty in reading other minds and recognizing others' pain and distress, but this often means nothing to them because it is other people's suffering instead of their own. By contrast, empathy can help break the boundary between self and others at least to some extent. In empathizing with other people in suffering, we imagine being them and thus getting into their situation, which in some sense generated an experienter in which we and the empathized person are unified. Then, we as the unified experienter realize how bad that situation is, and what kind of reaction we would

²⁴ It might be objected that theory of mind can also involve perspective-taking, which is often called 'simulation' in philosophy of mind. So my argument might be said to be unfair to supporters of theory of mind like Bloom. However, I will argue later in section 4 that empathy does more than just perspective-taking because empathy can provide us with the phenomenal knowledge of how bad other people's suffering feels that can strengthen the reason for sympathizing them, which cannot be guaranteed by perspective-taking.

appropriately have in that situation – say, pain and distress. Since in imagination we become the unified experiencer, the pain and distress falling on the empathized person also falls on us through our imagination, and hence evokes our sympathy for ourselves, namely feeling concern for our unhappiness. Finally, since our sympathy is formed when we are as the unified experiencer, that sympathy is not only directed at my well-being but also the well-being of the empathized person as another part of the unified experiencer. Therefore, through this emotionally charged perspective-taking, empathy helps us to extend the sympathy for our own well-being to other people’s well-being.

Third, empathy also generates a vivid affective feeling – often pain and distress, echoing the empathized person’s suffering – that helps us learn how bad the empathized person feels and thus strengthens the reason to show concern for her. In fact, this has been partly mentioned in the last paragraph when I talk about how emotionally charged empathic perspective-taking can direct our sympathy for ourselves to other people, but the significance of the affective feature of empathy is worth discussing independently because it is an important feature that not only theory of mind (as we saw in the last paragraph) but also general perspective-taking might not have.

In general perspective-taking, we imagine being other people and figuring out what they are feeling, but this process could be done in a non-affective way in which we end up knowing what others feel in an abstract manner. For example, we can imagine right now being some victims, figuring out what we would feel, namely great pain and distress and thus attribute them to the victims. But we could take such a perspective without necessarily having a similar kind of pain and distress in our mind. As a result, we have no idea of *how bad that pain and distress feel*, and so feel less motivated to show sympathetic concern for their suffering. By contrast, empathy requires one to stand in a closer position to the empathized person – acquired often by being exposed to details as rich as possible about the situation of the empathized person, delivered by witnessing, narratives, videos – to an extent that the position is close enough for the empathizer to actually feel the affective state that she inferred from imaginative perspective-taking. And compared to theory of mind and general perspective-taking, the significance of this affective feeling of empathy is that it offers us a piece of *phenomenal knowledge about how bad other people’s suffering feels* and thus strengthens the reason to show (more) sympathetic concern for them, provided we have already felt the reason to show sympathy to them by unifying ourselves and the empathized targets in the empathic perspective-taking. Thus, the affective feature of empathy serves as a significant supplement to the empathic perspective-taking, strengthening our willingness to show (more) sympathy for the empathized person.²⁵

²⁵ For a more detailed defense of how the affective feature of empathy contributes to moral motivation in this way, see Jefferson, William. “The Moral Significance of Empathy.” PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2019. For other defenses of the significance of affective feature of empathy, see Simmons (2014) and Marshall, Colin. *Compassionate Moral Realism*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

If my argument for the three-fold necessary contribution of empathy to sympathy is correct, Bloom's view will be in danger. To clarify, I agree with Bloom that sympathy together with theory of mind can be sufficient for specific moral motivations from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective. After all, there are so many everyday cases where we can be motivated to do the morally good thing without empathizing with the target; for example, when a mother sees her child drowning in the water, she would be immediately motivated to save her child simply out of her sympathy and concern for her child together with her awareness that her child is in danger gained by theory of mind. However, this does not mean that Scottish Sentimentalism should abandon empathy, for I have argued that *empathy is indirectly necessary for moral motivation in that empathy is necessary for the formation of sympathy, and sympathy (together with theory of mind) is further necessary and sufficient for moral motivation in a Scottish Sentimentalist view*. Therefore, if my view is correct, Bloom would be wrong in claiming that we are morally better off without empathy, for we would not be concerned about anything and anyone without empathy, even if empathy might sometimes lead to morally objectionable acts that cannot be controlled and guided by reason (which I doubt).

