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EMPATHY: ITS NATURE, DETERMINANTS, AND IMPORTANCE FOR MORAL DECISION-MAKING

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1983

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(with John Brent) "The Empathic Apologist." Currents in Theology and Mission (April, 1983).

FIELDS OF STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

When I began this study, I was interested in learning about how moral reasoning operates as a form of cognitive activity: how does moral reasoning differ from other ways in which humans think and deliberate? I quickly discovered that each normative ethical theorist purports to offer an explanation of what it is to morally reason. I decided to take one step higher to the so-called "meta-level"--in search of a theory-neutral description of the use of moral language and concepts which might tell me more about moral reasoning. Here, too, I discovered that there were numerous theories, both in the disciplines of philosophy and psychology. Among these were intuitionism, emotivism and prescriptivism and, from the psychologists' quarter, the Freudian theory and Kohlberg-Piaget cognitive-developmentalism. One item, I noticed, was in considerable dispute amongst these theorists, and perhaps represented a pivotal area of inquiry which could help to decide between these versions of meta-ethics. This was the question of how reason is affected by, and interacts with the emotions in moral reasoning. Are there generalizations which can be made
in this regard, even across the span of competing normative theories? I quickly discovered that, in seeking to find some clues to the nature of moral reasoning, I had opened Pandora's Box by turning to the emotions. This is because the nature of emotional phenomena is no more clear than is the nature of moral reasoning. It turns out that the nature of the emotions involves multiple and complex issues in philosophy of mind—and of course every psychological theory purports to offer its own unique explanation of how humans function emotionally. Far from discovering a theory-neutral source of knowledge, I had merely moved from one smoke-filled room to another.

As my concern was now how reason and the emotions relate—specifically in the area of moral reasoning, I turned to psychological attitude theory in search of an interpretive model which might help to synthesize some of the data and settle some disputes. The attitude model was useful in that having an attitude appears to involve both beliefs, feelings (affect), and a tendency to act in certain directions. This, at least, seems to be the dominant current conception of attitudes, though again I discovered that psychologists have found it difficult to agree on this matter (in fact, many of the differences in how to conceive of an attitude turned out to run parallel to the general disagreements concerning psychological explanation and the nature of the emotions).
Unfortunately, attitude theory, as primarily a department of social psychology, tended to study mainly the expression of attitudes in public opinion polls, voting behavior, etc. Some studies of attitude change, and a few highly speculative papers delved into the internal dynamics of attitudes (e.g., how beliefs and affect relate to each other as individuals come to form, maintain and change attitudes); however, from a philosophical standpoint, these were disappointingly imprecise and difficult to apply to moral reasoning.

I finally decided that it was fruitless to attempt to resolve anything by studying such broad phenomena as the relation of reason to the emotions-in-general. I settled upon choosing one specific form of emotional response for which there is good evidence of a connection of some kind to moral reasoning and behavior. This particular emotional response is that of empathy. Numerous philosophers from Hume onwards have argued that humans have an innate social "sensitivity" which plays a significant role in their moral thinking and development; Adam Smith spoke of "principles in [Man's] nature which interest him in the fortune of others." This is the phenomenon of empathic response, in which the emotional distress of another person somehow comes to affect the subject in such a way as to lead to forms of "prosocial" or helping-behavior on behalf of the other person. The
tendency to respond in this way—apparently more pronounced in some than others, but generally pervasive—certainly seemed relevant to moral reasoning. I turned, then, to the study of empathy as a form of emotional response which appears to have some special kind of relevance to moral thinking. The following pages represent the fruits of this study.

My concern throughout the following chapters is: where and how does (and should) empathic responsiveness affect moral decision-making? By moral decision-making, I mean especially those instances in which an individual devotes some portion of his cognitive capacities to deciding whether an action or state of affairs is to be viewed as right or wrong. I do not intend, in speaking of it in this way, to assert that the process is entirely cognitive (this would be to beg the question of this study). Nor do I intend to keep moral decision-making entirely absent from practical reasoning or deliberation. The picture of individuals reflecting at great length upon relatively abstract issues and making refined moral judgements apart from any actual tendency to behave in regard to them may be a good way to portray moral philosophers at work, but it does not provide a sufficiently broad sample of moral reasoning to get at the nature of what it is to think and make decisions in moral terms. My study of empathy—particularly its likely ontogeny in
primitive human societies--confirmed this prejudice, and compelled me to bring considerations concerning the influence of behavior outcomes into the study of moral reasoning. To put it another way, while everyone knows that moral reasoning is generally engaged in for the purpose of eventually arriving at a policy of action, the reasoning process itself is often understood in terms of the search for certain generalized characteristics or qualities of proposed policies which qualify them as being the morally-acceptable policies. I am not convinced that this approach to understanding moral reasoning, whether expressed in a Kantian, utilitarian or intuitionist normative theory (among others) adequately captures the motivational thrust of moral reasoning.

Working with a broad sample of moral reasoning activity--both sociologically and historically--we are compelled to raise questions about the "impulse" to view things morally, and the ways in which this original impulse colors the moral reasoning which results from it. In this study, I argue that empathy plays an important part, contributing to the original impulse to moral thinking. This is, of course, not a new approach--Hume's discussion of sympathy comes to mind immediately as its historical precursor. A great deal of attention will be given to Hume's discussion, as it is still one of the most distinguished and provocative defenses of
this thesis. I do not think, however, that Hume was careful enough in defining "sympathy". At a crucial point, he assumed its relation to benevolence, and thus begged the question at the pivot point on which turns his entire explanation of the origin of morality. Possibly, Hume may have made this mistake because of his dependence upon a primitive, mechanistic approach to psychological processes which oversimplified questions of motivation. Nevertheless, with corrections, I think that Hume's theory can be saved: he was essentially right, even though he had some of the details (albeit crucial ones) wrong.

Empathy is a concept for which too much has been claimed and not enough is known. This study strives for a more precise notion of what it is to empathize. As noted, the study will engage in considerable interaction with Hume's discussion, attempting to offer support for it while correcting it at crucial points. I have sought to integrate recent psychological investigations into the origins and nature of empathy, while also relying heavily upon insights from current sociobiological research. While I am aware of the great controversy which surrounds sociobiology in general, I believe that sociobiologists are able to offer the best explanation for certain observed characteristics of the empathic response. If one accepts the sociobiological
explanation of empathy and then returns to Hume's thesis concerning the importance of empathy (he called it symp¬athy) one is able to make some intriguing and hopeful¬ly compelling speculations concerning the role which empathy played in the origin of moral reasoning.

My conclusions, put briefly, are as follows. Em¬pathy is of great explanatory value in relation to the ontogeny of moral attitudes and moral language (cf. Hume). The relatively pervasive experience of empathy contributed to that degree of intersubjective agreement in personal evaluations of (some) actions to bring about the eventual evolution of a special class of evaluations—moral ones. Moral attitudes were those concerning which individuals came to expect agreement from others; moral language arose to express these attitudes and to make claims on the behavior of others. Only much later did there evolve a distinct notion of the "moral point of view," accompanied by the various attempts to understand and bolster moral beliefs by rational appeals to various characteristics of actions, policies, individuals, etc. The emotivist theory of moral attitudes and language is a lovely description of primitive man's moralizing habits; empathy played a major role in the "emotive" character of these habits.

Taking a great leap chronologically to the present day, we find ourselves now having the ability to argue
about the meaning of moral terms, the correct normative theory, and other questions totally foreign to the originating conditions of morality. Empathy remains a pervasive response pattern, but having been programmed for Prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies, it has only limited use in generating applicable moral attitudes today. As a result of the expanded learning experiences and the complexity of modern social institutions, empathic responsiveness is affected by a certain selectivity and idiosyncrasy which makes it highly unreliable as a source of non-partial moral guidance. It was never all that specific a guide anyway, and was certainly never inerrant. I have refrained, therefore, from putting forward an "Empathic Theory of Ethics"; empathy is ill-suited to serve as a normative ethical theory tie-breaker. Rather, I suggest that the experience of empathic distress functions more appropriately as a prima facie "cue" to the exercise of moral concern. The experience of empathic distress is a sign that a fellow-species member is in trouble. As moral attitudes were correlated early on with empathy, so now the experience of empathic distress should be at least a prima facie cue to moral concern and possible intervention. Moral decision-making by appeal to normative theories may be supplemented by taking the empathic point of view and considering therein the effects of a
proposed action or policy on those who would stand to be affected. The plight of others is thus vicariously given access to the psyche of the subject, where it can condition the attitudes and emotions which often (overtly) influence moral reasoning.

Perhaps the most important role which empathy can play, then, is in bringing, often in an unintended or relatively involuntary way, the sufferings and plight of others to one's attention. This provides an important antidote for the exaggerated individualism and rationalism of modern, and especially Western, Man. Its contribution thereby may be in offering a stimulus, as well as a certain realism to moral reasoning. Thus, I conclude by arguing that despite its many post-Pleistocene limitations, the development of empathic skills is nevertheless to be recommended. Training in empathy should be a part of any moral education program, and in general, the empathic response should be given heed, despite the antiquity of its originating conditions. There is no indication in contemporary society that humans have transcended the need for a native inclination to be affected by the needs and to come to the aid of their fellows. Empathy should not be suppressed, but rewarded and encouraged.
CHAPTER I

DEFINING EMPATHY

The concern of this chapter will be to establish parameters for the use of the term "empathy." Though the term originally denoted a fairly specific phenomenon, its usage has become contaminated in recent years with applications to related kinds of phenomena which are questionably "empathic" in terms of the original use of the word. The term is often used interchangeably with a number of other terms, such as "sympathy," "pity," and "identification;" this has tended to erode the consensus as to what is being referred to when the word is used. In this chapter, we will seek to trim the use of the term back to approximately its original meaning as a first step to understanding how empathy plays, or should play, a role in moral reasoning.

The term "empathy" came into the English language c. 1912 as a translation of the German 'Einfühlung.' Einfühlung played a central role in the Einfühlungs-theorie of the German psychologist Theodor Lipps. Einfühlung "means that when I grasp an object, as it exists and indeed must exist for me, I experience an
activity or a kind of self-activity as an attribute of the object." As one psychologist summarizes it, Lipps used 'Einfühlung' to stand for "a process in which one observes a gesture of another, imitates it, calls out through the imitation a previously experienced feeling, and then projects that feeling onto the other." Lipps saw this process as being operative in aesthetic experience.

In aesthetic Einfühlung, according to Lipps, one imaginatively attributes to the object feelings, attitudes, or activities aroused in oneself by the object's depicted surroundings. These feelings are aroused through a kind of involuntary neurophysiological response—an "aesthetic semblance." Lipps spoke of this as "kinesthetic mimicry;" he believed that certain shapes of objects and the structural configurations in which they stand have the potential to evoke involuntary muscular and nervous system reactions consisting of a kind of imitation of the forces imagined to be operant in or upon the objects. These reactions, reflected in the observer's consciousness as "inner motions," are not identified as one's own feelings, but are projected back onto the object of art. Thus, viewing a Doric column holding up a heavy stone arch is said to evoke an imitative kinesthetic reaction in the muscular and nervous systems of the observer, inclining her to attribute to the column highly anthropomorphic qualities, such as that of doggedly straining
to hold up the heavy weight. 3

Appreciation of a work of art, for Lipps, depended upon the observer's having the ability to empathize. She must have the capacity to readily "feel herself into it," projecting upon it the reactions of her own self, yet in a way which does not distract attention from the object. The object comes to have the qualities. In Lipps's earlier years, he emphasized the neuro-muscular reactions of the individual. Later, following the neo-Kantian lines of Lotze, et al., he emphasized the "apperceptive activity" of the "inner mind's eye." 4 The subject contributes from her own "vital self-feelings" as she perceives (or apperceives/constitutes) the object. Objects which seem to dynamically flow in unity or harmony with the self's own direction of activity come to be regarded with aesthetic delight. As Lipps expresses it, appreciation of a work of art is "an enjoyment that comes from this echoing, this yea-saying;" in aesthetic pleasure, "I enjoy myself in a sensuous object." 5 Critics of Lipps accused him of committing the "pathetic fallacy"—that of personifying inanimate objects.

Lipps's concept of interpersonal Einfühlung is similar. A crowd watching a game of football lean forward in their seats as the running back attempts to fight his way past the defensive line; their muscles tighten as he
is hit and loosen when he is finally brought down to the ground. In such instances, the observers note the physical state of the player and in a relatively involuntary and unconscious way participate in it by sharing what they imagine that he is presently experiencing physically. Lipps saw this kind of participatory process as the paradigm case of interpersonal empathy.

Moving from this participation in the physical states of others to a participation in the emotional states of others, Lipps suggested that Einfühlung might also stand for cases in which the observed or imagined emotions of others evoked similar reactions in observers.

The highest evocation of all arises from the sensuous appearance of the human being. We do not know how or why it happens that a glimpse of a laughing face, or a change in that contour of the face, especially the eyes and mouth, which we associate with the phrase "laughing face" should stimulate the viewer to feel gay and free and happy; and to do this in such a way that an inner attitude is assumed, or there is a surrender to this inner activity or to the action of the whole inner being. But it is a fact. This move from physical to emotional "mimicry" is not surprising if one considers that the James-Lange theory, which identified emotional experience with experienced visceral physical states, was in its heyday as the current accepted theory of emotions during the years in which Lipps first expressed his theory. In addition, the phenomenon of a vicarious experience or imitation of another's emotions was one which had already been noted.
at quite an earlier date, though the description of it travelled under another name. This was the concept of "sympathy," and it is worthwhile to briefly review the concept, as the denotation of the term "sympathy" appears to overlap considerably with the emotive application of the later term, "empathy."

Sympathy is spoken of quite often by the British moralists (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Hume, etc.), and received its most extensive treatment from David Hume and Adam Smith. In a later chapter, we will consider Hume's concept of sympathy; at this juncture, we will review the influential discussion of sympathy found in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

In introducing a section on "the sense of propriety," Adam Smith makes a now famous assertion concerning a kind of "fellow-feeling" which he believed to be the common experience of humans.

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it. Of this kind is pity or compassion, the emotion which we feel for the misery of others, when we either see it, or are made to conceive it in a very lively manner. That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it, for this sentiment, like all the other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it.
Smith denominates as pity and compassion, instances of fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Fellow-feeling directed toward any passion whatsoever is what Smith designates as "sympathy."

Smith considers a series of examples of sympathy which are instructive of what he meant by the term. His first example approximates very closely to the kind of experience Lipps regarded as paradigmatic:

When we see a stroke aimed and just ready to fall upon the leg or arm of another person, we naturally shrink and draw back our own leg or our own arm; and are hurt by it as well as the sufferer.  

A similar example which Smith considers is that of the crowd, writhing and twisting as they watch a tightrope dancer balancing above.

Another example considered by Smith more closely approximates the emotional form of empathy.

Persons of delicate fibres and a weak constitution of body complain, that in looking on the sores and ulcers which are exposed by beggars in the streets, they are apt to feel an itching or uneasy sensation in the correspondent part of their own bodies. The horror which they conceive at the misery of those wretches affects that particular part in themselves more than any other; because that horror arises from conceiving what they themselves would suffer, if they were really the wretches they are looking upon, and if that particular part in themselves was actually affected in the same miserable manner.

This latter example is again an example of physically imitating the other person. We note, though, additionally the role of the individual's imagination and the
way in which the imagined general misery and suffering of the other person appears to be vicariously experienced. As with Lipps's treatment of empathy, physical and emotional empathizing are related; thus for Smith, the experience of physical mimicry may function as a causal contributor to the experience of emotive mimicry.

An additional example suggested by Smith is one worth considering as it is one upon which Hume also relied heavily. This is the example of actors in the theater, wherein "whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator." Thus we rejoice at the deliverance of the heroes of tragedy or romance, while we grieve at their distress and "heartily go along with their resentment against those perfidious traitors who injured, abandoned, or deceived them."

It appears, then, that Adam Smith described, by the term "sympathy," a phenomenon quite similar to that spoken of as "empathy" by Theodor Lipps. Lipps was more interested (and aware of) the physiology of empathy than was Smith, though we have noted that Smith considers several examples which are similar to Lipps's "kines-thetic mimicry." The terms "sympathy," as used by Smith, and "empathy," as used by Lipps, thus appear to stand for
roughly the same kinds of phenomena. In a later section of this chapter, we will explore possible differences in nuance of the terms "empathy" and "sympathy" as these are employed in more recent ordinary discourse.

It is in its extension to the emotions that the term "empathy" came to be most widely adopted by other psychologists. This is in part because the etymology of the term (ein + fühlung; en + pathos) suggests reference to the emotions (pathos more commonly being used to refer to emotional feelings than to physical sensations). Also, British-American students, already primed by Smith's concept of sympathy, never received as full an exposure to Lipps's treatment of the aesthetic and physical aspects of Einfühlung. This was because many heard of his views only by way of the critical treatment given them by Max Scheler, who for his part was concerned only with Lipp's application of empathy to the emotions (cf. Scheler's discussion of Mitgefühl in his Wesen und Formen der Sympathie). Partly as a result, then, of its etymology and in part due to historical accident, the term "empathy" came to be applied primarily to some form of interpersonal emotional participation or imitation.

It is this application of the term "empathy" which was employed by such noted psychologists as G.W. Allport, G.H. Mead, C.H. Cooley and H.S. Sullivan. This brought the term into common parlance. But with increasing use
came increasing ambiguity. Differences amongst these psychologists as to the nature of empathy and the way in which empathic responses come to take place led to an increasing confusion as to just what empathy denoted. This is illustrated by the following set of definitions, culled from recent dictionaries of psychology and the social sciences.

**Empathy:**

1. ...the self-conscious effort to share and accurately comprehend the presumed consciousness of another person, including his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and muscular tensions, as well as their causes...the self-conscious awareness of the consciousness of others

2. A mental state in which one identifies or feels himself in the same state of mind as another person or group

3. A term used for the endeavor to add to extraneous behavior with the object of understanding the other person. The way to experience is primarily through linguistic communication, but it can also come through a spontaneous expression of feeling

4. Understanding of the feelings, sufferings, or situation of another person without these feelings being communicated by words

5. ...the understanding of the behaviour of another on the basis of one's own experience and behaviour

6. Ability to perceive the mood and feelings of another person

7. The emotional linkage that characterizes relationships between individuals; the ability to sense the feelings of others

8. Feeling (-pathy) into (em-); fellow feeling—Taking into oneself the feelings, sensations, or
attitudes of another person or object; the capacity for experiencing vicariously the feelings, thoughts, or posture of another.

9. An awareness of the thoughts and feelings of another person; the capacity to understand and in some measure share another person's state of mind... When we "empathize" with someone, we identify with him to such an extent that we can project ourselves into his thoughts and can usually assure him that we know how he feels.

10. Apprehension of the state of mind of another person without feeling (as in sympathy) what the other feels. While the empathic process is primarily intellectual, emotion is not precluded, but it is not the same emotion as that of the person with whom one empathizes.

The variety of epistemic terms ("comprehend," "understand," etc.), and nouns ("effort," "state," "endeavor," "ability," etc.) indicates the range of meanings the term "empathy" has come to have for the scientific community. As is to be expected, definitions of what empathy is are wrapped up in theoretical perspectives as to what takes place when an individual empathizes--i.e., differences as to how empathy occurs. Adding further complexity is the fact that terms like "projection" and "identification" are used as definiens--terms which themselves are used in a variety of highly theory-bound ways by psychologists. Deciding between these definitions almost of necessity requires deciding between theories about empathy.

Before trying to adjudicate between these definitions, we make the following terminological distinction.
In what follows, the "subject" (abbreviated "S") will stand for the person who is experiencing empathy. The object or what we will call the "recipient" of empathy (abbreviated "R") will be the person with whom the subject is empathizing. The subject shall standardly be spoken of by means of the female gender, while the recipient shall be pronominally referred to in male gender terms. The distribution of gender terms is not meant to bear any content concerning men, women, and empathy.

Leaving aside minor differences of emphasis, the major competing definitions of "empathy" can be divided into three classes. There are, first, those which define it as a skill or ability. Psychologists using it in this way usually concentrate upon the supposed cognitive skills involved in empathizing. Secondly, empathy may be defined as a tendency or disposition to engage in certain efforts to understand, relate to, and/or show compassion for the recipient. Here emphasis is placed upon the motivation or attitude of the subject and upon the recipient-directed behaviors in which she then engages. Finally, third, empathy may be construed as an enduring pattern of "imitative" physiological and emotive responsiveness of an organism as cued by the perceived situational context and/or expressive behaviors of recipients. When psychologists measure, talk
about or search for correlations with "empathy," they may be assuming the currency of any one of these three definitions of the term: there is no current consensus as to the meaning of "empathy." We will now review each of these three approaches in more detail.

Treated as a skill, empathy is generally defined in terms of the achievement of a specific goal: that of being able to correctly identify the emotional state of the recipient. Empathic skills are standardly measured for many psychologists by testing the subject's ability to guess the answers picked by the recipient on an emotional self-report questionnaire. The task may be given the subject after allowing her to converse for a short time with the recipient. Or, a story about the situation of the recipient may be provided, with perhaps some personal background about the recipient. The subject is then to gather from this data what the recipient's mental state or emotional verbal self-description would likely be as a result of his situation. High correlations between the subject's prediction of the recipient's emotions and the recipient's verbal self-report indicate a highly-developed ability to empathize.

Numerous experiments have confirmed that there is a correlation between what are regarded as "cognitive" skills of perspective-taking and role-taking and success at the kind of task described above. For example,
in an experiment by Zahn-Waxler, Radke-Yarrow and Smith, children who performed well on perspective-taking tasks in which they had to successfully reconstruct how an object would appear and be oriented towards another person were also the children who engaged in the highest amount of empathy-demanding prosocial behavior (e.g., sharing, helping, comforting). The same children were also tested directly for empathy in the manner described above, and performed better than those who did poorly on perspective-taking tests. In another experiment, "field-independent" thinkers—individuals who tended to rely less on the background field when locating and aligning objects which they were allowed to place arbitrarily—tended to also score more highly on empathy tests. This is interpreted as suggesting that individuals able to shift perspectives and work within multiple cognitive (especially perceptual) dimensions are those most adept at empathizing. Lawrence Blum, for example, in the context of discussing the related concept of compassion, notes the importance of being able to "imaginatively reconstruct" the situation of the recipient.

For compassion does not require even that its subject have experienced the sort of suffering that occasions it. We can commiserate with someone who has lost a child in a fire, even if we do not have a child or have never lost someone we love. The reason for this is that the imaginative reconstruction involved in compassion consists in imagining
what the other person, given his character, beliefs, and values, is undergoing, rather than what we ourselves would feel in his situation.27

According to this first way of defining empathy, then, empathy is measured by performance in a test demanding a particular skill. The strong correlation noted between the presence of this skill and certain cognitive abilities leads theorists, correctly or incorrectly, to identify empathy with a set of developed perceptual and, it appears conceptual cognitive skills. This way of defining empathy is reflected in those definitions which employ epistemic terms such as "perception", "understanding" and "awareness" (e.g., definitions 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and especially 6: "ability to perceive the mood and feelings of another person").

A second way of defining empathy consists of identifying it with the tendency of an individual to make efforts to somehow "make contact" with the emotional state of another person (cf. definitions 1, 2, 3, 9 above). We suggest that these efforts may be expressed in two ways: (a) through the effort to enter into, be aware of, understand or participate in the emotional experiences of the recipient; (b) through the effort to make known to the recipient that he is "understood," and not alone in his experience. The following series of quotations, drawn from an article espousing an empathy-centered method of psycho-therapy, illustrate these two
modes of expression well.

The way of being with another person which is termed empathic has several facets. It means entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive, moment to moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion of whatever, that he/she is experiencing. It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without making judgements, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware, but not trying to uncover feelings of which the person is totally unaware, since this would be too threatening. It includes communicating your sensings of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. You are a confident companion in his/her inner world. 28

To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another’s world without prejudice. "In some sense it means that you lay aside your self. . ." 29

Obviously, what is being described here is not simply a single psychological event, but a whole method of psychotherapy (indeed, a whole "way of being"!). 30 Nonetheless, the quote illustrates the extent to which an effort of the subject is required if empathy, according to this way of viewing it, is to take place. Another similar formulation also makes this quite clear.

Qualitatively it [empathic understanding] is an active process of desiring to know the full, present and changing awareness of another person, of reaching out to receive his communication and meaning, and of translating his words and signs into experienced meaning that matches at least those aspects of his awareness that are most important to him at the moment. 31
It is from this sector, unfortunately, that a great deal of the confusion in language concerning empathy has originated. Along with the term "empathy" have come such expressions as "being in a state of empathy," "feeling empathy," "empathizing," "seeking to empathize," "showing empathy," and "being an empathic person (counselor)."

The important defining characteristic of this perspective which must be kept in mind in the midst of all of this empathy-oriented terminology is that empathy involves a determination or deliberate effort to make some kind of contact with the emotions of another person. One is tempted to limit the term "empathy" to the effort made to experience vicariously the emotions of the other person, while letting "showing empathy" stand for the effort to communicate in some way to the other person that contact has been made with him. Not all "empathic" therapists (e.g., Carl Rogers) would be content with this, however, as "empathy" is defined as a characteristic which is expressed throughout the entirety of a counseling session; communicating to the recipient that contact has been made is regarded as making possible further disclosures of information by the recipient, which in turn facilitate increased understanding and participation by the subject (therapist) in his emotional states. Being empathic means making the effort to be open, and appear open, to the recipient's experience so that this dialogue can take
place and increase in depth. For some empathy-centered therapists, then, it is improper to attempt to distinguish between being empathic (having an attitude of empathy) and showing empathy.

For the sake of bringing some kind of conceptual clarity into this area, we shall take it that, according to definition (2), "empathy" is a quality or attribute of a person which persons may either have (in which case they are "empathic") or not have in any particular interpersonal encounter. To have empathy is also to have an empathic attitude. But what is this quality? We shall take it that empathy, according to these theorists, is a tendency to make efforts to participate in the feelings of others. Empathic individuals are those who tend to make efforts to "step into the shoes" of others so as to understand and, in general, better relate to them. Implied in attributing empathy to a subject is the attribution to her of a willingness or desire to vicariously participate in the emotions of others, as well as an uninhibitedness or openness to relatively new or foreign emotional experiences. All of this seems to be implied when, according to this second way of defining it, an individual is said to possess or be characterized by empathy.32

It should be noted that, according to this definition, one may have empathy only sometimes and only towards certain persons. For example, Sue may have
empathy towards Carl, who is her therapy client, but may have little empathy for Roderick, who is her next door neighbor. Also, empathy conceivably could be motivated in a variety of ways. Sue may have empathy towards Carl because she has genuine positive regard and care for him. If Carl believes this, the empathy-centered therapy sessions will probably proceed more successfully (one reason why showing empathy often leads to further disclosure by the recipient appears to be that the client interprets it as a sign of positive regard felt for him, which emboldens him to open himself further to the therapist). On the other hand, Sue may have empathy for Carl because she values the $50.00 per hour she receives from him, as well as the esteem in which she will be held if she succeeds in bringing him relief from his problems. Empathy-centered therapists differ as to whether they believe the effectiveness of empathy depends upon the client's sensing a personal regard for himself, or whether its chief asset is that the therapist simply provides something of a "sounding board" for the client.\textsuperscript{33} Even if the former is the case, it is still conceivable that the therapist could make an effort to empathize through creating the "useful deception" of apparent positive regard for the client, all the while endeavoring to make emotional contact with the recipient only because it is her job or because of curiosity, the desire for success in this case, etc.
Thus, as we have defined it, this second way of defining empathy does not appear to require that the empathizer (the individual characterized by the tendency to seek to make contact or participate in the emotions of the recipient) also have a positive regard or care for the recipient. It is only required that, for whatever reason, she has a willingness or desire to "step into the shoes" of the other person.