5. Three Anticipated Objections

The first anticipated objection to my argument asks: if I agree with Bloom that sympathy (together with theory of mind) can be sufficient to generate specific moral motivations without empathy, doesn't that mean empathy is not necessary for sympathy in specific cases? If so, in what sense are the three-fold contributions of empathy necessary for sympathy?

Let me begin by adding a minor distinction regarding sympathy. Recall that I use 'sympathy' in the same way with Bloom, which means the act of feeling concern for other people's well-being. Now let us distinguish *sympathy* from *sympathetic concern*: the former is a specific short-term episode of feeling concern for something (e.g., a social issue) or someone, while the latter is a long-term mental state of being concerned about something or someone. With this distinction in hand, we can see that my argument for the three-fold contribution of empathy to sympathy only means to show that empathy is necessary for the *initial formation of a sympathetic concern* instead of every specific short-term episode of sympathy in which we feel the pre-existing sympathetic concern for other people. That said, I am arguing that we cannot form any long-term sympathetic concern without empathy providing us the appreciation of others' feelings, the empathic perspective-taking as a breaker of the boundary between self and others, and the phenomenal knowledge about how bad others' suffering feels, though I admit that once a long-term sympathetic concern has formed based on empathy, it can generate specific episodes of sympathy later together with theory of mind without the help of empathy. For example, Oscar has never been concerned about the social issue of sexual harassment against women until he happens to watch a documentary illustrating the narrative details of women's experience of being sexually harassed. With the help of those narrative details, Oscar forms strong

empathy with the women victims, which generates a firm, stable long-term sympathetic concern for the sexual harassment issue. Later he becomes a lawyer engaged with supporting sexual harassment victims. In his job, he shows sympathy to every victim he assists, but he does not feel much empathy anymore to avoid being too distressed to work efficiently. So, although empathy can be unnecessary for every specific episode of sympathy and moral motivation, it is necessary for the formation of the long-term sympathetic concern.

The second anticipated objection questions that it seems we are willing to empathize with those in suffering because we have already had a concern for their well-being, instead of the other way around.²⁶ For people who have already had concern for a kind of issue or a person, empathy can help them discover more problems and suffering that they want to deal with; but for people lacking the concern for a particular issue or person in the first place, the recognition of the problem or suffering seems to only bother them instead of triggering their sympathy.

I have two replies to this objection. First, the idea that sympathetic concern which already existed can promote empathy is compatible with my view. Back to the Oscar example. We see that the developed sympathetic concern for sexual harassment issue makes Oscar become a lawyer engaged with assisting sexual harassment victims, and thus makes him more likely to be exposed to victims and empathizing with them, though Oscar chooses to suppress his empathic distress later for the sake of offering more professional assistance.

But second, the benefit of sympathetic concern to empathy does not mean that the initial formation of sympathetic concern can develop without empathy. In fact, an implicit assumption behind the given objection to my view is that empathy can only be intentional and effortful, which is thus taken to require a pre-existing sympathetic concern or general kindness. However, this assumption is problematic. On the one hand, empathy could be (and maybe is often) triggered passively, automatically, unconsciously. In Batson's influential experimental studies of the association between empathy and moral motivation, the experiment is cleverly designed in a way that makes the suffering salient enough so that it is hard to ignore. As a result, although it is the first time for the subjects to meet the sufferer in the experiment, most of them are found to have different degrees of empathic reactions to the sufferer.²⁷ We can also see passive and unintentional empathy in the Oscar case in which Oscar happens to watch the sexual harassment documentary and thus unintentionally forms empathy with the victims.

On the other hand, in cognitive science, the latest study of the development of fellow feelings shows that empathy does develop prior to sympathy. As

²⁶ It seems that Bloom also would like to make this objection, though he uses a way more general concept 'kindness' instead of 'sympathy' or 'concern' in particular in the book. "It's not that empathy itself automatically leads to kindness. Rather, empathy has to connect to kindness that already exists. Empathy makes good people better, then, because kind people don't like suffering, and empathy makes this suffering salient." *Supra* note 7, at 66.

²⁷ *Supra* note 11.