A third way of defining empathy is to speak of it as a pattern of responses which are (a) cued by the perceived situational context and/or emotionally expressive behavior of the recipient, and (b) which consist of states of "imitative" visceral and/or emotional arousal or activation of the subject. These states are often entered into involuntarily (that is, they are responses of the organism not initiated by an intention or as the result of purposeful effort by the organism. They often, but not always, lead to some kind of behavior. Particularly in cases of negative physical or emotional activation, this will often consist of some form of "helping behavior," involving attempts to relieve or come to the aid of the recipient. Empathy is here defined as a somewhat global characteristic--i.e., as a pattern which characterizes an individual in general or across specific situations.

"Empathy" is used in the general sense in which "sympathy" was often employed by the British moralists--as an
attribute or trait of humans, or even of the human race as a whole. We suggest that the expression "an occurrence of empathy" be employed to denote any particular instance of the kind of physical/emotional activation described above. An occurrence of empathy is a particular manifestation or instantiation of the trait called empathy.

This definition differs from the first way of understanding empathy through the fact that it allows for the possibility of experiencing empathy without intermediate steps of extensive cognitive processing. "Cognitive processing" is a broadly applicable term which can be used to stand for any number of activities or operations of the mind, including perception, imaging, representation, retention, recall, problem-solving, etc. In our discussion, however, we will speak of "extensive cognitive processing" as those relatively sophisticated operations of the mind which involve transformations of information or data as handled in the form of propositions. Extensive cognitive processing, as here used, thus stands for proposition-guided mental behavior. Assenting, believing, that knowing and recalling would be examples of such behavior.

Most who take the first definitional perspective assume that extensive cognitive processing is an important part, if not identical with, the skill which they call empathy. Since empathy is one's ability to discern and
predict the emotional states of other people, empathizing involves making cognitive assessments of the recipient's expressive behavior, situational context, personal character and dispositions, etc. Its end result is a belief concerning the recipient's mental state. The third approach to defining empathy differs from this perspective in that it does not require of the subject belief in or operation upon any propositions. 37

It is suggested, then, that empathy may occur without any extensive or significant processing. "Information" is clearly involved, but the term is here used to speak of any neurally-transmitted input. 38 This information is "meaningful" in the sense of having the effect of eliciting arousal; it does not, as used here, imply conceptually meaningful, in the sense of being intensionally relevant to the subject's values, ideals, beliefs, concerns, etc. Though meaningful, the information has not received sufficient processing to allow for its transformation into a propositional belief, though the experience of the input (especially as coupled with emotional activation) may result in its being committed to long-term memory, with the result that it may become available for expression propositionally through further more highly cognitive acts of interpretation.

It should also be noted that we have not ruled out the possibility of a prior transformation of the input
into a "mental representation." This is because numerous cognitive theorists suggest that many very primitive forms of sensation and perception may involve some kind of simple imaging or picturing (which is a form of mental representation). Even allowing for the mind's perhaps considerable role in structuring these representations, it is still possible to distinguish this from those "deeper" forms of processing which involve the introduction of ideas, previous beliefs and abstract categories by which the input becomes conceptually meaningful. Thus Kant distinguishes between those more simple processes which he describes in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the role played by the Ideas of Pure Reason. This is not to deny that many occurrences of empathy may be elicited by extensive kinds of processing (especially where complex situational cues are involved). It is simply to insist that what sometimes causally contributes to the occurrence of empathy not be included within its definition. We shall take up many of these issues in a later chapter.

In a similar fashion, this third approach to the concept of empathy may be distinguished from the second way of defining it. Just as the second approach defined empathy as the tendency of an organism to make an effort to participate in the emotions of others, so the third approach avoids insisting that empathy necessarily involves "efforts" of any kind. The third approach suggests
that the individual's response to the stimulus or cue presented by the recipient may be quite automatic, involuntary, and even outside the "center" of conscious, at least until the organism reaches the point of emotional or physical activation, at which time "feelings" result. The distinction may be put this way: the second approach implies a (non-fleeting) willingness or desire to participate in the emotional life of the recipient in some way, while the third approach does not imply such a desire.

It should also be noted that the characterizations of empathy which were quoted when discussing the second approach portrayed it as a somewhat involved and drawn out approach which required an active interest in and paying attention to or giving heed to whatever data could be obtained from the recipient's verbalizations, posture, past history, observed situational context, etc. This suggests that, as with the first definitional approach, empathy implies some sort of extensive cognitive processing. As already discussed, the third approach denies that this necessarily characterizes the occurrence of empathy.

As might be expected, the third definitional perspective broadens the extension of the term empathy to include sub-human species, and also young children and infants. In fact, it is primarily in reference to these groups that the third definitional perspective makes its
appearance in the literature. The possibility of empathizing appears to be denied even by this approach, however, in the case of non-sentient creatures at least as regards those forms of empathy which entail emotional activation.

One final aspect of the problem of defining empathy is worth noting, due to its connection with our discussion, in later chapters, of the views of David Hume. This is the difficulty created by the availability and popularity of a term closely proximate to "empathy" in meaning: viz., "sympathy." We have already noted Smith's usage of this term to stand for what appears to be very much like the concept referred to as Einfühlung by Theodor Lipps. Unfortunately, both in ordinary language and in the psychological literature, both terms have been preserved, and are regarded as having distinct, if highly subtle, nuances of meaning.

The Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary defines "sympathy" in the following ways:

1. sameness of feeling; affinity between persons or of one person for another.

2. an action or response arising from this

3. agreement in qualities; harmony; accord

4. a mutual liking or understanding arising from sameness of feeling

5. the entering into or ability to enter into another person's mental state, feelings, emotions, etc; especially, pity or compassion for another's
trouble, suffering, etc. 42

On the other hand, "empathy" is defined as follows:

1. the projection of one's own personality into the personality of another in order to understand him better; intellectual identification of oneself with another

2. the projection of one's own personality into an object, with the attribution to the object of one's own emotions, responses, etc.; also called pathetic fallacy 43

It should be noted that this definition of empathy resembles the second perspective discussed above.

Several psychologists have attempted to be more precise in their understanding of empathy and sympathy. Blackman, Smith et al., in a study of empathy, define empathy as "the ability to step into another person's shoes and to step back into one's own shoes again." They then contrast this with related terms as follows:

It is not projection, which implies that the wearer's shoes pinch him and that he wishes someone else in them; it is not identification, which involves stepping into another person's shoes and then being unable or unwilling to get out of them; and it is not sympathy, in which a person stands in his own shoes while observing another person's behavior, and while reaching to him in terms of what he tells you about shoes— if they pinch, one commiserates with him, if they are comfortable, one enjoys his comfort with him. 44

Lauren G. Wispe makes a similar distinction in an article entitled "Sympathy and Empathy" in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. He defines sympathy as "the capacity to apprehend the pain, suffering, or signs of negative emotions in man or animals and to respond to
these with appropriate negative feelings." He lists the following characteristics of sympathy:

1. In sympathy, the connotations of negative affect predominate.

2. Sympathy is often an immediate, predominantly emotional awareness, but is no less sympathetic when it is delayed and involves cognitive or reflective elements.

3. The communication of sympathy (showing sympathy) is not required by this definition.

4. The concept of sympathy has implied a fundamental capacity in man to respond to suffering, albeit by no specific neuropsychic structures.

5. Sympathy can be construed as either passive (the capacity to respond) or active (the apprehension of suffering).

Empathy, on the other hand, is defined as "the self-conscious effort to share and accurately comprehend the presumed consciousness of another person, including his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and muscular tensions, as well as their causes." It is "the self-conscious awareness of the consciousness of others." He lists the following characteristics of empathy:

1. Empathy requires the empathizer to maintain an awareness of the imaginative nature of the transportation of oneself into another, unlike some aesthetic experiences.

2. Empathy, unlike sympathy, denotes an active subject (empathizing is a voluntary or deliberate activity).

3. In empathy, one attends to the feelings of another; in sympathy, one attends to the suffering of another, but the feelings are one's own.
4. In empathy, I try to feel your pain. In sympathy, I know that you are in pain, and I sympathize with you, but I feel my sympathy and my pain, not your anguish and your pain.47

The similarities and differences, as discussed in this useful article, are summarized in Table 1.
TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathy</th>
<th>Sympathy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. An either immediate or delayed emotional awareness</td>
<td>a. An immediate or delayed emotional awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Does not entail the communication of empathy</td>
<td>b. Does not entail the communication of sympathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. A deliberate activity</td>
<td>c. May be deliberate, but is often a passive (non-intended) response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Requires continued awareness of the imaginative awareness of transport</td>
<td>d. No such awareness is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Involves attention to the feelings of the other person</td>
<td>e. Involves attention to the primarily negative feelings of the other person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. What is felt is the pain of the other person</td>
<td>f. What is felt is one's emotional reaction to the awareness of the other's feelings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. As voluntary, empathy may or may not be entered into by the subject</td>
<td>g. Traditionally suggests a basic tendency towards responsiveness in relation to one's fellow creatures</td>
</tr>
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</table>
To the extent that these characteristics describe actual usage of the two terms, this list helps to make explicit shades of meaning not normally evident in the confused way in which the two terms are often employed. For philosophical purposes, however, the distinctions Wispe makes are still not adequate to provide a precise denotation for each term. The list of characteristics reveals two essential differences between what Wispe calls "empathy" and "sympathy." First, while both activities involve feeling some kind of emotion, empathy is limited to the experience of the same kind of emotion as experienced by the recipient, while sympathetically-felt emotions may diverge from or go beyond those of the recipient, being the feelings of the subject, not the recipient. The paradigm case of this divergence appears to be that in which the subject, painfully aware of the suffering of the recipient, feels for (or compassionate towards) the recipient. The second difference suggested by Wispe is that empathy can be viewed as a deliberate and intended, somewhat laborious attempt to enter into the context of the other's feelings so as to experience similar feelings (sympathy). Sympathy, though, is often a non-intended response of semi-automatic nature, giving rise to a spontaneous rise of feeling similar to that of the recipient.
In general, the difference between "empathy" and "sympathy" appears to be that "empathy" commonly implies in ordinary language the deliberate attempt to be involved in or vicariously participate in the feelings of the other. Sympathy describes a similar participation (Rescher, for example, defines it as a "communion" of feeling, an "internalization of another's welfare"), but without commitment as to what led up to the participation. That is, one cannot have empathy without seeking to, while one could conceivably have sympathy without having taken any steps to do so. On the other hand, sympathy appears to communicate an assuring mutuality to the recipient, while empathy leaves open the question of whether the subject herself "shares" the recipient's feelings. Sympathy implies a "yes" response to what is vicariously felt, while empathy may be responded to in the subject with a "yes" or "no." 

This would explain why it seems more natural to speak of "feeling sympathy" for someone than "feeling empathy" for them. Likewise, to say "I sympathize with you" seems to suggest more support and compassion than "I (can) empathize with you." The latter, as Lawrence Blum notes, may affirm the other person through suggesting the rationality or "understandableness" of his reaction, but does not imply the same sort of mutuality or "fellow feeling" as does the expression of sympathy.
empathize with all the characters of a drama, but be in sympathy only with the hero.\textsuperscript{51} It makes sense to say "give them my sympathy" (cf. "condolences") or "you have my sympathy" (cf. "support") but seems odd to "give empathy" to someone, and incomplete to assure someone that "you have my empathy." The latter, in particular, invites the query, "...and?"

Despite the apparent existence of this subtle distinction in everyday discourse between "empathy" and "sympathy," we wish to offer a reforming definition of the term "empathy" which departs from its ordinary usage. The term "empathy," we suggest, is best reserved for the concept suggested above by the third definitional perspective. According to this view, 'empathy' is a trait-name standing for a pattern which an organism exhibits in its responses to the perceived physical and emotional "straits" of others. This pattern consists of a tendency to become imitatively physiologically and/or emotionally activated in response to the perceived physical/emotional state of the recipient.\textsuperscript{52} Individual instantiations of this trait are referred to as occurrences of empathy.

Why choose this definition? The primary reason is that it best describes what we regard as the most basic form of the phenomena described by both Smith and Lipps. This is the involuntary experience by the subject of
imitative physiological arousal in response to a perceived physical state of the recipient (or object). It is impossible to identify this case with either a cognitive skill or an effort made to participate in the recipient's mental state. The experience is often highly involuntary, and may not even occupy enough of the subject's consciousness to be given a verbal label.

Both Smith and Lipps appeared to have viewed this as the most primitive case of what we are now calling empathy. This seems correct; interpersonal emotional empathy is most likely an analogous process which is more complex through involving additional regions of the brain and nervous system. We suggest that this primitive physical responsiveness be called "empathy" rather than "sympathy" because sympathy, as noted above, has come to play a much more extensive social role involving support, assurance, positive regard, etc. Whether the occurrence of empathy implies all of these things (i.e., whether empathy implies sympathy) is a crucial question, but one which we do not wish to decide by arbitrary definitional decree. Therefore, we will allow empathy to stand for the relatively sparse and primitive concept of an organism's (involuntary) tendency to respond to another imitatively, leaving open the question of whether organisms so characterized also have feelings for the recipient.
The other two concepts of empathy outlined above can be seen as specialized derivatives of this root notion. The ability to identify another's emotional states is a predictable result of empathy working at its imitative best. To limit empathy to a set of cognitive skills appears, though, to confuse a particular ability which is often made possible by the occurrence of empathy (viz., quick identifications of what others are feeling) with the occurrence itself. Likewise, it seems that the second concept of empathy is best interpreted as a derivative notion. The subject characterized by a tendency to respond imitatively to the emotions of others may seek to extend her tendency to respond thusly, perceiving that it is a good or useful trait. She may seek to become even more responsive. Thus the fact of involuntary imitative responsiveness may encourage the voluntary development of modes of thinking and action which will facilitate increased "sensitivity" and "understanding" of the recipient.

Our case for definition three may be summarized in this way. Both the first and second ways of construing empathy accurately describe instances in which empathy is at work. They do not account, however, for the most primitive (and we have argued, basic) forms of empathy—viz., imitative physical responses. In addition, they appear to limit those who may experience empathy to individuals capable of developed forms of cognitive processing, as
well as a conscious purpose to participate in others' emotional states. In the next chapter we will argue that this draws the boundaries too narrowly; empathy (albeit in fairly primitive forms) is observed to occur in neo-nate infants and small children, as well as possibly in sub-human species. If empathy is defined according to the third definition, these cases can be accounted for. The kinds of phenomena cited by the other two definitions can be accounted for as well, cognitive emotion-recognition skills being regarded as results which commonly accompany the frequent operation of empathy, the effort to participate in the mental states of others as being a positive voluntary response to the perceived positive aspects of empathy.
CHAPTER I: NOTES


5. Lipps, 411, 403; cf. 407.

6. Ibid., 409.


10. Ibid., 202.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., 203.


29. Ibid.

30. Cf. the later Lipps, who spoke of empathy as "an activity of my inner being" (410).


32. See the lengthy description of this effort in Rogers, 4-5. Rogers (5-10) cites a number of studies in support of the positive effects of empathy in counseling. For another review of studies of this kind, see: R. E. Fox and P. C. Goldin, "The Empathic Process in Psychotherapy: A Survey of Theory and Research," Journal of Nervous and Mental Disorders 138 (1964): 323-331.


34. Cf. Martin L. Hoffman, "Empathy, Role-Taking, Guilt, and Development of Altruistic Motives," in Thomas Lickona, ed. Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976): "Empathy refers to the involuntary, at times forceful, experiencing of another person's emotional state. It is elicited either by expressive cues, which directly reflect the other's feelings or by other cues which convey the affect impact of external events on him" (126).


37. This will receive further treatment in Chapter III.

38. Neisser, 7.


41. See Chapter II.

42. Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary, 2nd ed., s.v., "sympathy."

43. Ibid., s.v., "empathy."


45. Wispe, 441.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.


49. Thus, expressing sympathy brings about many of the benefits described by Lawrence Blum in regard to compassion, e.g., an affirmation of solidarity and worth (cf. Blum, "Compassion," 513-f.).

50. See Langfield, 138.


52. K. B. Clark brings out nicely the often intended character of empathy: Empathy imposes upon the organism the capacity and need to balance concrete egocentricity and power gratification with the abstraction of concern for the needs of others. Empathy dictates that one's hunger be placed in the context of the perception of the possibility that another might also be
experiencing hunger. Empathy requires that in sensing the hunger of another, one might be restrained in satisfying one's own hunger. Empathy intervenes and sometimes confuses the biological imperatives. It makes it difficult, if not impossible, to gratify egocentric needs at the expense of sensitivity to the needs of another. In this regard, empathy becomes a compelling abstraction that interferes with the free functioning of organismic, egocentric, concrete dynamics. Empathy interferes with the sheer survival struggle and the functional efficiency of the power drive (italics mine). K. B. Clark, "Empathy: A Neglected Topic in Psychological Research," American Psychologist 35 (1980), 188.
CHAPTER II

DETERMINANTS OF EMPATHIC RESPONSE

Most of those who have studied empathy from a psychological standpoint have been forced to acknowledge that all too little is currently known about the factors in an individual's personality and background which affect either the ability or the tendency to empathically respond. Articles on the empathic response in psychology and social sciences journals begin appearing in volume in 1965; despite considerable interest since that time, this is a comparatively short interval for the study of such a complex and somewhat slippery phenomenon. It is difficult to keep the concept of empathy distinct from its family members of related notions such as sympathy, compassion, pity and benevolence. Only recently have experimenters begun to make an effort to insure that empathy is being measured, as opposed to other related emotional responses and the behaviors which accompany them.¹

The tendency to respond empathically has been widely noted in all ages and a variety of settings. Murphy (1937) described numerous examples of empathic response
in nursery school children; she concluded that "experiencing distress when another is in distress seems primitive, naive, reasonably universal." In recent years, a large collection of data has been gathered, supporting the presence of empathic responsiveness in very young infants and even the youngest infants (1-2 days old). This responsiveness does not diminish with increasing age, as experiments with virtually every age group have indicated.

While there is support for the pervasiveness of empathic responsiveness, it is important to emphasize that it is a differential pervasiveness. That is, empathy occurs often, over all age groups and in many different contexts, but it does not occur uniformly or consistently for all individuals over the universe of all empathizing opportunities or potential empathy stimulus situations. Stanley Milgram's experiments on obedience (1963, et al.) in which 65% of individuals tested willingly gave apparently severe shocks to subjects in response to an authoritative command by a white-coated experiment director provide a striking illustration of how empathic responsiveness can be absent or impeded by other motivational forces. A part of offering a description of the determinants of empathy is arriving at the factors which serve to either enhance or impede the occurrence of empathy given certain personality types and potential
empathy-evoking opportunities. We note also that this is made difficult by the problem, which we will confront repeatedly in this study, of confirming whether an empathic response has occurred. Thus, Dennis Krebs (1975) has offered experimental evidence, duplicating some of the variables of Milgram's studies, that in fact empathy, measured in terms of physiological arousal as well as verbal protest, occurs at very high levels in the induced-obedience situations, despite the fact that the subject submits to the commands. Though signs of increased physiological arousal do not conclusively verify the presence of empathy, Krebs's study at least serves to illustrate the difficulty of establishing or ruling out the occurrence of empathy in any particular context.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

It is extremely difficult, however, to measure empathy, construed as a general trait. Empathic responses, as would be expected, tend to vary with different recipients and situations. For example, empathy scores vary depending on whether the recipient is perceived as a friend, antagonist or stranger. Empathy varies with perceived attractiveness, familiarity and similarity-to-subject, though some studies indicate that first-born children are less prone to making these differentiations in response. Responses differ depending upon whether the
interaction with the recipient is in the form of an interview, a written transcript, a tape recording, a film, etc. Scores also vary depending upon whether the exposure to the emotional distress of the other takes place in a natural setting (e.g., watching a film of Charlie Chaplin). It is difficult to ascertain whether an individual's response to a situation is one of negative affective reaction to the observed sufferings of the other, or if it is actually an anticipation of the possibility that the observed stimuli may soon impinge upon the self. This problem particularly plagues research on animal empathy. Interpretation is also limited by the measuring device employed. Methods of measuring empathy lose accuracy of assurance of validity if forced to interrelate too many variables. Employing physiological measures, for example, helps to avoid some of the ambiguities associated with the motives to helping behavior. It is difficult, however, to determine what is the cause of an observed physiologically-measured emotional response. Verbal reports of emotion solve this problem through the cognitive account given by the subject. These accounts, though, are notoriously unreliable. Studying behavior helps to indicate when an individual is reacting to a perceived threat to self as opposed to negative affect felt in response to the sufferings of another. Again, however, seemingly "altruistic" behavior is open to a number of possible
interpretations in terms of antecedent motivations. It appears that no one measure of empathy can be easily correlated with the entire set of variables—cognitions, motivations, behavior, etc.—whose relation to empathy we would like to explain.

Thus, with all of these measures and settings, it is difficult to compare results and arrive at any sort of standardized overall picture of an individual's capacity to empathize. Most studies have attempted to correlate specific personality characteristics with the tendency to empathize in specific kinds of situations. An insufficient amount of experimentation has taken place at this writing to allow for conclusive generalizations concerning the overall determinants of empathy, conceived as a character trait capable of expressing itself in a variety of situations. In this chapter, we will give attention to the various theoretical perspectives which have been taken in an effort to explain at least large segments of empathic responsiveness. We do so with the cautionary note that no one perspective has succeeded in explaining every instance of empathic responsiveness. Each theory best explains empathy as experienced in a select sample of situations. In adult behavior particularly, it may often be the case that several factors act on the individual at once to encourage (or impede) empathic responsiveness. In this case more than one theoretical perspective may, for
that instance, be correct as at least partial explanations.

At least five major theories can be cited which seek to explain the empathic response. These are:

1. The nativist theory: empathy results from an innate tendency to respond imitatively to others' perceived physical/emotional situations

2. The classical conditioning theory: empathy is learned early on according to a very simple or primitive conditioning process

3. The vicarious learning theory: empathy is learned in response to regular observation that a respected model receives pleasure in empathizing

4. The identification theory: empathic responsiveness arises through imitation of primarily nurturant models

5. The social learning theory: empathy is developed in order to gain social approval and/or to satisfy internalized social norms

As we have suggested above, each theory has its proto-type situations in which it best accounts for apparent empathic responsiveness. Also, in some situations, a variety of factors may play a role. For example, an individual already inclined to respond empathically, perhaps due to previous conditioning, may be further encouraged to do so in a particular context by the fact that she will receive social approval by doing so, by having previously seen her mother respond empathically in similar situations, or by the fact that she has observed her best friend to be affected by such stimuli without displeasure or detriment.
In the previous chapter, we argued that cases of vicarious physiological or kinesthetic activation are to be interpreted as the paradigm or basic instances of empathy. Such cases of empathy are of experimental interest because they are less complex, involving a much less extensive part of the individual's mental capacities. Allowing that such primitive kinds of responses may be deemed "empathic," a family of even more interesting cases are opened for consideration. These are cases of what appear to be empathically-motivated emotional distress behavior in (a) subhuman species, and (b) in newborn infants. They are important for the same reason as above, viz., that the number of relevant variables are limited as a result of the relatively undeveloped state of the subhumans' or infants' mental faculties. This offers the hope that, with this limited number of variables, a clear experimental selection can be made between the five theories cited above in the most basic kinds of occurrences.

Studies by Church (1959) on rats suggested that they respond empathically to the distress of their fellow rats. Rats previously conditioned to press a lever for food ceased to do so with the same frequency when pressing the lever was coupled with administering a shock to other rats in their presence. Rats were also found to exhibit characteristics of fear in the presence of other fearful
rats. Lavery and Foley (1963) argued, however, that these experiments failed to provide clear evidence of empathy.\textsuperscript{10} They argued that the squealing noise produced by the rats being shocked may have acted as a deterrent to further lever pressing. This was demonstrated by Lavery and Foley when they showed that rats ceased pressing the food lever in a similar way when white noise or taped squealing was played in their presence. Further experimentation in this area appears to be required.

Other, similar experiments have been performed on rhesus and macaque monkeys. Hanson and Mason (1962) found that monkeys would change their preferences from one to another food lever if their previously preferred lever became associated with a shock given to another animal in the cage.\textsuperscript{11} Wechkin, Masserman and Terris (1964) showed that a monkey will refuse to satisfy its hunger so as to avoid subjecting another monkey to shock.\textsuperscript{12}

A different, indirect kind of evidence for empathic responsiveness in subhuman species consists of the prevalence of alarm behaviors, coupled with group defense actions. Animals and insects manifest numerous ways of expressing alarm. These include calls, cries, shrieks and screams, (birds and mammals) and chemical pheromone releases (many insects). Wilson and Regnier (1971) divide these into two functional categories: panic alarms (signalling that all should scatter) and aggressive alarms
(causing the workers to orient toward the center of the disturbance, engaging in "mobbing behavior", etc.). The latter conceivably could involve the operation of empathic responsiveness, the state of empathic activation functioning as a motivator. Thus Nissen and Crawford (1936) found that a chimpanzee would respond to the pain-shrieks of its shocked peer by trying to pull it to safety and attacking the experimenter.

Apparent empathic responsiveness has also been noted in young infants. Buhler and Hetzer, in 1928, had noted the occurrence of "reflexive crying" in infants 1 to 14 months of age. It was observed that 84% of a sample of such infants responded to hearing the crying of their peers by themselves breaking out into crying. Anecdotal reports (e.g., Valentine, 1946, Piaget, 1951 and Morley, 1965) confirmed this phenomenon, but it was not until M.L. Simner reported his studies in an article, "Newborn's Response to the Cry of Another Infant" (1971) that the scientific community possessed a carefully constructed test of the phenomenon.

Simner examined the reflexive crying behavior exhibited by infants of a median age of 70 hours in the following manner. He divided groups of 25 infants into a silent control group and two other groups which heard sounds emitted from a speaker just a few inches from their heads. One of the audially stimulated groups heard a tape
TABLE 2: NUMBER OF INFANTS WHICH RESPONDED WITH CRYING*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Silent control</th>
<th>Synthesized cry</th>
<th>5½ month old cry</th>
<th>Newborn cry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not crying</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of a newborn cry. Other groups heard taped reproductions of a synthesized cry only roughly similar to a newborn's cry, and of a 5½ month old infant's cry.

Simner's results reproduced those of Buhler and Hetzer (see Table 2). Infants exposed to the taped cries of their peers responded with crying far more often than did those in the other groups. The cry appeared to be in response to the vocal properties of another newborn's cry, as infants cried less in response to inanimate sounds of the same intensity.

Simner noted several possible explanations for the reflexive crying phenomenon. He found it necessary to rule out Thompson, Walters and Parke's (1965) suggestion that it was a distress reaction to loud sounds. Piaget's theory (1951) that it is a form of verbal imitation or, as for Morley (1965), a kind of "vocal play" is considered a possibility, though it seemed odd to Simner that the infant would imitate only the sound of her peers, as opposed to other interesting sounds (the synthesized cry) or the cry of a slightly older infant. Simner also considered possible the theory that "contiguity between the oral and aural cues associated with the infant's own cry may, over time, establish a relationship between these components." This would be the classical conditioning theory cited above. Simner also was open to the theory that "auditory feedback from the infant's own cry
should have no effect on the occurrence of reflexing crying. Instead, a congenital auditory template similar to a congenital vocal template should underlie the production of reflexive crying. That is, as a later article summarized this hypothesis, infants have a primitive capacity for imitating and responding to peer-generated social stimuli. This appears to conform to the nativist theory, cited above.

The instances of newborn empathic responsiveness described by Simner are of special importance, for they offer a hint as to the origins of the empathic response. It should be noted that theories (3) through (5) assume the previous existence of empathy as something to be imitated or inculcated through socialization. It is not clear how these theories could account for newborn empathy. Only theories (1) and (2) purport to explain the onset (as opposed to particular occurrences) of empathy as a response-pattern. It is not surprising, then, that they are also the only theories out of the five which appear to be capable of explaining infant, neo-nate and even the subhuman instances of empathy. Thus we turn to examine theories (1) and (2) in more detail.

The classical conditioning theory explains the early onset of empathic responses in terms of two phases of learning. First, the subject experiences various pain sensations, coupled with native aversive responses. These
TABLE 3

CLASSICAL CONDITIONING MODELS

I. Pavlov's Experiment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconditioned Stimulus</th>
<th>Conditioned Stimulus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>meat powder given</td>
<td>sound of bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(primary reward)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconditioned Response</th>
<th>Conditioned Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>salivation</td>
<td>salivation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

II. Classical Conditioning Model of Empathy-Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconditioned Stimulus</th>
<th>Conditioned Stimulus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sound of one's cry</td>
<td>sound of other's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unconditioned Response</th>
<th>Conditioned Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>negative emotional</td>
<td>negative emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>response</td>
<td>response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
responses include negative emotional reactions complete with their characteristic forms of overt expression. Experiencing the pain of bumping his head, a child experiences the automatic aversive response—avoidance behavior, accompanied by perhaps fear or anger, various visceral autonomic changes, and the sound of hearing himself crying. According to this theory, the child comes to associate the expressions of emotion (e.g., the sound of himself crying) with the stimuli which elicited the emotional response (the pain sensations). The second phase consists of a process of stimulus generalization (see Table 3). The observation of another's suffering pain (e.g., bumping his head), or even the sound of another's crying is associated with one's own complex of similar negative experiences. This elicits the standard response: the rise of negative emotion in the subject with its expressive behavior (viz., crying). As Justin Aronfreed, a defender of this theory, summarizes it, the onset of empathy requires:

... an initial temporal association between cues which transmit the affective experience of others closely related whose affective value is directly experienced by the child. As a result of this temporal contiguity, the cues which transmit the experience of others will acquire their own independent value for the elicitation of changes in the child's affectivity, under conditions where they are no longer perceived by the child as signals of other events which it will experience directly.
Empathy, then, is a conditioned or learned generalization by which one moves from one's own initial experiences of pain, emotion and expressive behavior to an emotional response to the pain, emotion and expressive behavior of another. Empathy is a learned association of one's own emotionally negative experiences with observed similar experiences in others. If this is correct, empathic responsiveness could develop quite early, the mechanisms required for learning being quite simple ones. In addition, the theory leads us to expect that empathy would be highly pervasive, the contingencies described being common to most infants. It would also explain some variations in responsiveness, attributing this to variations in the contingencies or in the schedule of reinforcement.

The nativist theory, which has received considerable support from recent advances in sociobiology, is able to account for the earliness and pervasiveness of empathy by appealing to the possible genetic origins of the response. According to the nativist theory, empathic responsiveness is an innate or constitutional tendency which has been selected by evolution because it adds fitness to groups which are characterized by it. There is no evidence that empathy would add to an individual's fitness; sociobiologists, however, appeal to the notion of "inclusive fitness", which implies that the overall fitness of the group (in particular, one's genetic "society" or
gene-pool) is enhanced by the presence of a tendency to respond empathically to the distress of fellow group members. In a later chapter, we will discuss in some detail two competing versions of this theory, each of which attempts to describe the mechanism by which empathy adds to fitness.

As noted, Simner's article does not attempt to adjudicate between these two theories in terms of their ability to explain newborn empathic responsiveness. A later study (Sagi and Hofmann, 1976) duplicated and confirmed Simner's results with infants 34 hours old. The author's of this study ruled out the vocal imitation theory, as the infant's cry in response seemed "to be a full-blown, spontaneous cry indicative of a distressed state." They noted that "the fact that 1-day-old infants cry selectively in response to the vocal properties of other infants' cry provides the most direct evidence to date for an inborn empathic distress reaction." Nonetheless, for reasons of parsimony, they opt for the classical conditioning theory, noting recent experimental support (Kessen, Haith and Salapatek, 1970) for the possibility of conditioning even in the early weeks of infant life. They suggest, then, that "the infant's cry in response to another's cry may be a conditioned vocal response to another's cues resembling the auditory cues associated with the infant's own past cries."
Acceptance of the classical conditioning theory to explain infant empathic distress reactions, however parsimonious this theory may be, is challenged by two additional studies of newborn infant behavior. We will consider each in turn. Arnold J. Sameroff, in a 1971 article entitled, "Can Conditioned Responses be Established in the Newborn Infant: 1971," argues that classical conditioning is difficult to demonstrate in the newborn, though operant conditioning may be possible at that age. Sameroff cites a series of studies in which attempts at classical conditioning of newborn infants have completely failed. Examples are the series of experiments performed separately by Crowell, Gullickson and Marum in which they tried to condition foot withdrawal by the infant, as elicited by electrotactual shock, with an auditory stimulus. These attempts were unsuccessful. Sameroff notes, on the other hand, a series of experiments which were successful in modifying behavior patterns by means of operant conditioning—that is, by reinforcing forms of behavior through direct punishment or rewards used as incentives. Siqueland and Lipsett, for example, succeeded in pairing newborn infant head turning with a stroking of the cheek through rewarding the infants which turned their heads with an immediate taste of dextrose.

Sameroff's analysis of why the classical conditioning attempts failed to take with newborn infants is
importantly relevant to the explanation of newborn empathic responsiveness. Sameroff suggests that classical conditioning fails in the newborn infant due to the inability of such infants to cognitively differentiate the conditioned stimulus (CS) and the unconditioned stimulus (US). Operant conditioning attempts succeeded because they offered, as rewards, stimuli already relevant to the infant's "reflex schemas"—modes of cognitive processing constitutive of already operational organized form of behavior (e.g., sucking or swallowing). Classical conditioning attempts offering as conditioned stimuli buzzers, bells, etc. all of which are divorced from the sensory inputs which play a role in the infant's immediate action orientations. These require a process of differentiation in the infant's sensory system which is not yet developed. Thus Sameroff maintains:

It is when one departs from these built-in schemas that difficulties arise. In the typical classical conditioning problem, there is an attempt to relate two previously unrelated stimuli in different sensory modalities. For adults, both the CS [Conditioned Stimulus] and US [Unconditioned Stimulus] already are part of various schematic hierarchies. In the typical newborn study, only the US is a part of the schema, for example, tactual stimulation leading to head turning. The 'newness' of CS for the infant also means that it is unrelated to any of his activity schemas other than through the possibility of generalizing assimilation. As a consequence, there is no place for the CS in the infant's cognitive structure.31

It is important to recognize that Sameroff is not simply asserting that the conditioned stimuli employed in
Limited orienting reaction of infant: 1 day old

More extended orienting reaction of infant: 3 weeks old

FIGURE 1: SAMEROFF'S THEORY OF INFANT PERCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT
classical conditioning attempts were unfamiliar ones—hence the failure of these attempts. Sameroff's point is that the infant is unable to differentiate cognitively, at this stage of development, the conditioned from the unconditioned stimulus. "There is no reason to believe that the response systems associated with perception are any more differentiated at birth than the response systems associated with motor activity." Sameroff argues that classical conditioning becomes possible only after an age of approximately three weeks, during which time the ability of the infant to engage in orientation to various aspects of the environment and to initiate increased kinds of activity involving various faculties becomes greatly expanded (see Figure 1). This is of course itself still a very early age, but the child's development accelerates exponentially over this time period.

It is interesting to note that Sagi and Hoffman, in the article cited above, give some attention to Sameroff's study. They reject it, however, on the grounds that Sameroff does not consider research on infants under 1 day of age. This seems an irrelevant objection, as Sameroff offers considerable evidence that infants under three weeks are incapable of responding to classical conditioning techniques. Nevertheless, it might be argued (as Sagi and Hoffman appear to do) that in the case of empathic responsiveness, classical conditioning is able to
### TABLE 4: MEAN AMOUNT OF VOCALIZATIONS (IN SECONDS) AND NUMBER OF INFANTS WHO VOCALIZED FOR EACH TEST CONDITION (EXPERIMENT 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State of Infant</th>
<th>Cry Stimulus</th>
<th>Own</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crying</td>
<td>M: 23.4</td>
<td>149.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># who</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm</td>
<td>M: 5.36</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># who</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### TABLE 5: MEAN AMOUNT OF VOCALIZATIONS (IN SECONDS) AND NUMBER OF INFANTS WHO VOCALIZED FOR EACH TEST CONDITION (EXPERIMENT 2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Human neonate</th>
<th>Chimp</th>
<th>Older child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>M: 74.5</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td># who</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

take place—even at the age of one day. Presumably, this would be because the similarity of other infants' cries to the infant's own cries overcomes the requirement that a not-yet-learned sensory mode of stimulation must be differentiated and oriented-to. As with some bird species, the infant's own cries function as a form of "auditory self-stimulative feedback"; similar sounding cries emitted by other infants (or a tape of other infants) have the same effect.

This rebuttal is questionably correct in the light of recent research by Grace B. Martin and Russell D. Clark III, summarized in an article, "Distress Crying in Neonates: Species and Peer Specificity" (1982). Martin and Clark performed two experiments, one with infants of a median age of only 18 hours. In the first experiment, involving 21 females and 19 males, infants' distress cry responses to (a) the cries of infant peers, and (b) to a tape recording of their own cries were compared. In the second experiment, employing 13 females and 17 males, (in this case, of 28.8 hours median age), involved comparing responses to (a) an infant peer's cry, (b) a chimp's cry, and (c) an older (11 month old) infant's cry. In both experiments, infants cried much more in response to the cries of their infant peers than to any of the alternative forms of stimulation (see Tables 4 and 5).
Particularly relevant are the results of the first experiment; Martin and Clark report:

Whereas crying infants continued to cry when they heard the cries of another neonate, crying infants stopped crying when they heard their own cry, and calm infants who heard their own cry did very little crying. These results indicate that infants do respond differently to the cries of other newborns than to their own cries.35

This strikes at the heart of the classical conditioning theory, as the infant's response to her own cry seems to be exactly the opposite of that posited by the classical conditioning approach. Rather than calling to mind aversive stimuli previously experienced in association with the infant's own cry, the sound of that cry apparently has a certain calming effect. The sound of other infants crying, however, has the opposite effect. This seems to support the views of some empathy theorists (e.g., Rheingold, Yarrow et al.) that infants do indeed have an innate primitive capacity for discriminating and responding to peer-generated stimuli.36 Despite the relative inability of the newborn infant to differentiate between perceptual inputs, certain specific kinds of inputs—those which are emotively-tones and of a vocal shape similar yet not identical with the subject's own expressions—are apparently discriminable even only 18 hours from the womb. A nativist theory seems the natural way to explain this phenomenon, particularly when similar kinds of immediately available capacities exhibited by
animals (and normally explained as native) are taken into consideration.

We will thus opt for the nativist theory as best explaining the occurrence of empathic responsiveness in newborn human infants. It should be noted that even if the classical conditioning theory were correct, a certain amount of original programming would need to be posited in order to allow for such an immediate and highly successful form of infant learning. We do not seek to make an absolute contrast between the two theories, or between nature and nurture. Nevertheless, experimental evidence appears to support the nativist theory as the most viable explanation currently conceived for neonate empathic distress behavior.

The findings concerning neo-nate empathy are significant in that, as suggested earlier, neo-nate empathic behavior constitutes a very simple or basic kind of responsiveness. We suggest that these primitive tendencies to respond provide the inclination towards a basic sociability amongst humans (and possibly some subhuman species). Psychologists have argued that such practices as play and learning by imitation depend upon the operation of this basic responsiveness to fellow species-members (cf. Mowrer, 1960; Thompson, 1958). As Nicholas Rescher writes in his work, *Unselfishness*:
Through positive and negative empathy we are able to enter into the fortunes of others and to share vicariously in developments affecting the welfare and the happiness of those about us. Our own satisfactions and dissatisfactions are thus in substantial measure composed of reactions not to developments that affect us directly and personally, but to our indirect and vicarious participation in the welfare and happiness of other people.\textsuperscript{38}

Or, as Mary Midgley puts it, "the lines of life lead outward."\textsuperscript{39}

The pattern of empathic responsiveness in older children and adults is much more complex while open to only the most broad generalizations. The range of possible cues is expanded by the development of the ability to cognitively process perceived situational factors. In addition, the subject's own learning leads to the development of expectations and evaluations based on past experience. These condition and alter the probability of empathic response in a particular situation. Psychodynamic conflict in the subject may also influence empathic responsiveness, accentuating or impeding it selectively. In all these factors the "differential pervasiveness" we spoke of earlier becomes evident. Nicholas Rescher speaks of this differential responsiveness as the "participatory transfer rate" (p.t.r.) of a subject.\textsuperscript{40} As illustrative of the considerable number of factors which interact to determine a subject's p.t.r., and through this any particular occurrence of empathy, we will briefly review two recent studies.
Martin Hoffman, in a study of empathy and moral development summarizing two decades of research, suggests that the development of empathic responsiveness can be divided into four stages, corresponding to development in certain basic cognitive skills. In the first stage, the child experiences only a "global empathic awareness" of the other's distress. She has not yet achieved the ability to make self-other differentiations, and hence has no awareness of the other's existence as a separate entity. In regard to the kind of empathy experienced in this primitive state, Hoffman asserts:

We use the word empathy to describe it, but the child does not really put himself in the other's place and try to imagine what he is feeling. The child's response is rather a conditioned, passive, involuntary one based on the pull of surface cues associated with elements of his own past.

Hoffman cites the undifferentiated character of the child's awareness as a possible mechanism by which conditioning might take place; he thus defends a version of the conditioning theory of the origin of empathy (though in reference, here, to older children). The child, accordingly perceives the expressive emotional distress behavior of another as behavior which is similar to her own when she is in distress. Because she is unable to differentiate between self and other, she does not realize that she is not expressing the distress behavior. The net result is the eliciting of emotional upset in herself,
which she may associate with primitive images or memories of her own past upsets.

When the capacity to make self-other differentiations develops, the child enters into a second stage of empathic responsiveness. The child now achieves the ability to detect object-permanence—viz., "a stable sense of the separate existence of physical objects even when they are outside his immediate physical field." Hoffman cites evidence that person-permanence may develop even before object-permanence, hence at a very early age. At the level of person-permanence, the child is now able to identify the other person as the victim, and her empathic response can now become the basis for a genuine concern for the other as other. However, she is still unable to detect that the other's feelings and experiences are different than her own. Thus, as summarized by Hoffman:

This [second] level of sympathetic distress is in some ways as primitive as the empathic distress described earlier—a passive, involuntary, and sometimes grossly inaccurate and transitory response to cues perceptually similar to those associated with the child's own past distress. It is a significant advance, however, since for the first time the child experiences a desire to help the other, though his effort to do so may be misguided because of his cognitive limitations.43

The third stage of empathic response development comes about when the child gains the ability to conceive of others "as sources of feelings and thoughts in their own right." She is now more aware that others' feelings
may differ from her own; she is more aware of the guesswork involved in emotion-recognition. At this stage she is capable of genuine role-taking, and may do so as a result of a personal or deliberate active effort. Hoffman interprets this, along Piagetian lines, as representing continuing progress away from ego-centrism.

The fourth and final stage represents the development of a relatively complete personal identity. The child develops "the cognitive capacity to integrate his own discrete inner experiences over time, and to form a conception of himself as having different feelings and thoughts in different situations, but still remaining the same continuous person with one past, present, and anticipated future." This opens up as well a new awareness of others—not only in terms of their expressive behavior and predicted feelings, but of their plight or situation. As Hoffman summarizes:

This [fourth] level of sympathetic distress, then, consists of the synthesis of empathic distress and a mental representation of the other's general plight—that is, his typical day-to-day level of distress or deprivation, the opportunities available or denied to him, his future prospects and the like. If this representation of the other falls short of what the observer conceives to be a minimally acceptable standard of well-being (and if the observer's own life circumstances place himself above this standard), this third level of sympathetic distress will typically be evoked, regardless of the other's apparent momentary state.

Having reached this fourth level, the individual is also now capable of experiencing empathy toward individuals not
quite like those to whom she has been exposed, or toward entire groups. This is because she now has an extended ability to perceive characteristics of circumstances or situations; these can be generalized to elicit empathy toward those in similar circumstances.

Another study, by K.V. Roe, examines the effect of parent-child relationships on empathy. Investigations have suggested that children whose relationships with father or mother, especially with the parent of the same sex, are either negative or highly ambivalent develop reduced capacities to empathize. Two hypotheses offered to explain this are (a) that empathy is not developed because it is not useful, and (b) the high level of tension due to the lack of satisfaction of basic affection or identification needs screens out empathic responses. Parents who are either too predictive or too distant in their responses stand in the way of empathy development because it is never in the interest of the child to imaginatively "guess" the feelings of the parent. Empathy is a useful strategy if getting one's own way or getting what one seeks is contingent on predicting accurately the feelings of another person. As this is not necessary for the child whose parents either always say Yes or always No i.e., an over-indulgent or overly prohibitive parent), empathy is less likely to be developed. According to the second hypothesis a basic need of the child has not been met, for
which the child compensates, by a defensive hardening of attitude toward the sufferings of others. Thus, we see that competing theories of development offer different explanations of what takes place; we let it stand that a history of parental affection is one important determinant of the ability to empathize. Individuals who have a scarred history may even want to be empathic, but find themselves unable to do so due to their own inner pain.

These two studies illustrate the number and complexity of the factors determining p.t.r. or empathic responsiveness in older individuals. Our aim here is not to settle upon any one theory as the explanation of every occurrence of empathy. Particularly as one moves to older children and adults, we see that there is considerable evidence that, whatever antecedent tendency to respond there may exist, one's p.t.r. is affected by a great number of determinants, including those described by theories (3) through (5). In regard to empathy in non-infants, it is advisable to adopt a multi-determinant approach, according to which no one determinant or set of determinants is regarded as both necessary and sufficient. Empathic responsiveness may vary in regard to particular situational characteristics, and with each individual's history of learning, emotional experiences, and personality and skill development. As an individual progresses in age and enters into more complex social situations, empathic
responsiveness becomes a function of numerous factors which are exceedingly difficult to isolate (especially in "naturalistic" settings) as psychological variables. The following is a summary of a number of these factors, as culled from recent experimental studies of empathy.  

**Sources of Impedance:**

a. empathy may be retarded by low levels of innate responsiveness (most data here applies to babies, young children and animals)

b. empathy may be retarded by insufficient development of cognitive skills, e.g., in emotion-recognition and imaginative reconstruction.

c. empathy may be retarded by high levels of inner conflict and tension

d. empathy may be retarded by an inconsistent record of parental affection and concern

e. empathy may be retarded by counterconditioning and indoctrination

f. empathy may be retarded by peer pressure

[note: each of these has its positive correlate]

**Sources of Accentuation:**

g. empathy may be enhanced by broad experience with the emotions, emotional expressions and of emotion-evoking "paradigm scenarios" (e.g., through role-taking)

h. empathy may be enhanced by observing respected models who empathize and appear to derive pleasure or meaning in doing so

i. empathy may be enhanced by social approval and internalized normative requirements

j. empathy may be enhanced by guilt

k. empathy is usually enhanced by perceived similarities and relationships to the subject
As can be observed from this list, an individual's probability of empathic response in any particular situation or toward a particular recipient may be the product of a number of variables. The presence of an antecedent, innate tendency to respond is no guarantee that the subject will respond uniformly, or at all, to the perceived straits of her fellow species-members. On the other hand, this tendency creates the likelihood that most individuals will sometimes respond empathically to their fellows—a predisposition the implications of which will concern us in remaining chapters.
CHAPTER II: NOTES


3. See the discussion below.


8. This discussion borrows heavily from Richard B. Brandt, "The Psychology of Benevolence and Its Implications for Philosophy," Journal of Philosophy 73 (1976): 429-453. Brandt offers these theories as explanations of sympathy and benevolence; we have adapted his discussion to apply to empathy.


16. Ibid.


20. Ibid.


22. Aronfreed, 111.


25. Ibid., 175.


27. Sagi & Hoffman, 176.


32. Ibid., 9.

33. Sagi and Hoffman, 176.


35. Ibid., 8.


40 Rescher, 22.

41. Hoffman, "Empathy, Role Taking, Guilt, and Development of Altruistic Motives," 126-f. Hoffman's numbering of the stages in this article is confusing; he begins numbering in the post-neonate stage, and thus ends up with three stages. We have converted this into four stages, beginning with neonate--an adaptation Hoffman has made as well in a more recent article, "Development of Moral Thought, Feeling, and Behavior," American Psychologist 34 (1979): 958-966.
42. Ibid., 132.
43. Ibid., 133.
44. Ibid., 130.
45. Ibid., 134.
CHAPTER III

FURTHER CLARIFICATIONS AS TO THE NATURE OF EMPATHY

In Chapter I we discussed a commonly-employed method of measuring empathy. This consisted of testing the subject's ability to correctly predict the verbal items picked by the recipient on an emotional self-report questionnaire. This method of measuring empathy is appropriate to the first concept of empathy discussed in Chapter I, but is out of place in regard to the third definition (the one which we adopted). ¹ This is because the measuring process requires what appears to be an extensive form of cognitive processing as well as emotion verbalization abilities—neither of which are required according to the third definition. Therefore, a more appropriate method of measuring empathy must be found. As it happens, another method of measurement is available, consideration of which may serve to shed further light on the nature of the empathic response.

This second method of measuring empathy seeks to gain a way of distinguishing uniquely empathic responses
from other kinds of responses to recipients (e.g., dispassionate responses to recipients as part of laboratory exercises in emotion-recognition). A number of recent studies have sought to determine when the observation of another's expressive behavior and/or situation leads to emotional activation in the observer (e.g., Krebs, 1975; Matthews et al., 1981). Experiments of this kind usually consist of a controlled situation in which the subject is allowed to observe the recipient in a particular emotional state (usually that of distress). The recipient may be observed on film or in audio form on tape; or, the subject and recipient may be in each other's direct presence. In some studies, no attempt is made to disguise the fact from the subject that she is deliberately being exposed to another person in an emotional state. In other cases, the distress of the recipient is made to look accidental or like a contingency unrelated to the experiment which is underway. For example, in one experiment (Aronfreed, 1970), as the subjects are all listening to headphones, one of the headsets "accidentally" malfunctions, causing a collaborator to wince in pain as a loud noise comes out of his headset. The subject is observed for signs of emotional activation felt in response to witnessing the recipient's distress. The most common methods employed to measure emotional activation are physiological ones, e.g., increase in
galvanic skin response, and change in pulse or blood pressure. Verbal reports of having experienced emotion are sometimes sought. In addition, forms of helping behavior directed toward the recipient are regarded as indicative of emotional activation, though this involves making certain assumptions which require testing themselves.

In the discussion which follows, we will take the liberty to speak of those responses which are emotional in nature and which enter consciousness as "feelings," in accord with the analysis of emotions provided by Errol Bedford, W. P. Alston, Terance Penelhum, et al. As opposed to the view which would seek to exclude all episodic language from the description of emotions (e.g., Gilbert Ryle's approach in *The Concept of Mind*), we affirm the interpretation that many of the emotions imply, among other things, an immediate awareness or feeling. We will not attempt to settle here the question—which we regard as an essentially neuro-physiological one—to what the feeling corresponds (e.g., is it an awareness in consciousness of visceral bodily states, or a state of excitation of the limbic system?). We suggest that the emotions may vary along a continuum from those most closely resembling physiological states, being more enduring or dispositional in nature (e.g., depression, alienation, disappointment)
to those which are highly episodic, protruding into consciousness as relatively prominent states of activation (e.g., fear, anger, joy). These latter we shall speak of as "feelings." Feelings, as we shall refer to them, are distinguished from other forms of emotionality through the fact that they capture or pervade the focus of current consciousness. This does not exclude the possibility of being emotional without being directly conscious of it (e.g., an individual may be depressed and not be consciously aware of all that is going on inside of him). Our interest here will be in those forms of empathic response measurable in the way described above—i.e., as normally taken to involve the experience of activation expressed in feelings.

We now raise a question of considerable controversy among those who have sought to define empathy. If experiencing empathy entails that the subject feel something, what is it that she feels? Her own syndrome of feelings, or those of the recipient? What can it mean to feel the feelings of another person? In what sense does the subject share or experience "the same" feelings as those the recipient experiences?

It seems unlikely that one can successfully defend the claim that, in a strict sense, the subject experiences the same (i.e., numerically identical) feelings as the recipient. Such a claim might be defended by an
appeal to some form of trans-personal psychology, as defended by psychologists such as Charles Tart. This would require the defense of a meta-physical system essentially foreign to the tradition of Western philosophy; for our part, we prefer to seek an understanding of empathy from within the latter tradition unless it proves to be impossible to do so.

A different attempt to defend the strict interpretation of "the same" in "the same feelings" was the phenomenological approach of Max Scheler. As noted in the previous chapter, Scheler was a vocal critic of Lipps, chiefly because of Lipps's suggestion that empathy might involve an inference or projection by the subject. Scheler, who preferred the term sympathy to empathy, drew attention to the observation, which we will discuss below, that emotions are sometimes "read off" in an apparently immediate or intuitive fashion. Scheler interpreted this as indicating that, by means of a phenomenological Aufweisen, the subject has a direct experience of the "foreign feeling". Eugene Kelly summarizes Scheler's view as follows:

Scheler claims that the 'foreign' emotion is directly and immediately given in the outward expression and that intuitive reflection upon what is given in an act of sympathy will reveal no 'projection' or 'inference' involved either in fact or as a logical precondition of the act of sympathy. Moreover, the thought that we 'go' from our own ego 'to' the foreign ego in the act of sympathy contradicts the phenomenal facts: we
first come upon the ego in our understanding intercourse with other egos; we discover 'ourselves' in discovering 'others': the 'we' founds the 'I.'

Scheler's argument for these assertions depends upon a complex classification of types of sympathy (Mitgefühlen) in addition to an intricate theory concerning the way in which feeling states logically and developmentally depend upon each other. Without attempting to exegete this complex system, we will make two brief points in regard to Scheler's view. First, Scheler's suggestion that empathy does not involve any conscious process of inference or transferring fits nicely with the definition we have adopted. Yet Scheler's claim that foreign feeling-states entail no "logical preconditions" requires more explanation and support than he gives to it. Scheler's approach, as is well known, is from the phenomenological standpoint. From this standpoint, he may well be able to confirm that no conscious reasoning process is involved in the experience of empathic feelings. What this does not rule out is the possibility that unconscious inferential processes play a role in empathizing. It remains to be shown that antecedent unconscious cognitive processes must be describable as "reasons" or "logical preconditions" for it to be granted that they play a causal role in empathizing. Scheler's analysis provides the whole story about empathy only if the phenomenological
standpoint is the only permissible analytical perspective. This seems an overly limiting approach.  

Secondly, Scheler holds that the "feeling" involved in empathy presents itself as the feeling of another. It appears that Scheler wishes the creation of a new category of human experiencing, the feeling-of-a-foreign-feeling-state (cf. Scheler's "community of feeling," Miteinanderfühlen). German phenomenological psychologists at the turn of the century were notorious for multiplying categories of experiencing (cf. Wundt, Titchener). Scheler does raise an interesting issue: in what sense does the experience of "another's" emotion (which we have previously spoken of as an "imitative" response) have an "alien" feel? How are empathically-experienced emotional feelings distinguished from one's own reactions? Scheler's solution is that empathically-experienced feelings have their own unique feel, different from the subject's personal emotional responses. They are different because they consist of the direct and intuitive experience (as alien) of the other's feelings.