Spaulding et al²⁸ survey, the development of fellow feelings starts with the emergence of emotional contagion at birth, followed by personal distress affected by recognizing other people's suffering very early. Then, the real empathy capacity – namely affective perspective-taking abilities – develops sometime in the two-year-olds (though it is only directed at other people's simple emotions in simple contexts). For instance, as shown in the experiments done by Denham (1986)²⁹ and Vaish et al³⁰, the two-year-olds start to emotionally attribute correct emotional reactions through perspective-taking because the targets do not display apparent emotional cues to the babies in the experiments. Unsurprisingly, the capacity for theory of mind and sympathy develops later than empathy. In particular, it is argued that the capacity for sympathy is relatively late-developing because it requires more mental mechanisms, including perspective-taking, theory of mind, the awareness of self in contrast to others, and emotional self-regulation.

The last anticipated objection is also somehow inspired by Bloom. It seems that Bloom wants to agree that past empathy is needed for generating sympathy from theory of mind, though this seems to be inconsistent with his claim that “on balance, we are better off without it (empathy).”³¹ He writes:

“There is a world of difference, after all, between understanding the misery of the person who is talking to you because you have felt misery in the past, even though now you are calm, and understanding the misery of the person who is talking to you because you are mirroring them and feeling their misery right now. The first, which doesn't involve empathy in any sense, just understanding, has all the advantages of the second and none of its costs.”³²

In light of this, perhaps what Bloom proposes is not to eliminate empathy from the start, but rather the idea that we should no longer use empathy to motivate moral behaviors after it has generated the long-term sympathetic concern which is sufficient for morality with the help of theory of mind. However, this modification of Bloom's proposal is still problematic. As I have argued in section 4, one of the contributions of empathy is to provide us with an appreciation of other people's suffering after we recognize their situation, which is important for us to form concern for new social issues. Recall the Oscar example. He lives in an era that witnessed the revolution of the social concern of sexual harassment, which was a new issue to him when he first learned about it. If Scottish Sentimentalists follow

²⁸ Spaulding, Shannon, Rita Svetlova, and Hannah Read. “The Nature of Empathy.” in *Philosophy of Neuroscience*, edited by Felipe De Brigard and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, MIT Press, forthcoming.

²⁹ Denham, Susanne A. 1986. "Social cognition, prosocial behavior, and emotion in preschoolers: Contextual validation." *Child development*:194-201.

³⁰ Vaish, Amrisha, Malinda Carpenter, and Michael Tomasello. 2009. "Sympathy through affective perspective taking and its relation to prosocial behavior in toddlers." *Developmental psychology* 45(2):534

³¹ *Supra* note 7, at 33.

³² *Supra* note 7, at 130.

Bloom's proposal, they cannot ask Oscar to use empathy anymore when watching the documentary provided that Oscar has formed almost all the basic sympathetic concern. If so, although Oscar might recognize the victims' suffering by theory of mind, he cannot appreciate their distress as appropriate given the detailed reports of their situation. So, as I have argued in section 4, Oscar would not form sympathetic concern that changes his life without using empathy. Similarly, since new social issues would come up with the development of human society, especially technologies, we still need to continue to use empathy for forming sympathetic concern for new social issues.

6. Conclusion

The main project of this book has been focused on whether Scottish Sentimentalists about moral motivation should abandon the fellow feeling of empathy in explaining moral motivation. I began the exploration by considering Bloom's skepticism about the significance of empathy to moral motivation. Bloom argues that sympathy is sufficient for moral motivation with the help of theory of mind, and that empathy often motivates altruistic behaviors in a morally objectionable way that goes against justice and fairness, and therefore concludes that we are better off without empathy from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective.

Then, I made a diagnosis of Bloom's view, arguing that Bloom does not answer where sympathy comes from, and that theory of mind as the most available resource for him is not sufficient to generate sympathy. Enlightened by psychological studies of the association between lack of empathy and lack of moral concern in psychopaths, I explored whether empathy can explain the formation of sympathy. I first correct Bloom's mischaracterization of empathy by adopting the latest consensus on the nature of empathy: real empathy is to feel what one believes to be appropriate for other people to feel in their situation through imagining being them and figuring out what one would feel in their situation. Then I provided my central argument for the idea that empathy is necessary for sympathy (or rather, sympathetic concern) by making three contributions that theory of mind cannot make: the appreciation of other people's suffering given their situation, the empathic perspective-taking that breaks the boundary between self and others, and the phenomenal knowledge of how bad other people's suffering feels. Hence, since empathy is necessary for sympathy, and sympathy is both necessary and sufficient (together with theory of mind) for moral motivation from a Scottish Sentimentalist perspective, I conclude that empathy is indirectly necessary for moral motivation, and therefore Scottish Sentimentalists about moral motivation cannot abandon empathy.

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