Scheler's approach, if adopted, would help to solve what might be called the problem of identification. Several of the definitions cited in Chapter I referred to empathy as a form of identification; the emphasis here is on the effort made by the empathizer
to place herself in the situation of the recipient, imaginatively associating herself with the recipient or even pretending to be the recipient. In most psychological literature, the term has one of two meanings, one positive and one negative.\textsuperscript{12} It may stand for an "associating or affiliating oneself closely with a person or group, merging one's purposes and values with those of the group."\textsuperscript{13} Many see this exemplified in the emotional attachments which children establish with adults through imitation and obedience, but it may also stand for the normal group loyalties which children and adults engage in for the purposes of friendship and furthering mutual interests.\textsuperscript{14} The other use of the term is to denote a psychological defense mechanism by which the individual associates herself with a successful person in the hope of enhancing her own self-esteem and reducing her level of anxiety. Identification may involve "seeking another person as an extension of oneself, hence, seeking satisfaction through that other, and sharing his griefs and triumphs."\textsuperscript{15} Social psychologists sometimes use the term to stand for the affiliations individuals seek with groups when driven by the need to maintain or establish their self-concept. In both of these uses, "identification" implies a uniting of one's self, or view of one's self, to the individual or group with which one identifies. In effect, one
becomes a member of the group, so that being affiliated with the group becomes a part of one's own identity. The latter sense of the term, perhaps denoting an extreme form of that signified by the first sense, is negative in import.

Many of those who have discussed empathy wish to preserve the important difference between the two interpretations of "identification." In the first case, identification with the group is a part of the normal process of self-definition through interaction in which group membership and loyalties gives the individual ways to distinguish himself from other individuals (e.g., those in different groups). Empathy may play a major role in establishing such group cohesiveness. The important point is that, in this kind of identification, "ego-strength" is maintained. But most who employ the concept of empathy wish to stop short of viewing it in terms of the second way of merging the identity of the subject with others. For example, Carl Rogers writes:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame or reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the person, but without ever losing the "as if" condition. Thus it means to sense the hurt or the pleasure of another as he senses it and to perceive the causes thereof as he perceives them, but without ever losing the recognition that it is as if I were hurt or pleased or so forth. If this "as if" quality is lost, then the state is one of identification.
Empathy is a bit of a tight rope walk. On the one hand, if the subject does not genuinely experience in some sense the same feelings as the recipient, then she hasn't really entered into his experience. On the other hand, if she *does* experience his feelings, with an overly high degree of realism, then she risks identifying herself with him (in the second sense), tying up her identity with his, and no longer bringing to him the viewpoint of an independent observer. Lawrence Blum notes the latter problem when treating the related notion of compassion. Blum warns that "such a pathological condition [as identification] actually precludes genuine compassion because it blurs the distinction between subject and object." The same can be said for empathy.

How can the "as if" quality mentioned by Rogers be preserved in the subject's emotional reaction without emptying it of realism and authenticity? Theodor Lipps apparently was aware of this problem, and makes the following attempt at analyzing the "as if" quality as it characterizes aesthetic experience:

> I become angry when in the course of everyday life I encounter something that stimulates anger. But if anger is artistically presented, nothing actually arouses my anger. Here anger arises not out of experiences which occur to me and wound me, but rather an inner mode of my self-activity is aroused by the artistic depiction. I know at once that the anger is only represented and therefore belongs only to an ideal world. This means that the anger that
permeates me lacks the necessary motivating factors of real anger. It is a kind of anger that has nothing in it of a wish or will to react against some inner attack, and it cannot stir me up to some sort of action. . . . It is an experiencing which does not affect me as a real individual, as a part of the context of reality, but only as the aesthetic spectator living and moving in a world of aesthetic representation, far removed from actuality. 18

Lipps makes a useful point when he notes that the empathic reaction arises not out of stimuli perceived to personally affect the subject, but out of "an inner mode of [my] self-activity" by which the anger is "only represented." His suggestion is that empathizing involves a certain self-directed projective activity into the emotions of the recipient. This serves to distinguish empathic responses from those emotional responses which are experienced passively by the subject due to personal experience of the emotion-evoking circumstances.

If Lipps's account is correct, empathic responses are distinguished from the subject's other emotional responses by the fact that they are, in some sense, willingly or deliberately initiated or entered into by the subject. This willingness does not include, however, "a wish or will to react against some inner attack" and thus "lacks the necessary motivating factors of real anger." The problem with this account is that it does not take stock of the often involuntary and highly realistic character of empathic responses.
Lipps's description of aesthetic empathy may accurately describe the "as if" character of some aesthetic experiences, but fails to successfully describe other forms of empathy. Interpersonal empathy, for example, does not necessarily involve an ideal world; in addition, it may well stir the subject to some kind of action.

How then is empathy to be distinguished from the ego-confusion referred to by the second negative sense of the term "identification"? Is empathy in actuality a form of ego-confusion or transference? We argue that it is not. The difference may perhaps be stated in this way. Identification, as a form of ego-confusion, represents an often sub-conscious activity of the individual's psyche to bolster the ego or reduce its overall level of conflict through transference or projection of information or experience to another (or group's) ego. Empathy, on the other hand, is what may be a highly realistic duplication of the perceived and/or inferred emotional responses of others, the occurrence of which is not, however, the result of the subject's own psychic struggles for mental equilibrium. The actual experiences of identification and empathy may not differ phenomenologically. What distinguishes the two response patterns is the fact that the chain of internal causes involved in identification is very different from that involved in empathizing. The impulse to respond in a
similar way to the recipient is, in the case of identification, fueled by the need to reduce ego-conflict or to maintain ego-strength (bolster self-concept). Genuine empathizing may have little if anything to do with the subject's ego and its vicissitudes.

This conforms to the model suggested in Chapter I, according to which empathy may occur without the contributing occurrence of "extensive" cognitive processing. The following proposed model of empathic response, adapted from Colin Martindale, suggests in a rough way how this might take place. An occurrence of empathy may be construed as an instance of involuntary attention, in which the awareness of the subject is drawn, prior to extensive processing, by seeing the overt expressive behavior of the recipient. Martindale, relying upon the suggestions of Berlyne (1971) and Treisman (1969), hypothesizes that a stimulus input may become activated as a "cognitive unit" sufficient to receive conscious attention as a result of one of several possible properties. These are detected by means of a low-level cortex "filtering" operation. Properties of "interest" to the organism include certain (a) psycho-physical properties to which the organism's receptors are highly attuned (e.g., brightness), (b) collative properties (e.g., contrasts with other perceptions as in the case of perceiving a shadow) and
(c) **ecological** properties, wherein specific characteristics of possible stimuli possess a special attention arousing potential due to a genetically-tuned capacity of the organism's nervous system. Martindale offers as an example of the latter the apparent biological structuring of a frog's receptors, nervous system and brain to respond attentively (and with rapid motor behavior) to small dark objects the size of flies. 22

In the same way, the visual input of emotionally expressive behavior in the recipient could elicit the attention and emotions of the subject prior to any extensive semantic or conceptual processing of the input. In this case, seeing the emotionally-expressive behavior of another involves (from a neurophysiological standpoint) activation of the occipital or visual regions of the cortex and, to a limited extent activation of the "visual associative" surrounding cortex regions. The latter serves as a precondition to the eliciting of response from the reticular activating system (r.a.s.) (involving primarily the hippocampus)—regarded by many physiologists as the source of neuro-physiological arousal. Arousal takes place as a result of the fact that the "information" supplied by the visual associative regions matches the genetically-supplied "ecological" candidating characteristics for arousal. The result is attention. This is accompanied by emotional arousal due
to a parallel genetically-mediated linkage of the r.a.s. with limbic emotional centers. 23

This model suggests that relatively involuntary and "non-cognitive" emotional responses may occur as a result of the perception of emotionally expressive behavior in others. The model fits nicely into the constraints which exist in the neo-nate situation described in Chapter II. Further discussion as to how humans came to be "programmed" in this way will be delayed until a later chapter.

The relevance of this model to our discussion thus-far is as follows. Empathy is not a form of identification inasmuch as only a low-level type of filtering process is involved prior to generation of feeling. This low-level does not permit the transformation of input information in terms of such sophisticated arrays as "self-concept" or "authoritative other." It should be noted that the choice of the Martindale/Treisman model here is crucial. Choosing a "late-selection" model of cognitive processing (e.g., Blum, 1961; Deutsch & Deutsch, 1963; Norman, 1968), according to which all inputs are processed deeply and all pass through long-term memory as well as semantic processing, would prejudice us toward the conclusion that empathic experiences are far from peripheral, but likely involve interaction with the major centres of the brain concerned with self-image and
psychic equilibrium. That is, adopting this model would make it likely that empathizing is after all a form of identification. The Martindale/Treisman model, however, has received recent experimental confirmation, while the "late selection" model has become increasingly doubtful as a description of how inputs usually are processed by the brain.

This brings us back to our original question, which concerns the nature of the "alien" but "as if" quality of empathic feelings. We propose the following analysis of these feelings. When an individual experiences an empathic emotional response, she experiences (a) the same kind of feelings as those which she either directly perceives or infers to be the experience of the recipient. These feelings are experienced simultaneously with (b) a relatively involuntary drawing of attention to the recipient. By "relatively involuntary" we mean that the subject's attention is drawn without the subject having necessarily chosen or intended to give heed to the recipient; yet, the subject is not so coerced that she cannot repress this input, nor is it implied that she could not have wished or intended to give heed to the recipient. Thus, the subject experiences the same kind of emotion as (apparently) experienced by the recipient. That this emotional response is vicarious or imitative, and not the subject's response to her own situation, is
FIGURE 2: EMPATHIC AROUSAL
apparent to her as a result of being drawn attention-wise to the recipient's situation. The actual feeling itself is not qualitatively foreign; it is the confluence of these otherwise normal feelings with the drawing of attention to the other which gives the entire experience its "as if" quality for the subject (Figure 2).

We have stated that the emotional response of the subject is of the "same kind" or same type as that perceived as being experienced by the recipient. Further discussion is necessary in order to specify what it is for two emotions to be of the same emotion type. Intuitively, the concept is that as the subject witnesses the sorrow, fear, anger, etc. of the recipient, she experiences these same (i.e., the same kind of) emotions herself. Psychologists have sought to locate the basic "dimensions" which individuals employ to categorize the emotions in emotion-recognition, and both philosophers and psychologists have endeavored to show how the plethora of emotional responses can be traced to more simple forms (e.g. pleasure and pain). These attempts have been by and large unsuccessful, as they tend to oversimplify the human motivational picture. Experiments have shown, however, that humans are extraordinarily capable at identifying emotional expressions—especially when situational cues are provided—in terms of the numerous
ordinary English words specifying kinds of emotional response (e.g., fear, anger, joy, etc.). This suggests that, except for cases of subtle or ambivalent emotions, language provides a good indicator of the distinctions which individuals want to make between the emotions. This makes sense if it is accepted that the conceptualization of the emotions is, by and large learned, in conjunction with the standard linguistic tags which are placed on emotionally expressive behavior in certain situational contexts. A very simple assertion might thus be made: the feelings experienced by the recipient and subject are of the same type if both individuals would assent to the same linguistic token as accurately describing what they have felt. It is roughly this kind of statement which lies behind the tests of "empathic accuracy" (i.e., emotion-recognition) mentioned earlier, wherein subject and recipient pick the same verbal items on emotion self-report questionnaires.

There are two problems with this way of defining "same type." First, it is not at all clear that any sort of learning to conceptualize the emotions (particularly by means of words) is necessary in order for empathy to take place. Of course, there may be some kinds of emotional responses which, through their conventional association with certain situational contexts, are learned. That is, individuals learn that it is conventionally
acceptable, and perhaps expected, that they respond in
certain ways in certain situations. Dostoevski's Idiot
is a sparkling example of someone who did not learn
these lessons well. And of course, every culture has
its own linguistic tags which it places upon expressions
of emotions; at least a part of developing one's repertoire of emotions consists of learning those tags. On
the other hand, it is likely that the subject comes
equipped with the capacity to experience a certain repertoire of emotions, no prior learning required. Nor is
such learning required to recognize emotions, as the 18
hour old infant empathizers illustrate.

Secondly, the test of mutually assenting to the
same linguistic token is not an adequate test of empathy.
An individual not sharing the same language with the
recipient is surely capable of empathizing, but may not
be able to report her feelings by means of the same
tokens as the recipient. Translation may in some cases
be possible; on the other hand, languages vary a great
deal as to the nuances of their emotion-terms. It seems
odd to require of a potential empathizer that she be
aware of the subtle nuances and translation difficulties
of two languages before we attribute to her the capacity
to empathize.

A possible way to circumvent these difficulties
would be to rephrase our previous statement in
counter-factual terms. Thus an emotional response is of the same type as that experienced by the recipient if the subject and recipient would assent to the same linguistic token as descriptive of what they felt if they shared the same language and each spoke it correctly or, expressive behavior might be substituted for linguistic behavior. Thus, an emotional response is of the same type as that experienced by the recipient if the subject would emit physiologically similar expressive behavior as that emitted by the recipient given a conventionally standard emotion-expression situation. This latter analysis is clearly insufficient. Though there are some universal generalizations which can be made concerning emotional expression, there is also considerable idiosyncrasy. In general, it seems incorrect to identify sameness of emotion with the ways in which emotions are sometimes, or would be, expressed.

Both of these attempted definitions represent ways of detecting when two people experience the same kind of emotion. The attempt to specify this arises from the search, with which we began this chapter, for a way of measuring or testing for empathy. Presumed is a third person vantage point. The various attempts to define "same kind" in terms of the same modes of expression are, despite their inadequacies, probably the lot of psychologists seeking to measure empathy— at least until more
exact neurophysiological measures become available. A different approach, however, is to ask how it is that the subject knows when she is empathizing. When is it clear to her that she is experiencing the "same kind" of emotion as the recipient? What standard does she employ to test for this?

We must first backstep to speak briefly of what is involved in emotion-recognition. It appears that there are two primary ways of recognizing emotions. These are, first, by means of expressive behavior. Probably the dominant means by which the emotions of others are recognized is through the observation of their expressive behavior. Noting the appearance of tears, a clenched fist, an involuntary twitch, and so forth indicates the presence of the appropriate emotions to the skilled observer. Experiments on the recognition of emotion suggest that subjects are often able to "read off" in a fairly immediate and intuitive manner the emotionally-significant physiognomic patterns exhibited by others. This ability extends at least as far as the more turbulent expressions, especially those which may require action on the part of the subject. As would be expected, more subtle emotions are less accurately identified by means of expressive behavior and posture, though such emotions can often nevertheless be detected and classified accurately according to certain very general dimensions (e.g.,
"approach-avoidance"). In addition, verbal reports of emotion provide a source of information—though often a less reliable one. An individual may also indirectly indicate an emotion through the way he speaks of a situation or another person (e.g., by doting on some one incident in an unusually prolonged way).

This method is, as noted, often quite intuitive and non-inferential; young infants appear to have the ability to recognize emotions by expressive behavior, and it is quite likely that it is by this means that neo-nates empathize with their fellows. In those cases where expressive behavior is not so manifest, conscious study and analysis may be required, and it may be quite questionable whether the recipient's emotional state has been correctly read. Such cases, interestingly, are the ones which are least likely to generate an empathic response, possibly due to the element of doubt which distracts the attention from the recipient.

Another important means of access to the emotions of another is through a knowledge of the external events which have had affective impact upon the recipient's present mental state. As Anthony Kenny notes, expressive behavior often can be identified as expressing a particular emotion only if the stimulus or situational reference is known. Thus, if a child cries, we can determine whether he is expressing emotion-behavior, as opposed to
pain-behavior, only if we know whether he is crying because he bumped his head, or because he was left alone. Amelie O. Rorty has noted, however, that "contextually identifying" emotions is highly complex. To identify an emotion by the circumstances which usually surround its occurrence is to claim a rather high degree of knowledge of the typical causes of any particular emotion. One often speaks of the "precipitating or immediate cause" of an emotional outburst or experience. This involves some reference to the object or target of the emotion (where one is believed to exist), as well as to the individual's description of the target (often referred to as the "intentional" component of the emotion). This usually requires, though, a certain "folk psychology" of the properties of the object which typically play a role in the generation of that particular emotion. Such psychologies, however, are often ideologically-tinged; more often than not, they are an expression of a culture's beliefs and attitudes concerning what is to be the proper emotional response to particular contexts or situations. In addition to this kind of knowledge, we may speak of knowing the "significant cause" of an emotion--this being a more extensive causal history which takes into account the "magnetizing dispositions" or long-range emotional tendencies of the individual. The latter would require a much greater knowledge of the
individual's past, whereas knowledge of immediate causes lends itself to more "ready and quick" identifications of emotion, through the association of emotion-types with relatively standardized sets of circumstances. Both types of contextual knowledge may play a role in empathizing. On the one hand, the subject may gain a sufficient awareness of the immediate causal context of the other person to make an identification of his apparent emotional response in terms of the emotion-type which is standard for that kind of situation. For example, seeing a car pull out directly in front of a vehicle travelling in the other lane, the subject easily predicts the emotional response of the driver who was forced to slam on his brakes. Empathizing may also require a knowledge of the significant causes of the recipient's response. In this case, prior acquaintance with the recipient and some knowledge of his background and characteristic ways of relating and responding are necessary. But this is not uncommon, as when friends are able to skillfully empathize with each other, or when the protagonist in a novel has been portrayed in an effective way so that the reader comes to know him sufficiently to guess his likely responses.

An important difference worth noting between these latter forms of emotion-recognition and recognition by means of expressive behavior is that the observation of
expressive behavior demands much less of an interest in the recipient. As noted above, expressive behavior is often noted in a quite immediate and intuitive way (though note: this does not imply infallibility or certainty). Emotion-recognition according to context, on the other hand, demands a more extensive giving heed or attention to the situations of the recipient. It may imply the subject "taking an interest" in the situation of the recipient. This explains why showing empathy (that is, expressing or communicating to the recipient that one is having or has had an empathic experience with him) is often interpreted as an act of service, positive regard or affirmation. It usually suggests that the subject has taken an interest in the recipient and his plight. Further, it suggests a tacit assent to the coherence, rationality or at least sanity of the recipient's emotions. The fact that the subject can empathize assures the recipient that his feelings are not crazy or utterly idiosyncratic; the subject has apparently rationalized the situation in the same way he has, and has arrived at similar results.

One final point concerning recognition by situational context is worth making. Adam Smith states that "sympathy...does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it." He offers a more detailed description of the
process as follows:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no ideal of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation. Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. 

Again:

It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.

Provided this is not limited to a purposeful or deliberate participation in the situation, Smith seems to capture quite well what we often do by means of imagination in empathizing. Smith is correct that in the cases in which the stimulus is a perception of the context of the recipient, the response is to the situation (via our own reaction to it), as opposed to being in response to the passions of the recipient. The recipient's emotions in this case, are not directly perceived (otherwise, emotion-recognition would be by expressive behavior, not situational context). Rather, the situation is matched with the subject's own imaginary or (if it applies)
remembered participation in it. The result is the evocation of empathic feeling.

Emotion-recognition and evocation, then, may vary from situation to situation, in some cases consisting of an intuitive and quick apprehension, in others a lengthy and sustained assessment of the recipient's situation. As Nico Frijda concludes following an extensive review of studies of emotion-recognition and impression-formation:

One thing, we think, is clear from the results of the summarized experiments. Recognition of emotion is not a simple process of permitting an explanation with the simplicity of the classical theories. The diversity of phenomena as well as of factors contributing to recognition is much too large.... Moreover, it would seem that recognition of emotion not only rests upon the integration of a large number of cues of different kinds. The manner of integration depends upon quite specific knowledge, upon a store of hypotheses concerning what goes usually with what in human life. Cues are combined by means of different kinds of hypotheses depending upon differences in the nature of those cues....In other words, recognition of emotion seems to be an example of complex information processing. A number of information-processing steps proceed in sequence, wherein the selection of steps to be undertaken depends in part upon the results of the preceding ones.40

Because of these variations in the kind of procedure involved in making emotion-recognitions, the subject's sense of assurance that she is experiencing the same kind of feeling as the recipient will also tend to vary. In some cases, it will be based upon a quick intuitive (non-inferential) assessment of expressive behavior. There may be little doubt about the correctness of identification, and little thought given to how the assessment was
arrived at. On the other hand, emotion-recognition may occur only after a lengthy process of study and involvement. This may affect the degree of certainty that the same kind of feeling is being experienced, depending in part on one's general feeling about the process of inference in which one has just been engaged. It must also be kept in mind that the subject's attitude concerning her empathic response will be in part a function of the degree to which the recipient or his situation has captured her attention. Where this has occurred only to a minimum degree, this may leave room for doubt, mental reservation, ambivalence, etc. On the other hand, where the subject's attention has, in a sense, been forcefully seized by the perceived situation or expressive behavior of the recipient, there will be little worry given to what kind of emotion is being experienced vis a vis the recipient.

With all this in mind, we return to the question of how we are to define "the same emotion-type." Consider an instance in which the subject takes the weeping recipient to be in sorrow, when actually his tears are ones of joy. Has the subject empathized with the recipient? If she has empathized, it is only in a minimal sense. To the extent that she has mutually resonated with the recipient by being generally in a state of emotional activation or arousal, she has to that extent
stepped into the recipient's shoes. This is saying very little, because, this aside, she really has misunderstood or misread the recipient and has felt something quite different than what he was experiencing.

It seems inappropriate to speak of emotional response based upon non-veridical emotion-recognition acts as empathic. Yet, a second illustration makes clear just how difficult "veridical" is to specify. Pall Ardal suggests the case of empathizing with a man who has a broken leg. Need one have previously experienced a broken leg oneself to understand/appreciate/be able to veridically discern his feelings? Need the subject experience an exact replica of his feelings, to the point of experiencing a pain in her leg of equal intensity, at the same anatomical location, etc.? This seems overly strict. Assuming that previous experience contributes to the ability to recognize and imitatively generate the recipient's present feelings, requiring exact replica feelings would require identical histories of experience; this would rule out empathy ever occurring, except where native responsiveness somehow enabled the individual to experience a replica emotion. Even in the latter case, there is no clear evidence that individuals are natively-endowed with a capacity to respond to recipients by experiencing exact replica emotions. Neo-nate crying may be a reaction to hedonic pain aroused by the perception
of other infants' cries; there is no reason to assume that infants fully experience the emotional/physical states of the recipient infants (e.g., the hunger-pangs which evoked their cries). Further, in Chapter X, we will argue for the place of learning in the emotion-recognition acts of even the most primitive empathizing.

It is impossible to derive conditions for what is veridical emotion-recognition without some reference to emotion-types. Whatever the limitations of attempts to specify the primitive or basic emotions, we require some notion of "different feels," to which (however ambiguously or imprecisely) are attached the emotion-words and the conceptual distinctions we attempt to make between them. These attempts to distinguish them are often tied (as noted above) to the circumstances which typically play a causal role in their occurrence. For example, if forced to define it, we might speak of embarrassment as "what you would feel when you make a mistake in public or when some personal bit of information is revealed." Not all emotion-types are equally definable in this way—e.g., fears of certain objects or states of affairs. Where the causes of being emotionally disposed in this way are not known or do not serve to provide it with a propositional content (cf., a "fear that..."), it will not do to appeal to "what you would feel when...". Thus, it would not be informative to state that "fear of snakes" is "what you
would feel when you see a snake." A similar problem arises in trying to define loving x, enjoying x, etc. Often recourse is made to other emotion-types at this point. Hence, "enjoying a good wine" is "experiencing lasting pleasure when you drink it."

Emotion-types, then, are of varying sorts, requiring several different modes of description (we have not attempted to offer an exhaustive survey here). Returning to empathy, we may define a veridical emotion-recognition as one which (as suggested earlier) is describable by the same emotion-type term. Again, this will only work as a philosopher's definition which assumes knowledge of the emotional states of both subject and recipient. It does not presume that subject and recipient would tend to employ the same linguistic token, except under highly idealized *ceteris paribus* conditions.

As to the phrase "the same," it is necessary to free it from "exact replica" interpretations. For example, it does not seem reasonable to require, for the subject to empathize with the recipient with a broken leg, that she must feel a replica pain (in the same leg), presumably arising from either a memory of having had a replica experience or from an amazing ability to imaginatively reconstruct and transform her own (different) experiences into those of the recipient. Empathy would normally be attributed to a recipient who felt *something*
of what the recipient was feeling. This might mean experiencing the general sense of handicap, frequent pain, embarrassment, frustration, etc. which can normally be supposed to accompany having a broken leg. All of this could well be inferred from one's relatively similar experience of having a broken arm, a sprained ankle, a head wound requiring stitches, etc. In this case, empathy would consist in experiencing the same emotion-type, with a substitution of many of the specific circumstances which caused the emotion to occur.  

As the example we have used is one of the sort described above as being circumstantially-defined (cf. embarrassment, above), the following statement would apply. For circumstance-bound emotions, an emotion, $\phi$, requires the experience of some set of circumstances, $C_\phi$, where $C_\phi$ would be an infinitely large set of circumstance-descriptions of that logically discernable type which normally cause $\phi$ to occur, and with which it is therefore normally associated. Particular instantiations of $\phi$ ($\phi_1, \phi_2, ..., \phi_i$) may be occasioned by circumstances unique to them ($C_{\phi_1}, C_{\phi_2}, ..., C_{\phi_i}$), provided the descriptions of these circumstances are drawn from $C_\phi$. Hence, Diane may experience the same type as Howard, even though she is actively recreating the pain of having had a sprained ankle ten years ago, while Howard is presently suffering with a broken leg. As long as they experience
the same emotion-type, and provided Diane's recalling her emotional experience is cued by some perception of Howard's suffering, Diane can be described as empathizing.

Some other means of specifying emotion-type would need to be developed for emotions which are not highly circumstance-bound, as discussed above. What would be required for Diane to empathize with Howard's fear of snakes? Presumably, she would need to experience an analogous kind of fear—e.g., her own fear of mice or dark closets might come to mind.

Whether the subject's emotional response is close enough to constitute empathy is, to some degree, a matter of convention or application, determined by the requirements of showing empathy. If Diane attempts to show empathy for Howard by citing her own experience, Howard may be comforted ("I'm glad I'm not the only person here who has fears") or he may respond, "But you don't really know what it's like to be afraid of snakes!" It is appropriate for Diane to seek from Howard the reasons why her empathy is not real empathy; he may or may not be able to meet her request. If he can then this usually amounts to a (conventionally-acceptable) demonstration that Diane really hasn't empathized, unless she can somehow refute his arguments. Intensity of experience is a common empathy-defeating factor. "You may know what it's like to be
letdown, but you've never been stabbed in the back by your own kids! In some cases, considerable difference in intensity is indicated by differing emotion-word synonyms. Either fury or irritation may be forms of anger; in some situations, agreement in sub-species (irritation-irritation or fury-fury) may be necessary before empathy is acknowledged to have occurred.

There is some latitude, then, within which we attribute experience of the same emotion-type. Further specification of this variable is undoubtedly complex, given the variety of emotion-types (some are circumstance-bound, some are not, some can be captured only by citing propositions and objects, others do not require this, etc.). There is no reason to think that there are uniform conditions for the occurrence of empathy, specifiable across all emotion-types and interpersonal encounters. We, thus, offer only the general description of experiencing the same emotion-type. Hopefully, the few examples cited exhibit the concept of sameness assumed here.

How crucial it is that the recipient's emotions or plight be veridically identified will also tend to vary with the needs of the situation. Empathy would appear to require correct identification in terms of at least the most general emotion-ascriptions. It is hard to see how the subject could err on such dimensions as
happy/sad, angry/pleased and still be described as empathizing. On the other hand, not being aware of every aspect of R's situation does not of necessity forbid empathizing. Here it is good to distinguish between having an incomplete knowledge of the other's state and having a mistaken impression of it. Either condition may disqualify empathy, though the latter seems the more crucial. Though we have argued that empathy in its more primitive and basic form involves relatively intuitive and immediate acts of emotion-assessment, in its more deliberate and intentional forms, empathy may involve a process of sustained observation and a feedback loop by which partial interpretations are fed back to the recipient for confirmation or re-expression. Initial non-veridical emotion-identifications may thus be corrected, allowing empathy to eventually occur. We will take this matter up again in Chapter XI.

In this chapter we have sought to further clarify the nature of empathic responses. Having rejected the view that the subject experiences the same identical feelings as the recipient, we determined that in empathy, the subject experiences (a) the same type of emotion as that perceived to be the experience of the recipient while simultaneously, (b) her attention is drawn to the recipient in his plight (contributing a dimension of "otherness" to the response). We discussed the
difficulty of detecting or defining when a subject and recipient experience the same kind of emotion. Detection of this is limited by the often faulty method of comparing expressions of emotion, whether linguistic or by other means. Situational variants may affect willingness to ascribe empathy in specific instances. Empathy is generally regarded as taking place only in a minimal way when the subject fails to accurately recognize the emotion of the recipient. The subject has not really "felt into" what the recipient is going through unless some approximation in emotion-type has been made to feeling what he is feeling.
CHAPTER III: NOTES


2. Ibid.


7. They feel with each other the same suffering, the 'same' pain; i.e., not that the one feels this suffering and the other feels it also, and in addition they both know that they are feeling it, but rather this is a feeling-with-each-other. The suffering of the one is not given to the other in any way as an 'object,' as in the case with the friend who comes up to the parents and sympathizes 'with them' or has pity on their pain," Max Scheler (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977), 129. See Max Scheler, The Nature of Sympathy (Wesen und Formen der Sympathie), trans. P. L. Heath (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).

9. Scheler distinguishes between four forms of sympathy: community of feeling (Miteinanderfühlen)—e.g., the feeling parents feel, standing by their dead child, fellow-feeling (Mitfühllein, Mitgefühl)—e.g., a friend enters the room and feels for the grieving parents, psychic contagion (Psychische Ansteckung)—e.g., a mob scene, emotional identification (Einfühlung)—e.g., psychosis. For a discussion, see Manfried S. Frings, Max Scheler: A Concise Introduction into the World of a Great Thinker (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1965), 56-ff.


11. Cf. note 9—Scheler demotes Einfühlung to a form of pathology, while it is Miteinanderfühlen which brings about real oneness.


13. Ibid, 249.


15. English and English, 249.


19. Though Lipps does acknowledge "negative empathy"—unpleasant empathic experiences.


23. Martindale, 242: "Biological rewards have genetically predetermined meaningfulness whereas the importance or significance of other sorts of stimuli is rather clearly learned. Irrespective of intensity and other psychophysical properties, stimuli differ in their impact value. This is because they differ in their meaning or significance for the organism. However, virtually every stimulus pattern presumably has some degree of meaningfulness. If it did not, we probably would not notice at all."


26. See the critique of various attempts to reduce emotions to simple forms of activation in K. T. Strongman, The Psychology of Emotion, 2nd ed. (N.Y.: John Wiley & Sons, 1978); see also Frijda, op. cit., 176-f.

27. Frijda, 217.

28. This is to accept the neo-Wittgensteinian strictures against purely private forms of emotional
response; on the other hand, it is not to suggest that the categories or dimensions into which the emotions seem to fall are purely conventional and entirely learned. Emotions may lend themselves to certain basic forms, learned in a Chomsky-type way. Numerous theorist's of the emotions have argued for a biologically innate set of basic or primary emotions having characteristic overt (e.g. facial) expressions. See Caroll E. Izard, Human Emotions (N.Y.: Plenum Press, 1977); Robert Plutchik, The Emotions: Facts, Theories and A New Model N.Y.: Random House, 1962); R. P. Abelson, V. Sermat, "Multidimensional Scaling of Facial Impressions," Journal of Experimental Psychology 63 (1962): 546-554.


30. Frijda, 217.


33. This point is made by Ronald deSousa, "The Rationality of Emotions," 142-3 in the Rorty volume, cited above. DeSousa, however, imports into the discussion the theses that (1) emotions are learned in connection with "paradigm scenarios" which yield sets of criteria for appropriateness, and (2) that these criteria enable a judgement of the "rationality" of any particular emotional response. This view appears to overlook the possibility of a biologically-based tendency toward certain types of emotional response; it also seems to confuse "rationality" with (social) "propriety."


36. Though, of course, this assurance may be a mistaken one. It might be argued that empathy involves a certain preliminary assent to an empathy-deserving interpretation of the recipient's plight—sort of an emotional form of Davidson's "principle of charity." We must keep in mind, however, that empathy may be highly involuntary in nature, and it is not at all clear that it implies an assessment or conscious "rational" accep-
tance of any particular interpretation of the recipient's situation.


38. Ibid., 201.

39. Ibid., 201-2.

40. Frijda, 213.

HUME'S THEORY OF SYMPATHY

Empathy, as we have defined it in previous chapters, may be viewed as a trait of a person, consisting of a disposition or tendency to respond imitatively over a sizable number of situations to the veridically perceived physical and emotional states of others. We have purposely left imprecise at this stage the measure of how often or readily the subject must respond if she is to be characterized as an empathic person. Having empathy is often attributed in regard to specific kinds of situations. We can speak of an individual as having a "tendency to empathize," meaning by this that, given a certain set of situations, an empathic response is likely to occur in the subject. As in Chapter I, an occurrence of empathy is interpreted as a particular instantiation of the general trait of empathy.

It is useful to distinguish between empathy as a tendency to respond in the way described from the component skills and abilities which sometimes play an important contributory role in the occurrence of empathic
response(s). These skills would include, for example, the cognitive processing abilities required to imaginatively reconstruct the recipient's situational context, as a means to projecting oneself into his situation and veridically regenerating the emotions which he is feeling. These skills are not always required for empathy to occur. Instances in which expressive behavior cues empathic response do not appear to require the ability to imaginatively reconstruct the recipient's context (cf. neo-nate empathy). Some basic abilities are always required--e.g., the ability to receive some kind of perceptual stimuli. It seems unlikely that entirely deaf and blind subjects, or those suffering from extensive cortical or limbic system brain damage, would be capable of empathizing (cf. some psychopaths whose emotional response capacities are extremely limited). Outside of these, which abilities and skills are required depends upon the particular empathy opportunity and the kinds of perceptual inputs available to the subject.

Possession of the component skills and abilities which are necessary to many occurrences of empathy are often lumped together by theorists as constituting "the capacity to empathize." By speaking in this way, certain interesting comparisons can be made with the tendency to empathize. It is almost a truism that subjects who do not have the ability to empathize will not tend to do so.
However, the converse does not hold so strongly. Individuals who do not tend to empathize, or who do not empathize in certain kinds of situations, can nevertheless sometimes be attributed the ability to do so, at least in terms of possessing the cognitive skills to represent or reconstruct the recipient's situation while recognizing his emotional state. In fact, we sometimes hold blameworthy individuals who do not show as much sensitivity or awareness of the feelings of others as we believe they should have (and could have). This latter point introduces a point of controversy, however—viz., the assumption that a person's motivational state is something which is in their control. This leads to the question of free will in thinking, feeling and action—a question too big to address in this context.

Speaking in general of a "capacity to empathize" often leads to undesirable confusion. As noted above, the requirements, in terms of skills tends to vary from situation to situation. This makes it difficult, and perhaps misleading to speak of a general capacity to empathize. Neo-nate infants are not able to imaginatively project themselves into the situation of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, yet we would be loath to say that they do not have the capacity to empathize.

There appear to be two ways in which "the capacity to empathize" can be cautiously employed. First, the
capacity to empathize could be viewed as being situation-relative, hence "the capacity to empathize-in-x," where 'x' denotes a type of situation. Secondly, one might define the capacity to empathize according to the breadth of situations relative to which the subject possesses the necessary skills to empathize. This would allow that the neo-nate infant has the capacity to empathize, but a very limited one when compared to the adult reader of Anna Karenina.

Returning to the distinction between the capacity and the tendency to empathize, we will seek to distinguish these two concepts in the following way. Let the tendency to empathize be interpreted in a non-reified way as the frequency with which the subject enters (voluntarily or involuntarily) into a state of empathic responsiveness over a universe of situations. The universe can be interpreted broadly as all possible situations, more narrowly as all situations the individual actually may face over the space of her life, more narrowly still as the set of situations she has already faced, or even more narrowly as a specific kind of situation—the dividing line between kinds being, let us say, the emotion-types relevant to those situations. In any particular situation, we can also speak of a tendency to empathize, perhaps as identified in terms of the frequency of empathizing in relatively similar situations in the past;
this may or may not, of course, work as a useful predictor because any number of unrecognized motivational factors may exist which are actively affecting the probability of empathic response in the present situation.

As for the capacity to empathize, let it be interpreted as that breadth of development of the component skills and abilities necessary to respond empathically to a range of situations, were one stimulated to do so. Defined in this way, we will not allow the inference that when an individual fails to empathize, this necessarily implies that she did not have the ability to do so. Also, if an individual has a low tendency to empathize in terms of a specific region of her empathic universe, then this does not necessarily imply that she does not have the ability to empathize in that context. We rule out these inferences by restricting the intention of "ability" so as to exclude reference to any prediction of an actual application of empathy. The state of skill-development which constitutes the capacity to empathize may be thought of in terms of a set of counterfactual statements about certain minimal scores which would be achieved on a variety of cognitive/perceptual skill measuring tests. When an individual is said to have the capacity to empathize, then this implies that a set of such statements is true of her. But in the restricted way in which we have defined it, it does not
imply the truth of any counterfactual statements about the subject's responses or achievements or actions in other kinds of situations--e.g., in normally empathic-response-evoking situations. Having the capacity to empathize is not, as we have defined it, determined by frequency of empathizing.

Thus, by restricting the meaning of the ability or capacity to empathize in this way, we are prevented from inferring from the fact that an individual has the capacity to empathize that she hence will tend to empathize. This seems right because there seems little reason to think that from the fact alone that a set of statements about a person's (good) scores achieved on cognitive skills tests is true, we can infer that the individual will have an increased frequency to respond empathically to a certain kind of situation. On the other hand, because these skills are in some situations a necessary condition for experiencing empathy, the fact of poor scores does often imply a reduced frequency to respond empathically. Where the tendency to empathize is low as a result of the inadequate development of the necessary skills, an improvement of these skills would suggest an increased tendency to empathize. But this is true only if the individual is stimulated and/or has a motivation to empathize adequate to yield a certain frequency of empathic responsiveness in the relevant
size universe, given the sufficient development of the necessary skills. To put it another way, as we have defined it, a mere statement about improvement in cognitive skills would not itself warrant inferring an increased tendency to empathize, unless one knew that development of cognitive skills was the only contingency preventing an otherwise increased tendency.

This leads to the question, which we have hitherto only indirectly confronted, of the nature or ontogeny of the tendency to empathize. Given that the state of development of the component skills and abilities of empathy are not sufficient to warrant inferring a specific tendency to respond empathically, what are the factors which are responsible for actualization? In the remainder of this chapter, we wish to examine a well-known and eloquent treatment of this question—namely, that of David Hume. Hume (and also Adam Smith) spoke of "sympathy" rather than "empathy"; as noted in Chapter I, the term "empathy" had not yet come onto the scene. As we argued in Chapter I, "sympathy" as used by Smith and Hume, is a rough ancestral meaning-equivalent of "empathy". "Sympathy" as Hume describes it, is best understood as standing for the complex of processes which Hume believed to take place in any occurrence of empathy. Understanding these processes helps to provide an explanation for the tendency to empathize. We examine Hume's
treatment in order to consider his description of these processes. More importantly, we examine it in order to consider a very significant thesis for moral theory. This is the thesis that the processes which produce the tendency to empathize (=sympathy) imply having a benevolent attitude, or what has been referred to in modern terms as a "pro-social motive" toward the recipient. Thus we turn now to Hume's discussion of sympathy.

In the Treatise, David Hume gives considerable and repeated attention to the "remarkable capacity" of humans for sympathy. Hume held that sympathy was a significant determinant of human thinking and behavior: "...it is of so powerful and insinuating a nature, that it enters into most of our sentiments and passions, and often takes place under the appearance of its contrary."¹ In fact, "whatever other passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice, curiosity, revenge or lust; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy; nor wou'd they have any force, were we to abstract entirely from the thoughts and sentiments of others."²

A second characteristic of sympathy is its universality. In all men is found a remarkable desire for company, "the most ardent desire for society." Give Man anything else; "he will still be miserable, till you give him some one person at least, with whom he may share his happiness, and whose esteem and friendship he may
enjoy." From this desire for company, Hume appears to infer a concern for the welfare of others, which he equates with sympathy. In the Enquiry, he argues that "no man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness or misery of others." He goes so far as to assert that "we must consider it a priori impossible for such a creature as man to be totally indifferent to the well or ill-being of his fellow-creatures." These seem "necessary and infallible consequences of the general principles of human nature, as discovered in common life and practice." Though sympathy may sometimes be only a "slight sensation", easily overridden by concerns for self-interest, it is nonetheless always and universally "diffused over all men." Even in animals, forms of sympathy can be observed.

But what is "sympathy" exactly? In the Treatise, Hume speaks of "that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own." An extended description of how this takes place is offered, to which we shall turn shortly. Sympathy consists of a disposition or tendency to be affected by the feelings of others. Thus, "in general, it is certain that, wherever we go, whatever we reflect on or converse about, everything still presents us with the view of human happiness or misery, and
excites in our breast a sympathetic movement of pleasure or uneasiness."

It is interesting that Hume does not clearly assert that sympathy implies experiencing the same kind of feeling as that experienced by the recipient. He maintains that the subject cannot remain indifferent or unmoved by the state of the recipient. Further, the subject experiences what we shall term an "isopolar" reaction in response to the recipient; that is, she experiences a negative emotion (displeasure) in response to perceived suffering or distress, and positive emotion (pleasure) in response to favorable circumstances (e.g., joy, happiness). Hume does not clarify whether the isopolar responses of pleasure and displeasure are direct responses to the perceived situation or reactions to experiencing the same feelings as those felt by the recipient. When he asserts that "the minds of men are mirrors to one another" and speaks of a "communication" of inclinations and sentiments, he seems to suggest that full-fledged empathy is indeed taking place; however, such language is metaphorical and does not enable a precise interpretation on this point.

At the very least, Hume means by sympathy a tendency to experience isopolar emotions in response to the perceived distress or prosperity of others. From the fact that humans tend to find joy at the well-being of
others and find it displeasurable to view their suffer­ings, he infers that sympathy implies a "humanity or concern for others," a "general concern for society," a "humanity or a fellow-feeling with other," "a more public affection," as evidenced by the fact that humans tend to approve of what favors society's interests. Thus, due to sympathy, "everything which promotes the interest of society must communicate pleasure, and what is perni­cious gives uneasiness." The following quote from the Enquiry illustrates how Hume's understanding of sympathy is wrapped up in his notion of benevolence or positive concern for the welfare of others.

Have we any difficulty to comprehend the force of humanity or benevolence: Or to conceive, that the very aspect of happiness, joy, prosperity, gives pleasure; that of pain, suffering, sorrow, communicates uneasiness? The human countenance, says Horace, borrows smiles or tears from the human countenance. Reduce a person to solitude, and he loses all enjoyment, except either of the sensual or speculative kind; and that because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow-creatures. The signs of sorrow and mourning, though arbitrary, affect us with melancholy; but the natural symptoms, tears and cries and groans, never fail to infuse compas­sion and uneasiness. And if the effects of misery touch us in so lively a manner; can we be supposed altogether insensible or indifferent towards its causes; when a malicious or treacherous character and behaviour are presented to us?

One can see why benevolence and sympathy would be interwoven in this way. If sympathy be thought of as a tendency to be affected in at least an isopolar way by the experiences of others, it is easy to move from this
to asserting that humans are, therefore, concerned, care
about, and wish others well in regard to their plight.
This is the attitude which is summed up by the term
"benevolence." Hume's inference might be portrayed in
this way:

1. S is affected by [is interested in] R's experiences

2. If S is affected by [is interested in] R's experiences, then S cares about, or is concerned about, R's welfare

3. If S cares about R's welfare, then S must have a positive regard for R--i.e., a desire for R's welfare or a benevolent attitude towards R

4. Therefore, to the extent that S is affected [is interested in] by R's experiences, S has a benevolent attitude towards R

In order to confirm that this is Hume's view, we must look more closely at his description of the "mechanics" of sympathizing. In the Enquiry, Hume refuses to seek the ontogeny of sympathy; "it is needless to push our researches so far as to ask, why we have humanity or a fellow-feeling with others. It is sufficient, that this is experienced to be a principle in human nature. We must stop somewhere in our examination of causes..."
The origin of sympathy receives attention, however, in several passages of the Treatise. The first significant treatment of the concept comes in the context of a discussion of the love of fame. Hume notes that such things as reputation, character name and other considerations
which are causes of pride "have little influence, when not seconded by the opinions and sentiments of others." This can be explained, he holds, only by reference to the notion of sympathy. Here Hume speaks of "that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own." Hume illustrates this with several examples, among them: children "embracing every opinion propos'd to them", men of great judgement unable to break from the pressure to conform to their peers, and the great uniformity in the humours and turn of those of the same nation. He cites the manner in which a good natured man picks up the humour almost instantly of his company; "hatred, resentment, esteem, love, courage, mirth and melancholy; all of these passions I feel more from communication than from my own natural temper or disposition." All of these are examples of how an individual is affected by, or comes to conform his emotions to, the emotions and attitudes of those who surround him (cf. our discussion of the first sense of "identification" in Chapter III). The first principles of this "communication" process are then described as follows:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. The idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a
Three steps are involved in the process, as described by Hume. These are:

1. Recognition of the presence of an emotion is another person (via its effects). An idea of the emotion is thus conveyed to the subject's mind.

2. The idea is converted into an impression

3. The impression acquires the same degree of force and vivacity as the emotion had for the recipient

Steps (2) and (3) could be combined into one, inasmuch as for Hume, the only difference between an idea and an impression is the superior force and vivacity of the impression. Both steps, then, amount to an intensifying of the original idea into the experience of the recipient's emotion. How does this "enlivening" or "conversion" of the idea into the impression take place?

The process may be understood if divided into two distinct components, which we will call the energy source and the connections. First, an energy source is required if the somewhat dull and unstimulating idea is to be transformed into a lively impression. The energy source, Hume informs us, is the "impression of ourselves" (what might, in modern psychological jargon, be called the "self-image", self-concept, or ego). Hume suggests that "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and...our consciousness..."
gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that "tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it." This is a confusing statement, inasmuch as Hume elsewhere denies that we have any impression of our own person or identity, but only of the stream of occurrent impressions striking it from outside via perception. Yet Hume also speaks of how some emotions (e.g., pride and humility) have the self as their "object," meaning that these passions, when experienced, turn the attention from their cause to idea of the self. In yet another place, Hume asserts "'tis evident that as we are at all times intimately conscious of ourselves, our sentiments and passions, their ideas strike upon us with greater vivacity than the ideas of the sentiments and passions of any other person." 

Taking a cue from this last statement, we might construe Hume's idea of the self as the set of one's personally experienced impressions and sensations. The impression of these experiences is more likely to be remembered than the somewhat distant and artificial idea of what someone else is believed to experience. Since the memory of our own past experiences is stronger than the idea of someone else's experiences, anything which could bring to mind or resuscitate these rather powerful memories of past emotional experiences (impressions) would, through the association, perhaps stand a chance
of itself being "enlivened" and transformed. It is this which Hume appears to have in mind when he says that "whatever object, therefore, is related to ourselves must be conceived with a like vivacity of conception." 24 Connectedness to the self (i.e., as we have explicated it, to memories of past emotional experiences of the self) is the energy source.

It remains to seek Hume's view of the nature of the connections between the idea of another's emotions and the self as energy source. Hume sees this process as analogous to the operations of the understanding (cf. the first book of the Treatise). The understanding consists of a movement of the mind from one idea to another as a result of three possible relations: causation, resemblance and contiguity. In the present context, causation is ruled out as being too strong a relation (though it does play a role in step one, the recognition of the presence of an emotion in another by its effects). There is no evidence of a direct causal tie between another's emotions and one's own sympathetic reaction. Resemblance and contiguity do apply, however. Hume speaks, on the one hand, of the "great resemblance of all humans":

The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations, nor can any one be actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible. As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the
rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature.  

The experience of others is sufficiently similar to that of ourselves, such that by an easy act of the imagination, our own experience is called up from memory in all of its vivacity.

Contiguity also plays a role, as is evidenced by the lesser impact which the experience of those have who are "far remov'd from us." It is difficult to know what a "contiguous sentiment" would be unless some reference is also made to the situational context. Hume's argument for the role of contiguity is that individuals or situations more distantly related to the individual tend to evoke less sympathy; it appears to be a legitimate interpretation that he saw contiguity as being between the situation of the other person and the subject's situation (or remembered situations). This is indirectly supported by the following statement:

When the present misery of another has any strong influence upon me, the vivacity of the conception is not confin'd merely to its immediate object, but diffuses its influence over all the related ideas, and gives me a lively notion of all the circumstances of that person, whether past, present, or future; possible, probable, or certain. By means of this lively notion I am interested in them; take part with; and feel a sympathetic motion in my breast, conformable to whatever I imagine in his. If I diminish that of the first conception, I diminish that of the related ideas; as pipes can convey no more water than what arises at the fountain.  


viewing resemblance and contiguity, then, as the connectors, Hume concludes that "all these relations, when united together, convey the impression or consciousness of our own person to the idea of the sentiments or passions of others, and makes us conceive of them in the strongest and most lively manner."

In another section of the Treatise, Hume approaches this same process from a different vantage point, adding an additional connecting link. In a section on love and hatred, he notes that the imagination "passes easily from obscure to lively ideas, but with difficulty from lively to obscure." But if this is true, then how can it be that the imagination, via resemblance and contiguity, conveys consciousness from our own person (lively) to the idea of the sentiments or passions of others (less lively)? Hume admits the difficulty, but seeks to resolve it by reversing the order of the process. Noting that in sympathy, self is not the object of any passion (cf. his skeptical objections to self-knowledge, elsewhere), for this reason "we must turn our view to external objects; and 'tis natural for us to consider with most attention such as lie contiguous to us, or resemble us." Hence, we first turn attention to that which is obscure, which in turn, through the imagination, calls up self-experiences which are lively. The process, then, is not from lively to obscure, but vice versa.
Hume does not make clear why he stresses the role of imagination, rather than memory, in this process. Hume's discussion in this section is extremely abstract and convoluted. It is clear, though, that Hume settles on imagination as the relevant mental operation, as he later speaks of sympathy as "nothing but the conversion of an idea into an impression by the force of imagination." Hume asserts that the capacity to empathize varies widely since "lively passions commonly attend a lively imagination." Hence, "the force of the passion depends as much on the temper of the person, as the nature of the situation of the object." Because it requires less imagination, we are most able to sympathize with those sentiments most like those which we experience from day to day. "But no passion, when well-represented, can be entirely indifferent to us," as illustrated by the power of poetry and drama.

For Hume, then, the principle connectors are resemblance and contiguity—being characteristics of the sentiment being reproduced, and imagination, being the mental operation by which the idea is intensified into an impression. We have added memory, as without it, is not clear to what the sentiment of the other person would be related; appealing to memory helps to explain Hume's notion of the impressions of the self.
It is now possible to draw together some of the loose threads of Hume's view. It seems clear that Hume did not associate sympathy with any particular emotion or passion. It is, rather, a function or process by which the emotions of another, or at least isopolar emotions, come to be vicariously experienced by the subject in the three step way described above. Hume asserts that all men experience some degree of sympathy (as opposed to indifference) meaning by this that every man's mind is affected to some degree by the emotions of others. All individuals can be described as having a tendency or disposition to indulge in sympathizing, however little impact this may have on their eventual behavior (an issue to which we will return in the next chapter). Described in the way Hume describes it, sympathy resembles an almost mechanical process, in which the imagination slides from obscure or less lively ideas to those characterized by force and vivacity. As a result, sympathy is not so much something which an individual decides to do as it is a relatively involuntary tendency of human psyches toward vicarious emotional activation.

In this respect, Hume's description of sympathy, as we have attempted to reconstruct it, closely parallels the classical conditioning model of empathic response (cf. Chapter II). To review, according to this theory,
empathy is a conditioned or learned generalization by which one moves from one's own initial experiences of pain and emotion to the empathic feeling of similar experiences in others. This account parallels Hume's associationist account in a number of respects. With Hume, it holds that the "energy source" of empathic responses is one's own remembered experience of pleasure and pain. Additionally, it distinguishes this from the motive of self-interest (there is no reason to think that stimulus generalization of one's own experiences is selfishly motivated). Also, empathy (sympathizing) is described as a largely involuntary response. Because of the universality of pleasure/pain experiences, this would tend to be highly pervasive for all social beings. Both accounts explain the onset of empathic responsiveness without appealing to nativist tendencies, except for the basic response of aversiveness to pain and approach to pleasure. The only major difference between the two theories is that the conditioning theory places a special emphasis upon learning (repeated coupling of stimulus and response in the experience of the subject). Hume often appeals to custom in the Treatise, but does so little when discussing this topic. Rather, sympathy is spoken of as "natural."30 His explanation, as noted previously, seems to be more of a mechanical one, based upon the vividness of forcefulness of ideas and
impressions, thereby referring to the presumed power they have to divert conscious attention from one idea or impression to another.

One additional distinction made by Hume will bring us back to the inference which we posited earlier as a reproduction Hume's move from sympathy to benevolence. Hume introduces a somewhat controversial distinction between "extensive" and "feeble" or "limited" sympathy. In the former case, sympathy involves more than a simple, momentary resonance with the pain or pleasure of another. Instead, the "general bent or tendency of it from beginning to the end" is such that "it interests us in the fortunes of others" resulting in love, good-will, kindness, and the desire for the good of the other person (benevolence). It is this kind of sympathy which draws the consciousness of the subject from the emotion of the recipient to his circumstances, past, present, and future. Limited sympathy, on the other hand, suffers from the "diminution" of being limited to a weak and momentary resonance with the other person. Whereas extensive sympathy leads to the "double impressions" of a "desire for his pleasure and aversion to his pain", limited sympathy yields only an impression of uneasiness which, argues Hume, evokes not a reaction of benevolence, but of hatred or contempt. As examples, Hume notes that "a certain degree of poverty produces contempt; but a degree beyond
causes compassion and good-will." Likewise, a bare and desolate country evokes disgust, but one ravaged by war and destruction evinces a benevolent response. Hence, "the same object causes contrary passions according to its different degrees."^3^2

Hume's argument for this distinction is highly controversial, as it might be questioned whether what he refers to as "limited sympathy" should really be called sympathy at all. If Hume meant by sympathy a tendency to empathize (as we have suggested), and if empathizing requires that the subject experience the same kind or at least an isopolar kind of emotion as that believed to be experienced by the recipient, then Hume's "limited sympathy" fails to qualify without further explanation. We will take up this question further in the next chapter. What is important to note at this point is that for Hume, the essential distinction between extensive and limited sympathy (which he seeks to explain through appeal to the vivid-feeble dimension) is that extensive sympathy entails benevolence, while limited sympathy does not. Because of the pervasiveness of (extensive) sympathy, Hume is able to assert "what surely, without the greatest absurdity cannot be disputed, that there is some benevolence, however small, infused into our bosom; some particle of the dove kneaded into our frame, along with the elements of the wolf and the serpent."^3^3 It is these
"generous sentiments...common to all mankind" which "produce a cool preference for what is useful and serviceable to mankind," which in turn leads men to make moral distinctions. Yet we note that it is a "cool" preference. Hume's description of sympathy in the *Treatise* suggests that the energy source of sympathy arises from connection of the situation of the other person with one's own experiences, i.e., "only from the relation to ourselves." Hume clearly repudiates any interpretation of sympathy as being a "universal affection to mankind". On the contrary, "there is no such passion in human minds, as the love of mankind, merely as such, independent of personal qualities, of services, or of relation to ourself." Sympathy is a highly particularized or situation-specific response to fellow species members; it is not to be equated with a form of "universal love" or generalized "publick interest". Mankind may serve as the object either of love or hatred; what is required is some specific cause to evoke an interested response in regard to any individual circumstance.

On the other hand, Hume also repudiates the assertion of a universal "private interest". To protect his theory from being interpreted in a Hobbesian, psychological egoist manner, Hume in the *Enquiry* argues extensively that sympathy, though involving a connection with the self, is not a function of self-love.
arguments against psychological egoism are well known. The majority of his illustrations revolve around the point that even in cases where self-interest appears to be clearly irrelevant, individuals nevertheless (a) sympathetically participate in the plight of others, and (b) prefer the welfare of other people (provided its achievement would not affect their self-interest negatively). While the energy source of sympathy derives from some form of ego-involvement ("impressions of self"), this is not to be equated with an occurrent concern for one's own interests.

With this in mind, we return to the inference posited earlier as a representation of Hume's thinking about sympathy and benevolence.

1. S is affected by [interested in] R's experiences

2. If S is affected by [interested in] R's experiences, then S cares about, or is concerned about, R's welfare

3. If S cares about R's welfare, then S must have a positive regard for R--i.e., a desire for R's welfare or a benevolent attitude towards R

4. Therefore, to the extent that S is affected by [is interested in] R's experiences, S has a benevolent attitude towards R

A review of the statements we have cited from Hume's works will reveal that Hume does in fact argue along these lines. That is, Hume moves from asserting the pervasiveness of sympathy, as a tendency to empathize, to
the assertion of at least a limited motive of benevolence.
The following quote from the Enquiry sums this up this well:

It appears also, that, in our general approbation of characters and manners, the useful tendency of the social virtues moves us not by any regards to self-interest, but has an influence much more universal and extensive. It appears that a tendency to public good, and to the promoting of peace, harmony, and order in society, does always, by affecting the benevolent principles of our frame, engage us on the side of the social virtues. And it appears, as an additional confirmation, that these principles of humanity and sympathy enter so deeply into all our sentiments, and have so powerful an influence, as may enable them to excite the strongest censure and blame.42

In the inference above, we placed "is interested in" in brackets because Hume is not consistent in speaking about the relation of sympathy to interest. On the one hand, Hume speaks of "a disinterested resentment of the welfare or injury of others".43 He also, as we have noted, denies that the sentiment from which morality arises is that of either a "publick" or "private" interest in others. On the other hand, through the "vivifying" of the idea of anothers' experiences and situation, "I am interested in them; take part with; and feel a sympathetic motion in my breast."

A possible way to resolve this apparent inconsistency is to distinguish "taking an interest" or "being interested in"—meaning by this, allowing or having one's attention captured by the person—from "having an
interest in" or "making it a part of one's interests," which suggests that the person's welfare is viewed as part and parcel of one's own welfare and concerns. On this interpretation, Hume's statements can be understood as affirming that the first kind of interest is involved in sympathizing, but that the second kind of interest is not. The problem with this interpretation is that while it removes the apparent inconsistency between Hume's statements, it takes away an important support for the inference, above. Were Hume to be taken as asserting the identity of sympathy with the second sense of "interest," this would confer on premiss 2 of the inference the status of a necessary statement. Without doing this, the truth of the conditional is highly questionable, as we will argue in the next chapter. Then again, even if Hume does mean that interest is to be interpreted in the second sense, not all controversy is removed. This is because we must now question whether S's being affected by R's experience is appropriately identified with interest in the second sense. Does the evidence Hume cites for the pervasiveness of S's being affected by R's experience also support the assertion that S is interested (in the second sense) in R's situation?

In general, does empathy imply a form of benevolence? Are sympathetic people benevolent people?
what extent does the experience of empathy provide either a logically or causally sufficient condition for viewing it as a form of benevolent motivation? We leave these questions to the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV: NOTES


2. T., 363.

3. T., 363.


5. E., 178, note 1.

6. Ibid.


8. E., 224.


10. T., 316.


14. T., 605: "The passions are so contagious, that they pass with the greatest facility from one person to
another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts. Where friendship appears in very signal instances, my heart catches the same passion, and is warm'd by those warm sentiments, that display themselves before me. Such agreeable movements must give me an affection to every one that excites them. This is the case with every thing that is agreeable in any person." Hume here sounds much like Shaftesbury and Smith.

15. E., 178, note 1.
16. E., 184.
17. E., 179.
18. T., 316.
19. Ibid.
22. T., 339-41.
23. T., 339.
24. T., 318-9, cf. T., 369, 482.
26. T., 386.
27. T., 339; see Ardall's discussion, 52.
29. T., 603. Ardall plays down imagination here (see Ardall, 45), but this statement clearly indicates its role.
30. See T. 417. Ardall (45) notes the mechanical nature of Hume's account.
31. T., 385.
32. T., 387. For a similar concept of "negative sympathy," see Nicholas Rescher, Unselfishness: The Role of the Vicarious Affects in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), 5.
34. Ibid.
35. T., 482.
36. See T., 480-482, 368; but see also E., 183.
37. See E., section 5 and Appendix 2 ("Of Self-Love").
38. T., 593, 363.
40. T., 384, 5, 7.
41. T., 384, 5.
42. E., 189.
43. E., 178.
44. A helpful discussion of this question is found in Rescher, op. cit., 9-13. Rescher notes that "it is clear that the happiness (utility) we derive from the happiness of others can be disinterested as well as interested. And even when it is interested, it may be either unselfishly interested (when, by virtue of some suitable relationship, we legitimately 'form an interest' in their welfare) or selfishly interested (say through the recognition that, when happy, they are more likely to act to make us happy too, so that we become happy through anticipation)" (9). It is not clear from Rescher's discussion whether he fully appreciates the often involuntary character of empathy. The issue of "forming interests" will be addressed further in Chapter IX.
CHAPTER V

EMPATHY AND BENEVOLENCE

In the previous chapter we examined Hume's discussion of sympathy. Our conclusion was that for Hume, sympathy consisted of the tendency to empathize (Hume often speaks of it as a "propensity"). In addition, we observed that, for Hume, the fact that individual humans are characterized by sympathy implies that they have an attitude of concern or benevolence. That humans are not unaffected by the plight of their fellow species members indicates that there must exist some "original principle of our frame" by which we "feel a desire of another's happiness or good" such that this "becomes our good."

We have devoted this much attention to Hume's discussion because he raises issues which are of current relevance and interest for both philosophers and psychologists. Particularly in the area of psychology, a considerable amount of attention has been given in the past two decades to the relationship between empathy, prosocial motives, helping behaviors and altruism. The meaning of all four of these expressions has tended to
float (we have already observed this in the case of empathy). That Hume's discussion remains relevant today is illustrated by the recent appearance of an argument very similar to Hume's in Nicholas Rescher's work, 

Unselfishness.

A key aspect of the vicarious affects relates to their rational or motivational modus operandi: they function in the order of reasons rather than in the causal order. What is at issue is not just a matter of being pleased or displeased when someone enjoys or suffers—for example, by a peculiar blood transfusion or by being somehow cross-connected with that person by wires. The crucial factor is being happy at another's happiness by way of motivation, being pleased for him, valuing someone's good fortune just because it is his.

The factor of motivation is crucial. The determinative consideration with respect to benevolence, altruism, etc., is not just that a person is concerned for the well-being of others but why he is so—namely because their welfare is at issue. A person's values become the pivotal consideration here. The vicarious affects come into operation when someone internalizes the welfare (or illfare) of another by way of prizing it on the basis of the relationship that may be as tenuous as mere common humanity.2

Rescher's move from "vicarious affect" (which he calls "other-regarding sympathy") to "reasons" such as "being pleased for," "valuing" and "prizing" the welfare of others is clearly an echo of Hume. Preferring to study the source (or at least, one of the earliest precise expressions) of this move, we will walk with Hume a bit further in order to determine whether the relation he sees between empathy and benevolence holds true. This will lead us to discuss prosocial motives, helping
behaviors and altruism as well, for we discover that these concepts are inevitably introduced whenever benevolence is under examination.

Allowing Hume's discussion to serve as our point of departure, we will examine two questions in this chapter. First, does the tendency to empathize imply, in the sense of providing sufficient conditions, the presence of a benevolent attitude? If it does, then it seems reasonable to equate empathy, or more precisely, the tendency to empathize (i.e., sympathy), with what has been called the "pro-social motive." This leads us to a second question. If the tendency to empathize implies benevolence, and can be identified with a pro-social motive, then can we say that empathy, when it is not neutralized by other motivational factors, makes probable attempts at helping behaviors? And if so, would it not appear that humans, to the extent that they are characterized by such (non-self-interested) motives, might even sometimes engage in behaviors which can be spoken of as genuinely altruistic? That humans actually are characterized by a tendency to empathize then, would imply that they are benevolent, possess pro-social motives, have a tendency to enter in to helping behaviors and are, to at least some extent, altruistic. Can all of this be derived from the fact of empathy?
Turning to the first question, whether from empathy we can derive benevolence, we present again the argument-form which we believe captures Hume's thinking on this matter.

1. S is affected by [interested in] R's experiences

2. If S is affected by [interested in] R's experiences, then S cares about, or is concerned about R's welfare

3. If S cares about R's welfare, then S must have a positive regard for R--i.e., a desire for R's welfare or a benevolent attitude towards R

4. Therefore, to the extent that S is affected by [interested in] R's experiences, S has a benevolent attitude towards R

We noted at the conclusion of the previous chapter that Hume is unclear about whether empathy entails a form of interest; it was decided that either way, this would not ultimately provide sufficient support to establish the truth of the controversial second premiss. The same goes for "concern": a concern may be simply an object of one's relatively disinterested attention, or it may be a sign of positive regard for and commitment to the recipient. Care, on the other hand, clearly implies taking the other's welfare into one's own interests and desires. As inferring a benevolent attitude from care is a relatively minor issue, we will regard premiss 2 as for the moment the crucial one; we will let the third premiss stand uncontested until later in the chapter.
Does being empathically-affected by the experiences of others imply that one cares about others; to the point of having a benevolent attitude toward them? How is it that from empathic experience "arises a subsequent desire of his pleasure, and aversion with his pain"?

Hume's argument at this is tortuous to follow. It occurs, at Section II.2.9 of Treatise, in the midst of a discussion of "the mixture of benevolence and anger with compassion and malice." Hume is attempting to explain why it is that pity, which causes an "uneasiness" of mind upon the contemplation of its object, should often be found in an emotional "mixture" with love, tenderness and benevolence; vice versa, why is malice, involving a joy in the sufferings of another, conjoined with hatred?

Hume's discussion on this somewhat confusing point is not well written. He cites illustrations from everyday life, but at other times seems to be trying to offer an a priori argument based on the nature of certain emotional concepts. It is not always clear what kind of data he is appealing to, nor what kind of connections he wishes to establish. In addition, he relies upon a number of points made earlier in the Treatise, which makes it all the more difficult to follow the thread of his argument. Nonetheless, with these limitations in mind, we will attempt to reproduce the essential premisses.
How can pity, which involves a sympathetic, vicarious experiencing of the misery of another bring it about that there "arises a subsequent desire of his pleasure, and aversion with his pain"? There appear to be two arguments which thread their way through Hume's discussion. It is unclear whether these are two separate arguments, or two interpretations of what Hume intended to be one argument. We will treat them as two separate (but intertwined in the text) arguments, taking the simplest one as our starting point. First, then, Hume seems to argue that because the experience of another's misery is unpleasant, that therefore this provides a natural motivation to bring an end to the unpleasantness. Thus, in his summary of this area in the Enquiry, Hume states that, "No man is indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure; the second, pain." In the Treatise, he states that "benevolence is an original pleasure arising from the pleasure of the person beloved, and a pain proceeding from his pain."

The middle term between empathy and benevolence appears to be that of experiencing vicarious pleasure or pain. When the subject experiences empathy, she experiences a "parallel direction of the affections." In the previous chapter we spoke of this as the experience of an isopolar emotional response, inasmuch as it is not
clear whether that when Hume says that "by sympathy we feel a sensation correspondent to those, which appear in any person, who is present with us," he means that we experience the same kind of sensation, or simply an emotional reaction of the same polarity. In any case, what is important is that at the very least, we experience an isopolar response which Hume characterizes as being one of either pleasure or pain. But we know from elsewhere in the Treatise that "the chief spring or actuating principle of the human mind is pleasure or pain; and when these sensations are remov'd, both from our thought and feeling, we are, in a great measure, incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition." If another person's pain, then, is the source of pain for us, while pleasure is available to us through the improvement of his state, then is it not natural that a desire should arise that the other's state should be as pleasurable as possible? To desire their pleasure is, due to the sympathetic connection between the other and one's self, to seek further increased utility for oneself. Thus Hume asserts that "our concern for our own interest gives us a pleasure in the pleasure, and a pain in the pain of a partner, after the same manner as by sympathy we feel a sensation correspondent to those, which appear in any person, who is present with us." It appears that the benevolence which arises from sympathy has its roots in egoism!
A second argument is much more complex, but has the support of a larger portion of the text of the section. Hume holds that for there to be a "transition" from one passion to another by the mind, there must be present a "double relation" between the relevant ideas and impressions. Two illustrations, offered by Hume in the previous section, may help to make this notion clear. Hume discusses a "monstrous" painting containing both heroic and burlesque design. This creates an emotional "clash" because it involves the relation of two conflicting emotional responses, both finding their origin or evocation in the one painting. On the other hand, were the two designs in different frames, there would be no clash. Hume argues that the clash is avoided in the latter case because there is no relation of ideas present. In the former case, there is a relation of ideas present. In the former case, there is a relation of ideas in the sense that the contents of the painting are united together in one frame, leading the perceiver to expect some sort of coherence. This relation of ideas enables a transfer from one emotion to the other, which causes a clash. In the latter case, because the two designs are separated (no relation of ideas), the mind is not led to think that the two emotional responses should be consistent (unless one takes the room as a frame, and judges the effect of two so different
paintings on one wall). Because there is no relation of ideas there is no mental uniting of the two emotional impressions. Hume is thus led to assert that a transition from one passion to another can take place only where there is a "double relation" of impressions and ideas.

Returning to empathy and benevolence, Hume brings up what he regards as an instructive difficulty: the occasional occurrence of limited sympathy. It will be recalled from the last chapter that limited sympathy is an event in which the subject is empathically-affected by the recipient's plight, but responds with hostility or resentment or disgust, rather than benevolently or compassionately. How can the widespread occurrence of empathy be an argument for human benevolence if this sort of response to empathic activation is possible? Hume attempts to show that in cases of limited sympathy, the requisite "double relation" or "parallel direction of the affections" does not hold, while it does hold in regard to extensive sympathy.

The original formulation of the problem of this section was as to why the comparatively negative experience of another's misery should lead to a positive response or attitude toward that person. Hume now corrects this analysis of what occurs in pity. It was mistaken to give heed only to the "momentary" sensation which comes
from viewing another's present misery. As Hume asserts:

'Tis plain they [benevolent attitudes] arise not from the double relations of impressions and ideas, if we regard only the present sensation...When the present misery of another has any strong influence upon me, the vivacity of the conception is not confin'd merely to its immediate object, but diffuses its influence over all the related ideas, and gives me a lively notion of all the circumstances of that person, whether past, present, or future; possible, probable or certain. By means of this lively notion I am interested in them; take part with them; and feel a sympathetic notion in my breast, conformable to whatever I imagine in his.

On the other hand:

If I diminish the vivacity of the first conception, I diminish that of the related ideas; as pipes can convey no more water than what arises at the fountain.11

Where only the momentary sensation is attended to, and not the entire state of affairs, including future affairs, of the person, only a negative emotional response is experienced. Unless we resort to the first form of argument (supra), there is no benevolence to be found here.

Something different is alleged to occur if we give heed to the entire (past, present and future) state of affairs of the recipient. Hume waffles here between two different kinds of outcomes, both of which are inter-connected by him with the occurrence of a desire for the recipient's happiness. First, giving heed to the whole system of related ideas and possibilities offers a less "feeble," more forceful and vivacious conception. A
more forcefully felt vicarious response somehow elicits greater interest in the recipient; this greater interest opens up other areas of the recipient's life besides his present misery. Thinking about all of these things helps to vitiate the uneasiness initially felt through contemplating his present plight. Hence, "the same object causes contrary passions according to its different degrees."12

Hume also offers another reason why giving heed to the entire state of affairs of the recipient is efficacious in bringing about benevolence. This involves making more specific just what it is that the subject experiences besides the pain of the recipient in the case of extensive sympathy. According to Hume, by looking beyond the momentary sensation (of vicariously-felt pain), one is able to give heed to the "future prospect" of the recipient. Pity "interests us in the fortunes of others, good or bad, and gives us a secondary sensation correspondent to the primary; in which it has the same influence with love and benevolence."13 To the primary sensation, the empathically-produced pain in response to the recipient's plight, there is now added a secondary sensation—that pleasant impression of the individual's future possibilities. Adding this, according to Hume, completes the formula. One now has a double relation of impressions and ideas, which might be
summarized in this way:

Idea 1: The present terrible situation of R
Impression 1: The vicariously-felt misery of R.
Idea 2: The (future) fortunes of R, good and bad
Impression 2: The pleasures as well as pains of R

Thus results the "parallel direction of the affections" required to produce benevolence. We are not just uneasy, but are pleased at his (future) pleasures and feel pain with him in his misery. The "double relation" argument, in both the "increased vivacity" and "future prospects" form, may perhaps be rescued from its incredible abstraction by the following restatement. In the case of limited sympathy, the subject is not exposed to the recipient sufficiently to come to view him as a real person. Due to less than the required participation in his more extended life situation, the subject comes to regard or respond to the recipient as something less than a fellow human. On the other hand, through an increased participation "over all the related ideas" of the recipient's present situation, as well as past history and future prospects, it becomes harder to deny him personhood. The subject now knows him too well, and cannot help but desire for him what he would normally desire for himself as well.14

Hume has a point, in that it is certainly true that increased exposure to others in their general situation often leads to more friendly relationships. In at least
some cases, anonymity leads to apathy, though some studies on altruism have indicated that the anonymous stranger is helped more frequently than one might expect (cf. Darley & Latane, 1969). The problem with Hume's argument is that it completely begs the question. Extensive sympathy, as a more expansive and circumspect kind of exposure to the recipient and his situational context, is nothing more than that: another case of sympathy. Hume has only shown that a benevolent response is more likely to occur if there is greater sympathy. He has not offered a mechanism (unless it is somehow wrapped up in his quite obscure notion of a "parallel direction of the affections") which explains how or why it is that sympathy even in its extensive form should lead to a desire for the other's welfare.

In hopes of something better, we return to Hume's first argument. We will rewrite the argument-form brought over from the previous chapter. The argument-form is altered by compressing the second and third premisses, equating "care," "concern," and benevolence. We will also omit the controversial expression, "is interested in," while adding new premisses which reflect our first interpretation of Hume's argument.

1. S is affected by R's experiences

2. If S is affected by R's experiences, then S experiences pleasure corresponding to R's pleasures and pain corresponding to R's pains
3. To experience pleasure at R's pleasures and pain in response to R's pains is to desire R's happiness and detest R's sufferings.

4. To desire R's happiness and detest R's sufferings is to care about, have a concern for, or have a benevolent attitude towards R.

5. Therefore, to the extent that S is affected by R's experiences, S has a benevolent attitude towards R.

At first sight, Hume's argument may appear inescapable. If the empathically-experienced pain of another causes pain or displeasure in the subject, how can he do anything but desire its extinction? By "its extinction" here, we mean the extinction of the pain suffered by the subject; however, Hume seems to confuse this with the recipient's pain (which is not surprising, inasmuch as his (perceived) pain is the cause of the subject's pain). Hence, he moves from desiring extinction of personal pain to desiring extinction of the recipient's pain. Similarly, in regard to the positive emotions, Hume asserts that love or desire implies a "relish to the objects of its pursuit." Empathically experiencing the recipient's pleasure necessarily implies relishing or being pleased (how can one experience pleasure and not be pleased?). If one is pleased with another's happiness, then, surely this implies wishing the other person well--i.e., benevolence. To respond that one may be either pleased or displeased with the empathic experience of another's
pleasure or pain seems to lead to Gilbert Ryle's infinite
regresses, such as "being pleased at being pleased,"
"finding pleasure pleasurable," etc. To experience
pleasure or pain is to be pleased or in pain. If it is
another's success, prosperity or happiness which causes
one pleasure, how can one have anything but a benevolent
response? This is captured in a recent definition of
benevolence:

A benevolent person is one of whom it is a relatively
permanent feature of personality that he (1) is
positively motivated to bring about an improved
state of happiness of welfare of others and to avoid
a reduced state of happiness or welfare of others,
(2) finds the reflection that another has moved to
a higher state of welfare or happiness pleasing (so
that awareness of this can act as a reinforcement),
and (3) finds the reflection that another is un-
happy or not well off or has moved to a lower state
of happiness or welfare distressing.16

A more careful examination of this argument reveals
that it fails to warrant the move from empathy to bene-
volence. Hume himself admits a whole class of phenomena
in which the stimulus elicits a response, which in turn
evinces a "secondary sensation" (an "indirect passion")
which may be non-isopolar in relation to the initial re-
response to stimulus. Examples are Hume's treatment of
humility and hatred, in which an initial sensation of
pleasure (e.g., one's own or one's enemies) evokes a
negative emotional response.20

Despite appearances, it is possible to distinguish
the experience of pleasure from being pleased. As W. P.
Alston points out, "Being f" as opposed to "feeling f," stands for a more extensive disposition of the subject concerning her general emotional (and perhaps physical) state and attitudes toward the object. While being pleased normally presupposes feeling pleased, the converse does not necessarily hold. The contrast is pronounced if the empathic response is described more carefully as "feeling the pleasure (or, what the pleasure would be like) of the recipient." There is no reason to think that getting a "taste" of another's pleasure in this way should entail being pleased oneself. One can make this distinction without being led into an infinite regress provided one distinguishes between the recipient's and the subject's emotions in the way we did in Chapter I in distinguishing empathy from identification. This allows for an independent response by the subject to finding herself in the state of feeling a measure of the recipient's emotions—a response which may be quite contrary to the emotion of the recipient.

Further, Hume's argument makes an unwarranted move from the experience of a form of unpleasantness to the desire that the recipient be relieved from his suffering. There is nothing in knowing that the recipient is experiencing distress that entails that one should feel personally impelled to wish for his better fortune or come to his aid. Even the consciousness that the
displeasure or pain that one feels is that of another person does not entail that one should care or be concerned about the welfare of the other person. The fact that it is unpleasant for the subject to vicariously feel this pain is motivating, but the fact of experiencing pain itself does not necessitate that the subject's wishes should be channeled in the direction of the relief or welfare of the recipient. The subject's wish might rather be to forget about the recipient and his problems all together. The fact that it may seem natural to come to the aid of one whose hurts one feels is no excuse for conceptual fuzziness here; perceiving another's distress, no matter how painful this perception may be, does not provide the sufficient conditions alone to create a benevolent response to the recipient. Even the fact that one may have a tendency to respond empathically does not entail a caring spirit, an active concern or a benevolent attitude. Some people may just be plagued with oversensitivity in the form of an inclination to always be homing in on the imagined feelings of other people. Such people may be nosy, rather than benevolent.

If empathy is at its roots the kind of involuntary response which we have depicted, one might empathically experience another's pleasure or happiness, yet respond to this with some other emotion, such as envy or anger.
The displeasure or pain of others might evoke nothing more than irritation; such cases were acknowledged by Hume in his discussion of limited or feeble sympathy.26 An individual might empathize with a sentenced criminal, yet also feel relief that he is imprisoned and glad that he is receiving his just recompense. One may feel pity for another without feeling compassion. Similarly, one may empathically sense the shame and embarrassment of the politician caught in a compromising situation, yet respond to it with a certain mocking or even sadistic glee. In none of these cases does the desire for the recipient's happiness appear to be entailed.

It might be objected that these examples are instances of ambivalence, in which a benevolent attitude is indeed evident, but only as accompanied by conflicting tendencies. To the extent that the subject empathizes with the criminal, she responds benevolently. Were she to be affected by no other motivations or affections, her natural inclination would be to desire the criminal's happiness and to want to prevent his further sufferings.

True enough, experiencing empathy towards the sentenced criminal may make it difficult to allow his sufferings to go on (cf. Camus' demand that proponents of capital punishment be the ones to throw the switch). This is easily explained, though, by the fact that
experiencing empathic distress is to experience personal pain (which is unpleasant). That this is so explains why it is difficult to (calmly) observe the sufferings of the criminal; it is not sufficient to warrant the assertion that one thereby cares about or for him (as a person) or desires his well-being.

A similar objection to our thesis is that jurors often have to restrain their empathic tendencies in order to avoid feeling sorry for the defendant and biasing their judgement by wishing him well. Empathy left unrestrained often leads to strong ties of compassion and affection, particularly as one becomes more familiar with the circumstances of the recipient. This is still insufficient, however, to show that experiencing empathy implies benevolence. We grant that empathy, in conjunction with other factors, can cause a benevolent response. For example, the subject may, through an involuntary empathic response, come to give heed to factors in the recipient's situation which were previously overlooked; this may engender a cognitive reorganization, in turn resulting in the formation of a new attitude toward the recipient. 27 "Stepping into his shoes" may bring to light aspects of his experience similar to one's own, thus creating a sense of kinship or mutuality which easily develops into a concern for the others well-being. All of this goes to show that not being unaffected by
the circumstances and experiences of others increases the probability of forming relationships of care and concern. However, it does not enable us to assert necessary and sufficient conditions. Unfortunately, it is difficult to settle this kind of dispute through appeals to these kinds of instances of empathy because more often than not, the motivational picture is extremely complex, such that one experiences a variety of feelings in response to the dramatic cues of the situation. It is difficult to determine why the subject responded pro-socially.

Another argument is that we respond to individuals for whom we have no care or concern with indifference and perhaps even an insensitive apathy or callousness. The contrapositive, therefore, also holds true, viz., that if we respond non-indifferently to the recipient, this suggests that we must care about him. But in both cases, the logical relation may be only of weak implication. To assert that having no care entails indifference is to beg the question; it remains to be shown why not caring about another requires that his sufferings not affect us in any way. Thus the fact that we can contrapose the statement is of little import.

Another argument notes the fact that empathy does often motivate forms of helping behavior (i.e., behavior which has the consequence of benefiting the recipient).
This is undoubtedly the case, as we will argue below. However, this does not establish that empathy alone is a sufficient reason for attributing a benevolent or pro-social motive to the empathic subject. Why must the subject, in response to the empathically-experienced pain of the recipient, choose to engage in helping behavior instead of other forms of behavior which would achieve the extinction of the unpleasant emotional experience? The chief alternative strategy to engaging in helping behavior is that of escape—leaving the unpleasant situation and putting it out of mind. The fact that individuals do not take this option more often may be explainable by such factors as social norms which make it shameful to leave a person in distress, anticipations that the recipient might someday come to the one's aid, etc. It nevertheless remains a viable option. The mere coincidence of empathic responsiveness and helping behaviors is an insufficient support for holding that empathy implies benevolence or having a pro-social motive.

Hume's view might be defended by re-interpreting it to assert that the isopolar emotions of pleasure and pain are not after all the empathically-felt emotions themselves, but the responses of the individual subject to the vicariously-felt emotions. It is questionable whether this interpretation does justice to all of Hume's
remarks, but it is a possible defense. This approach would rule out as non-empathic all non-isopolar responses to those vicarious affections caused by others' situations. What it does not do is offer a connection between empathy and benevolence. While it may be the case that we can attribute benevolence to the individual who responds in an isopolar way to empathically-felt emotions of the recipient, there is no reason why empathy would always, or ever, evoke this response. Benevolence is here gratuitously asserted. The strength of Hume's original argument is that it begins from the relatively well-established observation that individuals are empathically-responsive to fellow humans; in order to succeed, Hume must show why such a pattern of responsiveness would be a good reason for expecting that individuals also will be receptive to their empathic responses, reacting to them in an isopolar way and in turn coming to have a desire for the welfare of the recipient.

We are forced to conclude, then, that the mere fact of an empathic response is insufficient alone to ground attribution of a benevolent or pro-social motive; nor is a tendency to empathize reason to attribute a benevolent attitude. Hence, in regard to the second question, we must also conclude that the presence of an empathic response does not provide a reason, in itself, to predict the appearance of helping behavior or altruism.
"Helping-behavior," usually is taken to mean any behavior which has the intended consequence or end-state of benefiting another person. Helping-behaviors are designed to benefit others. "Altruism," as often used, requires an antecedent motive to benefit the other, such that the desired end-state for the action is the increased welfare in some respect of the other person, especially as seen in cases where this is to the detriment of the subject's self-interest. Were the tendency to respond empathically to imply the presence of a benevolent or pro-social motive, this would appear to some grounds for expecting altruism from humans. Because the link between empathy and benevolence has been thrown up for doubt, however, we are left with all of the old questions about the presence of genuine human altruism. At this point, we are forced to conclude that empathic responses of displeasure or distress may motivate the individual to any form of behavior which serves to bring the experience of the negative emotion to extinction; this may or may not lead to helping-behavior or altruism. Likewise, pleasant empathic responses may lead to the individual to rejoice with, and encourage, the recipient in his prosperity. On the other hand, the subject may also respond with resentment, envy, or even hatred. The experience of the recipient's pleasure in empathy does not guarantee the presence of affirming
behaviors on the part of the subject.


system separate from the egoistic," seeing a "transformation of empathic distress into the different forms of sympathetic distress" which in turn "predisposes the person to act altruistically" (125, 136, 137); see also Aronfreed, op. cit., who clearly ties vicarious affective experience to helping and altruistic behavior.

4. Pall S. Ardal, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise (Edinburgh: University Press, 1966), notes that Hume distinguishes between benevolence and sympathy. "Sympathy is a principle of communication, but benevolence is defined by him as desire for the happiness, or aversion to the misery or unhappiness, of someone" (61, see also 64). In another place in his treatment, Ardal is forced to admit that Hume had difficulty explaining the connection between sympathy, benevolence, pity and love (51-2, 54).


8. T., 574.

9. T., 384. Cf. D. G. C. MacNabb's criticism of what he perceives as a hidden psychological egoism in Hume: "It seems to him self-evident that only what is pleasant or painful to me can arouse in me a passion for or against it. Therefore, it seemed to him that the thought of another's pleasure or pain must be converted in my mind by the mechanism of sympathy into an actual pleasure or pain of mine, before it can move my passions and actuate my will"; David Hume, His Theory of Knowledge and Morality (London: Hutchinson, 1951), 187-8. Ardal emphatically opposes this interpretation. See infra, note 17.

10. Ardal notes the complexity and confusion in Hume's account, 64, 67.

12. T., 357.

13. T., 385, cf. T. 382 where Hume speaks of pity and benevolence as the "same desires," though being caused by "different principles."

14. Cf. T., 388: "When the uneasiness is either small in itself, or remote from us, it engages not the imagination, nor is able to convey an equal concern for the future and contingent good as for the present and real evil. Upon its acquiring greater force, we become so interested in the concerns of the person, as to be sensible both of his good and bad fortune; and from that compleat sympathy there arises pity and benevolence."

The present/future distinction comes out well in this statement, as well as the way in which Hume sees sympathy as explaining (without apparent reference to any other source of desire) the onset of pity and benevolence.


16. Thus in the Enquiry, Hume argues that "the immediate feeling of benevolence and friendship, humanity and kindness, is sweet, smooth, tender, and agreeable, independent of all fortune and accidents. These virtues are besides attended with a pleasing consciousness or remembrance, and keep us in humor with ourselves as well as others..." (E., 231). Pity (to which corresponds empathic distress) is not open to explanation in terms of these kind of positive feelings; Hume admits (in the Treatise, 384-389) that this is somewhat anomalous, and it is here that he appeals to the "secondary sensations" arising from the empathic response.

17. Ardal (69-79) defends Hume against the charge that his view amounts to a form of psychological hedonism and/or egoism. Ardal notes Hume's distinction between the cause and object of desires, and concludes that for Hume, pleasure is the cause, but not in every case the object of desire (cf. T., 367). Only if the object of a desire were one's own pleasure or self-interest would Hume be open to the charges of psychological hedonism or
egoism (cf. Ardall, 74-5). McNabb admits that in terms of Hume's system, the experience of pleasure and pain are required if there is to be a motivation to approval/disapproval or to action. However, he argues that this does not alter the ultimate end or content of the feelings.

"Thus there is no suggestion that sympathy with John is the conversion of the thought of his pleasure into the thought of his pleasure as a means to my own, and a consequent approval, or love or benevolence, arising therefrom. The causal conditions of love or benevolence, neither determine the object of love, which itself is determined by an inexplicable natural connection, nor the end of benevolence, which is equally ultimate as far as Hume is concerned (Ardal, 74-5). This seems correct. Our point here is that Hume often speaks as though sympathy were a sufficient condition or explanation for the occurrence of benevolence and benevolent action; the "inexplicable natural connection" which is inexplicable by Ardall's assessment, is generally ignored by Hume (though note T., 439). Ardal (78-9) is forced to acknowledge the apparent lack of precision and explanation here, concluding that apparently "sympathy is not needed to account for the fact that it is not the agent's own pleasure but someone else's which is the object (79)."

What is needed? This important question is left unanswered.


23. This is simply to say that some further explanation, the need for which is often ignored, is required here. Otherwise, inevitable appeal must be made to a hedonistic or egoistic motive. For example, Darley and Latane note that "reinforcement theory's traditional resolution of this dilemma is to postulate that individuals do, in fact, get rewards for altruistic acts. One line
of argument is that the sight of a person in distress arouses sympathetic or empathic feelings in an observer: "Primitive passive sympathy," MacDougall said. The observer, in helping the victim, helps himself. He is motivated not to relieve the victim's suffering but to alleviate his own sympathetic distress. Whether this primitive passive sympathy is instinctive or is the result of complicated classical or instrumental conditioning, its arousal motivates a person to helping action and its termination rewards those actions. Darley and Latane offer considerable evidence that this explanation does not fit the observed characteristics of empathically-induced altruistic responses. Among these characteristics are the speed of entering into helping behavior, the report of altruists that their reason for helping was simply that "he needed help," and the fact that where the empathic response is most strong, the impulse to escape (even where it could be easily done) is apparently reduced, while the impulse to help is increased. This latter point has received experimental support from the study by Batson et al., cited in note 1.


25. See the discussion of rivalry by Hume, T., 383-4. Ardal (59-61) notes that what Hume calls the principle of "comparison" can work in the same way (apparently by the same kind of vicarious affective responses) but yield the opposite effects from those of benevolence. An excellent discussion of the problems created by this kind of mixed response is that of Patricia Greenspan, "A Case of Mixed Feelings: Ambivalence and the Logic of Emotion," in Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, Explaining Emotion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 223-250.


28. It is this fact which Hume seems to often overlook. Cf. Ardal's criticism of his move from sympathy to pity (cf. T., 369): "But why, even if I am affected through the process of communication, should I be concerned about the other person's suffering or sorrow? This, it seems, needs explanation, and it is not given. Why could we not hate the other person, because we are made uncomfortable by the presence of his sorrow? Why, furthermore, do we feel concerned on many occasions, rather than turn away from the source of our discomfort? (51-2).
29. See, for example, the definition employed by Batson, et al., cited in note 1: "...a person's helping is altruistic to the degree that he or she helps from a desire to reduce the distress or increase the benefit of the person in need. That is, altruistically motivated helping is directed toward the end-state goal of increasing the other's welfare" (291).


31. Chapter VI will take up the question of why, nonetheless, empathy is often correlated with altruistic and helping behavior.
CHAPTER VI

EMPATHY, INSTINCT AND HELPING BEHAVIOR

Forced to abandon hope of establishing a simple connection between the experience of empathy, benevolence and forms of helping-behavior or altruism, we are nevertheless faced with the task of explaining their experimental correlation. Even young infants are discovered to respond to empathically-perceived distress with attempts at helping behavior. Latane and Rodin (1969) discovered that individuals empathically-affected by the distress of individuals in need tended to enter into helping-behavior after only a 4-5 second latency period, a period far too short to allow the kinds of calculation of personal interests and social approval suggested by theories discounting the motivational importance of the empathic response. Individuals afterwards reported having had very few thoughts at the time, feeling rather an immediate impulse to action. As Martin Hoffman notes:

When Latane and Rodin (1969) asked their subjects why they intervened, they said that they did so because the fall sounded very serious, because they were uncertain about what had happened and felt they
should investigate, or because it was the right thing to do; none of the reasons given seemed pertinent to the subject's distress. When I asked people what went through their minds when they helped someone in a real-life situation, the typical response was that they acted without thinking or because the other person obviously needed help. According to the introspective reports of bystanders who helped, the empathic feeling of the dire need of another apparently provided its own motivation, a compelling reason for action, if not a cognized rationale. Yet as Hoffman goes on to note, "none of the responses indicated that the person helped in order to reduce his or her own empathic discomfort." That is, these responses of helping behavior do not appear to have been merely a hedonistic response in terms of the most convenient way to bring to extinction the irritating or painful empathically-communicated experience. Even where individuals were given opportunities to escape, they often did not do so (see Krebs, 1975). Nor are apparently altruistic responses of this kind explainable in terms of drive-reduction or internal neurotic demands on the individual; individuals responding altruistically tended to score well on measures of psychological health and personality-integration. In all of these studies, it is the experience of empathy which correlates most highly with helping-behavior outcomes; this indicates that empathy functions as at least a major cue for altruistic behavior. What is required is some additional mechanism to
explain why the subjects responded with such immediacy and spontaneity in a pro-social way, engaging in sometimes highly risky forms of helping behavior.

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to return to our discussion of the determinants of empathic response. As noted in Chapter II, the most interesting cases—because they are least complex and hold out the greatest hope of explanatory value—are the cases of early empathic and altruistic behavior. Out of the five theoretical perspectives offered to explain the onset of empathic responsiveness (cf. Chapter II), we adopted the nativist theory. The nativist theory explains the causal relationship between empathy, benevolence and helping behavior in an indirect way. One version of the theory, that of kin selection (Hamilton, 1964), begins by explaining why a tendency to helping behavior and even altruism should regularly be selected—viz., because it adds to the "inclusive fitness" of the group.\(^4\) This tendency does not add to the fitness of the individual, of course, whose individual survival—and hence capacity to reproduce and pass on her genetic complement—may be highly endangered by the forms of altruistic behavior in which she engages. However, the fitness of her relatives (and perhaps other fellow species-members, and even in some cases, other species), is enhanced through the outcome of her actions. Since
her relatives carry a part of her genetic complement (if siblings, one-half; if uncles, one eighth, etc.), her actions indirectly do add to the fitness of her genetic complement, thus enhancing the possibility that the "altruistic genes"—i.e., those genes which incline her to engage in altruistic behavior—will survive, perhaps making the "altruistic trait" even more pervasive. As Hamilton summarizes his theory:

In brief outline, the theory points out that for a gene to receive positive selection it is not necessarily enough that it should increase the fitness of its bearer above the average if this tends to be done at the heavy expense of related individuals, because relatives, on account of their common ancestry, tend to carry replicas of the same gene; and conversely that a gene may receive positive selection even though disadvantageous to its bearers if it causes them to confer sufficiently large advantages on relatives.5

An alternative theory (Trivers, 1971) suggests that empathically-elicited helping behaviors are selected by evolution when directed toward those who will eventually reciprocate—thus adding indirectly to the subject's fitness.6 In both formulations of the nativist approach, a biologically-tuned disposition to helping behavior, is selected by evolution because it contributes to the overall fitness of the group possessing this trait.

How then may genes play a role in "motivating" altruistic behavior? The nativist theory suggests that empathic responses, particularly to the distress of fellow species members, functions as a cue to the
release of amounts of emotional and physical energy stored in the system. The individual is genetically predisposed (a) to notice or have her attention drawn to certain factors in the behavior or situation of the other, (b) to become physically and/or emotionally activated by this perception, and (c) to respond by attempts at helping behavior. The linkage between (a), (b) and (c) is not conceptual or logical, but causal; moreover, it is native.

What this implies is that the entire pattern—consisting of empathically-cued helping behavior—is the result of a kind of programming often referred to as instinctive. The concept (and presence) of instincts is of course a matter of great controversy. Early in the twentieth century, it was popular to postulate instincts (cf. the systems of Murray and McDougall). Critics soon observed that the number of posited instincts was increasing with incredible rapidity. Further, instincts were often posited as pseudo-explanations of observed phenomena. As R. A. Hinde notes, "we postulate the instinct because we observe the behaviour, and then explain the behaviour by the instinct we have postulated." Critics also noted the tendency of instinct-theorists to ignore the role of external stimuli.

As is true in regard to many areas discussed by sociobiologists and ethologists, the concept of
"instinct" has recently received more careful attention and definition. Many of the criticisms have been addressed and answered. This is a very detailed area of inquiry; reference should be made to some of the more recent, careful attempts to define instinctive behavior. Among these are Niko Tinbergen's *The Study of Instinct*, the chapter, "The Great Parliament of Instincts" in Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression*, and Edward O. Wilson's *On Human Nature*. Mary Midgley, in her work *Beast and Man*, has sought to offer a philosophical characterization and defense of the concept of instinct. We will here address only some of the major issues in the hope that the concept can be supported as sufficiently credible to play a role in our discussion of empathy and helping behavior.

The concept of instinct has been troubled by the fact that it is often used as a self-sufficient form of explanation. Some imagine that to say that a pattern of behavior is caused by an instinct is to bring the process of explanation sufficiently to a close. This is quite inadequate, though, as instinct here only functions as a hypothetical construct or intervening variable to stand for an observed pattern of behavior. As Hinde points out, though, this can be of some value in linking together several specific observed behaviors into one behavior pattern.
To cite an instinct, then, is not to give an account per se of a behavior pattern, it is only to recognize (and perhaps name) one. Instincts ultimately become useful as explanatory devices as their neuro-physical character is defined and their evolutionary originating conditions are specified. Unfortunately, these tasks are vastly uncompleted at present, though our knowledge in these areas is increasing.

Another confusion which has similarly muddled the concept of instinct is the idea that an instinct is identified with the purpose or goal which it fulfills. In a sense, of course, this is true. When we speak of feeding, escaping or reproductive instincts, we isolate the relevant behaviors by means of what they accomplish. Where confusion enters, however, is that this implies for some (C. H. Waddington may perhaps be an example) that instinctive reactions somehow display a certain general teleology or fittingness, which then takes on (as for Waddington) valuational significance. This involves the concept of orthogenesis, which biologists have long rejected in their saner moments.

In addition, construing instincts according to their goals or purposes leads some to attribute to the organisms subjective motives in the forms of emotions, intentions, etc. Midgeley, despite an attempt to take great care in handling the concept of instinct,
approaches this all too closely. The following state-
ments, extracted from her discussion, illustrate this:

> Instinct covers not just knowing how to do things,
> but knowing what to do. It concerns ends as well
> as means. It is the term used for innate tastes
> and desires, without which we would grind to a
> halt...

> With closed instincts, desire and technique go
> together. A bee cannot just want to dance-in-
genral; it must dance (and therefore want) only
> the exact figure that will tell the other bees
> where it has been. But as you go up the evolu-
> tionary scale, much wider possibilities open. The
> more adaptable a creature is, the more directions
> it can go in. So it has more, not less, need for
definite tastes to guide it. What replaces closed
> instincts, therefore, is not just cleverness, but
> strong, innate, general desires and interests.15

> Speaking in this way risks an anthropomorphizing of
infra-humans which seems quite out of place. There is
no reason to assume that when the frog quite automatical-
ly flicks out his tongue to catch a fly, this is concur-
rent with or the result of an instinctive desire, wish,
or interest in the fly. On the other hand, Midgeley
can be defended if we consider that her focus in these
statements is upon humans. She is asserting that in-
stincts may, in fact, predispose humans to emotional re-
sponses (e.g., wants and wishes). Or, we might defend
this view by defining "desire" in the very general way
in which, for example, Hume spoke of it—as consisting
of the propensity of an organism to act in a certain
way towards an object or state of affairs.16 This would
allow that thirst and hunger are desires, requiring no
particular emotional "feeling" or well thought out/intended goal.

Tinbergen defines instinct by supplementing the reference to end-state or goal with a reference to the neuro-physical mechanisms which play a role in the occurrence of instinctive behavior. He thus speaks of instinct as:

...A hierarchically organized nervous mechanism which is susceptible to certain priming, releasing and directing impulses of internal as well as of external origin, and which responds to these impulses by coordinated movements that contribute to the maintenance of the individual and species. Tinbergen makes a number of distinctions which are helpful in ridding the concept of instinct of many of its handicaps. He argues that there is no one type of instinctive activity but, as in the definition above, instinctive behaviors may take place at varying levels of neuro-physical complexity. Tinbergen distinguishes, for example, between "consummatory actions," consisting of a relatively rigid or stereotyped action which, when their end-state is accomplished, cease to occur, and "appetitive actions" or exploratory, seeking behaviors in which the goal or desire (in general sense) is constant, but the repertoire of behaviors employed is flexible. A similar distinction is between "fixed pattern" reactions to stimuli, which consist of very basic, low-level orienting motor reactions, and "taxis"
reactions, which are adaptive, and which may be affected by learning. Midgley makes a similar distinction when she distinguishes between "closed" and "open" instincts.

Closed instincts are behavior patterns fixed genetically in every detail, like the bees' honey dance, some birdsong, and the nest-building pattern of weaver birds. Here the same complicated pattern, correct in every detail, will be produced by creatures that have been carefully reared in isolation from any member of their own species and from any helpful conditioning. Such genetic programming takes the place of intelligence; learning is just maturation. Open instincts on the other hand are programs with a gap. Parts of the behavior pattern are innately determined, but others are left to be filled in by experience....Experience must "imprint" it.

By this interpretation, learning is not ruled out; there is no absolute nature/nurture conflict. Thus Wilson speaks of genetically-programmed "learning rules": "a predisposition to learn one alternative behavior as opposed to another, even when both are taught with equal intensity." He offers as an example right-handedness and left-handedness. This is in contrast to the view that would attribute all behavior and behavioral dispositions to learning. Pavlov, for example, equated instinct with reflex. Ethologists have noted two characteristics of animals which are extremely difficult to explain by this model. First, there is the periodicity of certain ways of responding to stimuli--variations which seem to be explicable only by referring to internal
changes in the individual. Hinde notes that even with a constant external situation, changes occur in many animals' frequency of types of behavior, intensity of behavior, threshold of response to certain stimuli, choice of stimuli and responsiveness to aversive stimuli. Tinbergen argues that at least three kinds of internal changes may contribute to the occurrence of these variations. These are (a) endocrinal changes (e.g., sexual hormone increase), (b) internal sensory stimuli (e.g., contractions of the stomach lining), and (c) intrinsic central nervous system factors (e.g., apparently spontaneous initiations of activity such as stalking, or so-called "vacuum" activities involving no stimulus, but perhaps resulting from a displacement of excess energy). We note again that these factors are not posited to the outright exclusion of external stimuli, but are suggested as factors which shape the behavior of the individual in ways which appeal to external stimuli alone cannot explain.

A second difficulty to be explained from a purely behavioristic or conditioning perspective is that of the remarkable specificity or selectivity of perception in most creatures. Tinbergen speaks at some length of the "sign stimuli" (see his famous studies of the three spined stickleback and the herring gull) to which individual species are selectively disposed to respond.
He points out that not all of the perceptual abilities of the creature are employed to cue instinctive behaviors. An insect may be able to make color distinctions, but such distinctions may not evoke any kind of pre-programmed specialized behavioral response. Sign stimuli apparently play two functions for many species. They serve (a) to release or elicit behavior, and (b) to guide behavior towards some end-state or goal.26

Tinbergen commonly speaks of instinct as including an "Innate Releasing Mechanism (IRM), which takes its place in the causal chain between the receptors and afferent nervous system, and the efferent system culminating in motor and other responses.27 He suggests that the IRM may take place at various levels in the nervous system of the individual. Hence, we may speak of a "hierarchy" of instinctive activities, some involving only the lower parts of the nervous system (e.g., scratching an itch) and others involving emotional activation and even extensive cognitive processing.28 With this "releasing" function stimuli may also serve, as noted, to cue individuals to certain behaviors to which they are already disposed. Wilson speaks of an instinct as "behavior that is relatively stereotyped, more complex than simple reflexes such as salivation and eye blinking, and usually directed at particular objects in the environment. Learning may or may not be involved in the
development of instinctive behavior; the important point is that the behavior develops toward a comparatively narrow, predictable end product. Such behaviors would include the often elaborate ceremonies, and reproductive-relevant displays of animals (and perhaps humans), ritualized forms of combat, feeding procedures, warning signals, escape activities, etc. Wilson, Lorenz, Ardrey, Dawkins and others have sought to show that many aspects of human conduct are similarly instinctive.

Our concern here, however, is with just one kind of instinctive behavior—what we have spoken of as empathically-cued helping behavior. We are now at a place where we can return to the questions with which we began this chapter. According to the nativist theory, the tendency to empathize, in its most basic or primitive form, is a genetically-programmed disposition largely beyond the control of the subject. Empathic physical and emotional arousal acts as a cue to the release of energy stored in the system. This energy is guided instinctively—that is, by biologically-tuned pathways of the individual's nervous and motor system, so as to function as a motivation to helping behavior. The fact that the occurrence of empathy involves a drawing of the attention to the recipient and his plight may also be relevant here, the individual's "captured" attention cuing and directing the behavior toward the recipient. Examples
of such behavior would be the quick and immediate rescue attempts discussed above, and the instinctive releases of anger or fury, experienced in protecting one's family from imminent threat.

All this may seem to take much of the romance and honor out of helping behavior. Inasmuch as it tends to generate the appropriate forms of helping behavior in a roughly programmed way, there is nothing in the theory which demands that individuals be characterized by a conscious sustained desire for the welfare of fellow species-members. This eliminates benevolence in at least the warm, mushy sense of an attitude of friendly regard for others, presumed to be possessed by all humans. Even where altruism—in the sense of self-sacrificial action—occurs, this may not imply a good motive or courageous will on the part of subject. On the other hand, this analysis does not rule out the possibility that (some) humans are benevolent, nor that humans may (sometimes) act out of a positive regard for others or pro-social motive, such that are impelled to a heroic and even self-sacrificial exploit in helping-behavior. In earlier chapters we noted that empathy itself may take on a more full-blooded, deliberate form, as described in Rogers's definition.

Our concern in this and the previous chapter is not to exclude these kinds of human motivational states.
But nor is it to argue for their pervasiveness. We have concentrated on the very primitive, streamlined kind of empathic response which Hume was concerned to describe. It is very simply, the tendency to be affected by the plight of others. We have then sought to show that the differential pervasiveness of empathy will not justify asserting a similar pervasiveness of benevolence, and with it acts of helping behavior and altruism. Empathy is not, by itself, a sufficient condition for the occurrence of helping behavior; despite appearances in itself it does not provide a clear-cut motive to help the recipient. Some additional mechanism is required to explain why empathy and helping behavior are experimentally-correlated. The fact that they are often correlated, and that it seems "natural" that the subject should want to help the perceived sufferer does not provide an explanatory mechanism as to why this is the case. We noted in the last chapter, pace Hume, that a conceptual or a priori intuitive linkage could not be demonstrated.

We have thus appealed, in conjunction with the nativist theory arrived at in Chapter II, to a biological intervening variable between empathy, as a received pattern of recipient-related stimuli, and the helping behavior which results. The connection between empathy and helping behavior is causal, not conceptual. The fact that helping behavior occurs in response to empathic
arousal is to be explained by appeal to the organization of the human nervous system. If further explanation is sought, we then appeal to the evolutionary conditions which brought it about that humans should respond in this way (this is the topic of Chapter VII). If this appears reductionistic, excessively non-cognitive or physicalistic, it is because most philosophers have become accustomed to assuming that Hume's argument works—viz., that responsiveness to others, described as we (and Hume) have described it, implies, by some kind of intuitive appraisal, a desire for the good of others and even an approval/disapproval reaction.31

One qualification must be added to our conclusions concerning empathy, benevolence and helping behavior. In the general sense of desire used above, it may be appropriate to speak of the subject as having an occurrent desire, care, or concern for the welfare of the recipient during those moments in which her emotions and behavior are controlled by the empathically-cued helping-behavior program. This point was anticipated in a striking way in the eighteenth century by the British moralist, Bishop Joseph Butler. We will briefly advert to Butler's view in order to note his distinction between this occurrent desire and the more global type of desire implied by Hume's concept of benevolence.
Bishop Butler, in his *Sermons*, defends the view that benevolence is not opposed to the pursuit of self-interest or self-love. He does so by seeking to show that happiness (presumably the goal of self-love) is nothing more than "the gratification of certain affections, appetites, passions, with objects which are by nature adapted to them."³² If pursuit of these "particular passions" is excluded by a total engrossing of attention in the pursuit of self-love, there is no room left for any kind of happiness or enjoyment whatsoever. An important part of successful pursuit of self-love (to which Butler wishes to make "all possible concessions") is thus the "distraction" which makes for pursuit of gratifying the particular passions.³³ As for the latter, these "are towards external things themselves, distinct from the pleasure arising from them."³⁴ That is, to pursue or seek to gratify a particular passion is to seek the particular object of the passion itself, as opposed to embarking on the quest of a more global quality such as Pleasure.

This discussion by Bishop Butler is relevant to the matter of this chapter inasmuch as Butler interprets benevolence as being a particular pleasure.³⁵ This is why self-love does not conflict with benevolence. Benevolence is one of the particular passions which can, quite consistently, become a goal of the
gratification-activities comprising self-love (thus "the thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest...but that they have so little to the good of others"). This view of benevolence approximates the view which we attributed to the nativist theory, as is illustrated by these statements Butler makes in regard to the difference between delight in the prosperity of others (which we would interpret as being equivalent to Hume's more-global concept of benevolence) and compassion (which we equate with the very specific, empathically-induced desire to help):

Of these two, delight in the prosperity of others, and compassion for their distresses, the last is felt much more generally than the former. Though men do not universally rejoice with all whom they see rejoice, yet, accidental obstacles removed, they naturally compassionate all in some degree whom they see in distress: so far as they have any real perception or sense of that distress: inso­much that words expressing this latter, pity, com­passion, frequently occur, whereas we have scarce any single one by which the forrer is expressed.

Again:

This difference or inequality is so remarkable, that we plainly consider compassion as itself an original, distinct, particular affection in human nature; whereas to rejoice in the good of others, is only a consequence of the general affection of love and good will to them. The reason and account of which matter is this: when a man has obtained any particular ad­vantage or felicity, his end is gained, and he does not in that particular want the assistance of ano­ther; there was, therefore, no need of a distinct affection towards that felicity of another already obtained; neither would such affection directly carry him on to do good to that person; whereas, men in distress want assistance, and compassion leads us directly to assist them.
This passage from the *Sermons* very clearly asserts the notion that empathically-elicited helping behavior involves a distinct or particularized desire—viz., to come to the distress of the recipient. This is opposed to the more generalized and global (though not general in the sense of common amongst men) desire for the welfare of all, as here represented by "delight in the prosperity of others."

Before leaving this discussion, a word may be said in defense of Hume. In at least two places in the *Enquiry*, Hume relies upon Butler's approach to benevolence. In Section IX, he asserts that "it is requisite that there be an original propensity of some kind, in order to be a basis to self-love, by giving a relish to the objects of its pursuit; and none more fit for this purpose than benevolence or humanity."39 This argument reappears in the Appendix, "On Self-Love," but with an important addition. Here, Hume asserts that "hunger and thirst have eating and drinking for their end; and from the gratification of these primary appetites arises a pleasure, which may become the object of another species of desire or inclination that is secondary and interested."40 Hume also considers certain "mental passions" such as fame or power which, he claims, are also initially pursued without regard to self-interest, yet which, when attained, yield "a pleasing enjoyment."
In the case of both these physical and mental passions, argues Hume, there is a "passion which points immediately to the object, and constitutes it our good or happiness" (cf. Butler's "particular passions"). Hume adds, however, that there are "other secondary passions which afterwards arise and pursue it as a part of our happiness, when once it is constituted such by our original affections." The primary passions are regarded by Hume as a result of Nature, "by the internal frame and constitution of the mind" which gives an original appetite for and propensity to the object. The secondary passions, are derivative, in the sense that they arise from the pleasure experienced by the gratification of primary passions; these Hume identifies with the pursuit of self-love and happiness.

Like Butler, Hume, in this Appendix to the Enquiry, suggests that benevolence is also a natural, primary passion "from the original frame of our temper." Hume defines it, though, as "a desire of another's happiness or good," and then asserts that this "becomes our own good, and is afterwards pursued, from the combined motives of benevolence and self-enjoyment..." This is closely similar to Butler's view, except that Hume uses "benevolence" in a more global way, rather than along the more context-oriented, particularized lines in which we saw Butler speak above of compassion. Also,
Hume appears to posit a separate, secondary passion for pleasure and self-interest, which becomes, as in the argument with which we opened this Chapter VI, a part of the motivation to desire the happiness of others. Butler is more reticent about associating these two kinds of passions; they are "totally different, and so want different words to be distinguished by: all that they agree in is, that they both proceed from, and are done to gratify an inclination in a man's self."


12. "We gain some measure of understanding of these diverse characteristics of . . . behaviour when we see that they all reflect a single predisposition or temporary state" (Hinde, 26).


15. Midgley, 332.


17. Tinbergen, 112.

18. Ibid., 104-f.

19. Ibid., 88-f.


24. Tinbergen, 67.

25. Ibid., 57-f, 76-f.
26. Ibid., 81-f.
27. Ibid., 37-44.

28. Cf. P. Weiss, "Self-Differentiation of the Basic Patterns of Coordination," Comparative Psychology Monographs 17 (1941): 1-96. See also the discussion in Chapter III.


31. Cf. Stroud's summary (196): "In the latter two cases I get the sentiment from something that tends to promote a certain end, so it must be that I am not indifferent to that end. The well-being of particular people and the flourishing of society and mankind generally must be things which themselves give me pleasing sentiments of approbation. Only if that were so would I approve of what leads to them." What is a "pleasing sentiment of approbation"?


33. Ibid., 117, 114.
34. Ibid., 115.
35. Ibid., 121.
36. Ibid., xxii.
37. Ibid., 47-8.
38. Ibid., 48-9.

40. Ibid., 253.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid., 254.
Once again, it is useful to refer to Hume's discussion of sympathy, for he offered an important thesis about the role which sympathy plays in the origination of moral language. In the Treatise (III.1.2), Hume argues strongly that morality requires some other explanation than that offered by the appeal to reason; "since vice and virtue are not discoverable merely by reason, or the comparison of ideas, it must be by means of some impression or sentiment which they occasion."¹ Hume's alternative is that an action, sentiment or character is deemed virtuous or vicious (these are the moral terms which Hume concentrates on throughout his discussion) "because its view causes a pleasure or uneasiness of a particular kind."² To give a reason for this is to "sufficiently explain" these feelings. What Hume seeks to offer, then, is an explanation of the origin or distinctive nature of the feelings which he sees as the source of moral distinction-making. As "virtue is distinguished
by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that any action, sentiment or character gives us by the mere view and contemplation," the question reduces to, "why any action or sentiment upon the general view or survey, gives a certain satisfaction or uneasiness, in order to shew the origin of its moral rectitude or depravity."³

According to Hume, only "certain peculiar sentiments of pain and pleasure" lead us to designate their objects in terms of virtue and vice. What is the nature of their peculiarity? Hume's initial answer (III.3.1) is that these feelings are distinguished from other feelings of pleasure or pain because they originate from sympathy. He argues as follows:

Now as the means to an end can only be agreeable, where the end is agreeable; and as the good of society, where our own interest is not concern'd, or that of our friends, pleases only by sympathy: It follows, that sympathy is the source of the esteem, which we pay to all the artificial virtues.⁴

Having derived from "experiments" that "the tendency of qualities to the good of society, is the sole cause of our approbation" in the case of the artificial virtues (e.g., justice), Hume thus argues for the belief that "sympathy is a very powerful principle...and that it produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues."⁵

A similar argument is offered to explain the correlation of the natural virtues and sympathy. While
some moral notions may be irrelevant to interpersonal conduct (Hume does not discuss these in this context), he argues that...

...moral distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities and characters to the interest of society, and that 'tis our concern for that interest, which makes us approve or disapprove of them. Now we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy; and consequently 'tis that principle which takes us so far out of ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in the characters of others, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage and loss.6

The peculiarity of that pain and pleasure responsible for the making of moral distinctions is that it derives from an empathic response to the interests and well-being of others. Just as that which causes personal (self-interested) pain or pleasure is called a good or an evil, so that which causes empathic pain or pleasure is called a moral good or evil (virtue or vice).7 In the case of the natural virtues and vices, the relevant empathic response is to the view of a "single act", i.e., to what is "particular" as opposed to "a general scheme or system of action." Hume offers as an example of a naturally virtuous act the relief of a person in distress--a phenomenon which is a commonly-studied sign of empathically-motivated altruism.8 Yet, an observed tendency may also evoke morally-relevant emotion. Thus "when any quality, or character, has a tendency to the good of mankind, we are pleas'd with it, and approve of it; because it
presents the lively idea of pleasure; which idea affects us by sympathy, and is itself a kind of pleasure."

We should note that in distinguishing moral feelings in this way, Hume does not commit himself to a "moral sense" theory. A moral sense theory (cf. Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and perhaps G. E. Moore) suggests the existence of a unique mode of perception and, corresponding to it, uniquely moral qualities, impressions or truths. Hume nowhere asserts this view. On the contrary, he sees moral feeling as resulting from a certain unique way of generating, operating upon and correcting (cf. below) otherwise natural passions. He is thus a moral sentiments or feeling theorist, in that he saw the end result being a "peculiar" kind of feeling; these feelings are not peculiar, however, through being experienced by means of a uniquely moral faculty or in conjunction with intrinsically moral properties or impressions.

Hume takes up a problem which leads to a second differentiating characteristic of the "peculiar" character of morally-relevant sentiments. Hume notes the problem of the "variation of our sympathy" or the "variation of the sentiment". Because the situations of humans are in "continual fluctuation" in regard to each other, and "every particular man has a peculiar position with regard to others", it is to be expected that sympathy should vary and fluctuate with the
changing relations of individuals in society (cf. what we spoke of in Chapter II as the differential participatory transfer rate per individual and per context).

This problem of variability calls for some method of "correction", through fixing on "some steady and general points of view."

In general, all sentiments of blame or praise are variable, according to our situation of nearness or remoteness, with regard to the person blamed or prais'd, and according to the present disposition of our mind. But these variations we regard not in our general decisions, but still apply the terms expressive of our liking or dislike, in the same manner, as if we remain'd in one point of view. Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or at least, of correcting our language, where the sentiments are more stubborn or inalterable. But

Hume argues that such corrections are common in the operation of all the senses—otherwise it would not be possible for humans to communicate with each other in regard to the objects which each person perceives from their unique standpoint or perspective. Humans thus act to "make allowance for, "correct," or "overlook" their peculiarities of viewpoint, adopting general principles and "general unalterable standards." If, as Hume asserts in the Enquiry, virtue is "whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; and vice the contrary"¹⁴, then this "spectator" must make an effort to satisfy certain idealizing conditions, by which he checks his reactions to
situations, characters and actions avoid idiosyncrasy of viewpoint. Unfortunately, Hume nowhere specified in detail how this is to be done. At most he specifies (a) that the object of such sentiments are to be the "general interests of the community", (b) that the goal is to "consider all the circumstances in which these actions agree, and thence endeavour to extract some general observations with regard to these sentiments", and (c) that the spectator's reaction is to be characterized by "a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion." This last point deserves attention.

Earlier in the Treatise (II.3.4,8), Hume distinguishes between "violent" and "calm" passions. Violent passions have a "sensible" effect on the mind, and tend to have a more powerful influence on the will, being of greater intensity than calm passions. Calm passions act more subtly, causing "no disorder in the temper"; they are relatively tranquil and, alleges Hume, are often mistaken for the conclusions of reasoning. Hume speaks of the "calm desires and tendencies" as being of two kinds: "either certain instincts originally implanted in our natures, such as benevolence and resentment, the love of life, and kindness to children; or the general appetite to good, and aversion to evil, consider'd merely as such."¹⁵ The calm passions tend to become "a settled
principle of action" or the "predominant inclination of the soul"; as such, they produce no sense of opposition as normally attend a "gust of passion". Another difference between calm and violent passions is that "the same good, when near, will cause a violent passion, which, when remote, produces only a calm one."\textsuperscript{16} The effort given to imagination where the object is not immediate "weakens the conception" and thus "takes off from its force when it contemplates any considerable distance."\textsuperscript{17} The peculiar passions inspiring virtue and vice (viz., sympathetic responses) thus differ from other passions through the lower level of emotional activation or excitation which is involved.

As C. D. Broad and others have suggested, what is to be imagined (hence generating the calm passions) is the effect an action or character would have on others.\textsuperscript{18} In the Treatise, Hume asserts that we take their "points of view" and "place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation."\textsuperscript{19} Even though a contemporary may excite stronger sentiments of love and kindness than Marcus Brutus, we do not view the former as more laudable, but consider our feelings "were we to approach equally near to that renown'd patriot."\textsuperscript{20} We thus seek some counterfactual "steady or general points of view." These are "founded on some distant view or reflection" in regard to our own, partial interests; on the other
hand, we seek an imaginative positioning of ourselves proximate to the situation of any person. That is, we try to feel how they would feel were we as close to their situation as they are themselves. These feelings are regarded as those any or all would feel in the same situation.

The feelings which are experienced in these points of view are those directed toward the moral agent and his character. As Hume often asserts, they are feelings of approval or disapproval, that is, of praise or blame. These arise whenever the object presented to the subject is an object of affection or disgust, which in turn reflect a response of love or hatred. In yet another section of the Treatise (III.2.1). Hume notes that pride and humility, love and hatred are excited "when there is anything presented to us that both bears a relation to the object of the passion, and produces a separate sensation related to the sensation of the passion." That is, an observed passion (either observed as being experienced by oneself or by another) evokes an additional emotion in the subject. Hume notes that virtue and vice are "attended with these circumstances," and it is this "which clearly distinguishes them from the pleasure and pain arising from inanimate objects, that often bear no relation to us." Hume holds that as the object of these emotions is either ourselves or others, either
pride or humility, love or hatred must also simultaneously be experienced with, and as part of, the sentiments evoking judgements of virtue or vice. Elsewhere, he goes so far as to state that they are to be viewed as equivalent, "virtue, and the power of producing love or pride, vice and the power of producing humility or hatred." Thus, we may "pronounce any quality of the mind virtuous, which causes love or pride; and any one vicious, which causes hatred or humility."

What is the source of this love or hatred? The answer is, of course, sympathy (and, with it as we have seen benevolence). Immoral actions, presumed to proceed from vicious characters negatively affect humanity. As we take the victim's point of view sympathetically, we experience pain, which evokes toward the cause of the victim's pain a hatred or disapproval. Sentiments arising in this way as a result of the operation of sympathy and the point of view which it motivates the subject to take result in the making of a "moral distinction," a general sentiment of blame and approbation; a tendency however faint to the objects of the one, and a proportional aversion to the other.

Moral distinctions arise, in a great measure, from the tendency of qualities and characters to the interest of society, and...'tis our concern for that interest, which makes us approve or disapprove of them.' Now we have no such extensive concern for society but from sympathy; and consequently 'tis that principle, which takes us so far out of
ourselves, as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in the characters of others, as if they had a tendency to our own advantage or loss. 28

To sum up the discussion of the previous pages, Hume's view is that the following characteristics differentiate "moral" or moral language-evoking sentiments from other kinds of passions:

1. Moral sentiments are motivated by a concern for or response to the general interests of society or mankind

2. Moral sentiments require a "steady and general point of view" (as opposed to that of self-interest)

3. Moral sentiments are characterized by a general calm determination of the passions, founded on some distant view or reflexion

4. Moral sentiments have as their object the pleasure or pain of others; as such, moral sentiments imply the concurrent experience of pride or humility, love or hatred, resulting in approval or disapproval

Let us now consider in the light of the conclusions of Chapter V, how these assertions about the sentiments underlying morality relate to what we know about empathy. In terms of our analysis of empathy in the previous chapter, not all of the four characteristics of morally-relevant sentiments directly correlate with the experience of empathy. First, we discovered that it is incorrect to attribute on the basis of the tendency to empathize concern for the general interests of society or mankind. Empathy is a largely situation-specific response cued primarily by the observed distress of another
person. As we concluded in previous chapters, the fact that individuals often respond in this way does not, by itself, provide a sufficient condition for ascribing to them a global benevolent attitude. Hume himself denies, as we noted, a universal "love of mankind," but often fails to recognize the need for some further mechanism besides sympathy to explain the fact that humans approve of that which has "a tendency to the good of mankind."

On the other hand, Hume has offered an important insight by suggesting that sympathy, by generating at least an occurrent desire and concern for the welfare of others, was a contributor to the ontogeny of moral thinking and distinction-making. Provided one does not a priori rule out from the sphere of morality any influence from such sources, this is a credible historical thesis as to how individuals came to evaluate actions and characters which had no direct connection to their personal utility. In the next four chapters, we will further explore the nature of morality, seeking to discover whether in fact a place can be made for sympathy in terms of our view of moral thinking, language and decision-making.

Hume was clearly aware of the differential nature of human empathic responsiveness (cf. the variation of viewpoint), and characteristic #2 describes the device which humans have adopted to cope with this problem, Paul Ardal suggests that for Hume, taking the steady point of
view was an "acquired habit" which served the purpose of gaining objectivity. The latter was required in evaluating conduct just as it was required in perception and in human language. Conventions or general rules are required if intersubjective agreement is to be achieved.

As in the case of all the artificial virtues, experience teaches us the advantages of language, and a tacit agreement to abide by the rules of language grows up...Successful communication in individual cases depends upon a general adherence to the conventions that govern the rules of the language.30

In the same way, in regard to morality, Ardal summarizes Hume's view:

The case is precisely parallel in moral 'judgements'. We form the habit of looking upon a person's situation in such a way as to take into consideration only those characteristics that are independent of the special situation in which any one spectator may find himself. The acquisition of this habit of objectivity is also convenient, because it tends to eliminate the friction which arises in our arguments about the values of qualities of character, and which is due to our talking at cross purposes about them.31

It is this view of the origin of moral language and thinking which we will defend in Chapter VIII. The moral point of view, expressed attitudinally and linguistically, derives in a somewhat contingent way from what proves to be effective in reducing friction and disagreement. It turns out that humans are often able to agree about things which favor the good of their fellows, but only because of empathy. Morality originates out of these agreements.

The third characteristic correlates only imperfectly with empathy. While empathic responses may be less
intense than the observed emotions they reproduce, it will not always do to speak of them as "calm passions." On the contrary, if the nativist theory is correct, empathic responses are often intense enough to motivate the individual to helping-behavior. One can, of course, think of a refined, intellectualized empathy. Its roots in the history of the human race, however, go much deeper and are much more raw. This is not to deny that what has sprung from the roots has not been mellowed and acculturated, such that moral disagreements can take place in virtually dispassionate form.

Finally, characteristic #4 accurately describes empathy to the extent that empathy involves the reproduction of the same kind of emotions as are experienced by the recipient. It is difficult, however, to follow Hume when he suggests that to experience empathic emotions is, in that, to experience a form of pride or humility, love or hatred. It is difficult to believe that infra-human species experiencing empathy consistently respond with love or hatred unless these terms are emptied of much of their content.

Despite the reservations implied in our "trimming" of Hume's concept of sympathy, we should not be quick to abandon Hume's theory. Hume may be taken as asserting two very tenable theses:
(1) Humans' innate tendency to be affected by and respond to the sufferings of fellow-humans provides a major part of the impetus to interpret human actions and characters in moral terms.

(2) The terms "virtuous" and "vicious" came to be pronounced upon actions and characters which pass the test of (a) taking the spectator's view and seeking to sense a feeling of approbation or disapprobation, or (b) considering (by reason) what tends to be useful or to the welfare of society.

Hume's concern, then, is with the origin of the institution of morality and moral language, and also with the procedure or taking of the point of view which provides a guide to judgements qualifying as moral. It is important to note that Hume did not assert that the meaning of moral language is the expression of the pleasure or pain, approbation or disapprobation which generates it. Hume's explanation of the unique "moral" character of moral language is drawn wholly from his description of its ontogeny; he leaves the question of meaning rather open.

Nonetheless, it is a legitimate question to ask whether the meaning of moral language is affected by, or somehow an expression of, its ontogeny. In the following chapters, we will assume the basic correctness fit of Hume's two theses concerning empathy and the origin of morality. What are the implications for the meaning of moral terms, and for the establishment of a more precise moral decision procedure?
CHAPTER VII: NOTES


2. T., 473.
3. T., 475.
4. T., 577.
5. T., 577-8.
6. T., 579.

7. Hume does not devote discussion to moral language per se, but is concerned to explain (the fact of) moral utterance or the making of moral distinctions (see discussion, infra). Nevertheless, it appears that he is struck by the fact that the same terms "good" and "evil" are used for personal evaluations of things (see T., 276) as well as for moral evaluation. The implication is that moral language has somehow evolved from their former usage, though Hume never addresses himself directly to this question.

8. T., 579.

10. See Raphael's discussion in the Introduction to his book.


12. T., 580-584.
13. T., 582.
14. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd ed., ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, rev. and ed., P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 239 (marginal numbering). Ardal makes the important point that this constituted an "acquired habit" for the purpose of achieving "objectivity"—a necessary quality if "tacit agreement" is to be gained. The habit of objectivity is "convenient;" it serves to reduce disagreement and friction (118-120). "The habit of disregarding your personal relation to the object does not necessarily eliminate all disagreement about the value of the object, but it will tend to decrease friction, because we are all more or less alike in being affected by the pleasure or pain of others through sympathy, although in somewhat unequal degrees" (120). This expresses exactly the view which we will defend in Chapter VIII.


16. T., 419.

17. T., 437, cf. 631-2. Raphael (90) objects to this analogy, noting instances in which contemplation of an object is strengthened by distance (e.g., contemplating a mural or a mountain range). This may show that Hume's analogy only works to a certain extent; Hume, however, was aware that even a weak or non-existent (fictional or future) object may evoke a stronger passion by the force of imagination. See Ardal's discussion of this point, 52.


19. T., 582, cf. *Enquiry*, 222. Ardal (146) notes that, unlike Adam Smith, Hume does not clearly assert that sympathy involves an imaginative placing of oneself in the other's situation. The spectator's viewpoint would open up this possibility, as the spectator could be the victim of a proposed action. However, Ardal is right that Hume sees this sort of process as a corrective one, not as motivating the moral point of view, which is the role of sympathy.

20. T., 582.

21. T., 471: "To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise and admiration...we do not infer a
character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous." This clearly shows that Hume was not a subjectivist. See also T. 578.

22. T., 473.

23. Ibid.

24. T., 575. Ardal suggests that Hume held approval/disapproval to be "species of love and hatred" (126).

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Enquiry, 220.

28. T., 579.

29. See T., 481.


31. Ardal, 119-120.

32. The Treatise, 469 is often quoted to support this view: "So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it." A reading of the context, however, reveals that Hume's point is not one of the "meaning" in terms of the role moral language plays in the rule-bound conventional linguistic system. Rather, he is speaking about the source of the moral distinction—that is, what it is, as a result of the causal genesis of moral language—which is being expressed. Moral language does not "arise from" the rational cognition or inference of a property; moral beliefs are "felt, not judged." This affects moral discourse through the fact that it hence serves the purpose of expressing these feelings—a point we will argue for in Chapter VIII. It misconstrues Hume's purpose to take it that he is making points about moral language in the Treatise. An example of one who mistakes Hume in this way is Charles Stevenson, Ethics and Language (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1944), see esp. 273-276. Barry Stroud, Hume (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 182-183, defends Hume against this interpretation.
CHAPTER VIII

THE EMOTIVE THEORY OF ETHICS AND
THE ORIGIN OF MORAL ATTITUDES

Let us begin by picturing a paradigm instance of empathic response as it takes place in a primitive society. Pithicus looks across the field and sees his brother Lupicus being attacked by a trespassing tribesman. Lupicus lets out a welp of pain and terror. Pithicus, observing this, empathically experiences something of Lupicus's emotions. He is immediately galvanized into action, the empathic response acting as a cue to his genetically-programmed disposition to helping-behavior. He races across the field to come to the aid of his brother. He makes quite an outcry, his facial expressions stretched in a grimace of hot emotion, his posture communicating pure threat and outrage. The invading tribesman gets the "message" and departs from the scene before Pithicus arrives. Pithicus's communication of his intentions is thus quite successful, though Pithicus deserves very little credit for this. In fact, his reaction was quite automatic. Cued by his feelings
of empathic distress, his genetic program swung reservoirs of physical and emotional energy into action, causing his quick move in Lupicus's direction, the displays of angry emotion, and the adoption of a threatening physical posture. If Pithicus had had the freedom to think about it, he might not have reacted so quickly or risked intervention at all, nor is it likely he would have thought of adopting such a combination of highly effective expressive contortions.

Pithicus's expressive behavior is effective in communicating his state of emotional excitation and involvement in the situation. It also communicates his intentions to intervene. The message which comes across with crystal clarity is, "you'd better get out of here!" That is, Pithicus's expressive behavior communicates to the invader the practical necessity of his desisting from his present conduct. It is antagonizing, disapproved of, unacceptable, and invites imminent intervention.

Is it possible to move from communication of this kind to communication by moral language? This would depend upon one's model of the interpretation of moral terms. The model which portrays moral language most isomorphically to the scene which we have just depicted is the emotivist model. Thus, compare the scene above to Stevenson's famous "working model" interpretation of "this is wrong" as, "I disapprove of this; do so as
On this model, moral language (a) expresses the subject's emotion (via the so-called "emotive meaning" of moral terms) and (b) communicates a prescription to the other person, perhaps backed up with a (veiled) threat or communication of the intention to act or enforce. Does a nativist theory of empathic responsiveness thus favor an emotivist theory of ethics, a theory which has fallen under considerable disfavor in recent years? In this chapter, we take a brief tangent to consider the emotivist theory of morality and moral language, in order to assess its suitability as a model for explaining the relation of empathic responsiveness to morality.

The chief credit which must be given to the emotivist theory (as put forward by Ogden and Richards, Ayer, Carnap, Stevenson, et al.\(^2\)) is that it recognized the role of an individual's emotions and attitudes in moral thinking and disagreement. As an approach to moral psychology, emotivist theories held that an individual's moral beliefs are importantly affected by his emotions or attitudes (we shall use these essentially synonymously while discussing the emotivist theories, as this is the way emotivists treated them).\(^3\) While cognitive beliefs may function as a "guide" to attitudes, it is the presence of the emotional element which most significantly constitutes moral thinking. This is opposed to theories
of ethics in the Kantian tradition, which sharply divorce moral thinking from feelings and desires. It is also opposed to those naturalistic theories which view the making of moral judgements as a cognitive exercise involving the search for certain natural properties in proposed actions or policies. Emotivists counter that to portray moral convictions as simply a form of belief is to overlook that element which so often leads to irresolvable moral controversies. Along with disagreements in belief may also come disagreements in attitude. In cases of the latter, even complete resolution of the differences of belief does not guarantee that moral agreement can be obtained. Instances of this kind of disagreement are taken as evidence for a dimension of moral thinking which goes beyond that of belief.

The emotivist approach to language held that moral judgements function chiefly in a "dynamic" way, as expressions of emotion. As Ayer wrote, "in every case in which one would commonly be said to be making an ethical judgement, the function of the relevant ethical word is purely 'emotive'. It is used to express feeling about certain objects, but not to make any assertion about them." If the words used in moral judgements have meaning, then it is chiefly a form of "emotive meaning," defined by Stevenson as "a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (or result
from) affective responses in people.\textsuperscript{5} Or again, "the emotive meaning of a word is the power that the word acquires, on account of its history in emotional situations, to evoke or directly express attitudes, as distinct from describing or designating them."\textsuperscript{6} The effect of this upon attempts to rationally assess moral judgments is summarized by Urmson. "If to use evaluative language is merely to bring causally efficacious means of change to bear on attitudes and feelings, there can be no discrimination of valid and invalid argument in evaluation. Any support must be causal reinforcement or persuasion."\textsuperscript{7}

The emotivist theory of moral language was sharply attacked in a number of areas, which we shall only mention here (cf. the writings of Urmson, Findlay, Warnock, et al.).\textsuperscript{8} Attention was brought to what the emotivists seemed to have overlooked: to the descriptive elements of moral language, to the logical maneuverability of moral terms, and to the seeming openness to justification and/or disconfirmation of moral sentences, as witnessed to by the observation that some moral disagreements are settled by an appeal to facts. It has been suggested that the emotivist concept of the linguistic "expression" of emotions is a good model for the language of expletives or ejaculations, but not for moral language in general. Stevenson's concept of "emotive meaning" has
been criticized as leading to the proposition that a word means whatever effect it happens to have on any individual—thus undermining all vestiges of either conventional or objective meaning. Recent attempts to resurrect the emotivist approach have centered on "speech act" interpretations of moral language. These suggest that if the expression of emotions is not the meaning, then it is at least the force or effect of moral statements. We will return to this restatement of the theory momentarily.

In the light of these criticisms, emotivism is taken less than seriously by most philosophers as an account of moral thinking and language. Bernard Williams, contributing to a recent collection of essays seeking to resuscitate the emotivist theory, captures well the role the theory plays for many in the academic community:

Not that emotivism has ceased to be mentioned. It is mentioned in order to be refuted, and indeed the demolition of emotivism has almost come to take the place in undergraduate exercises that used to be held (as Stephen Spender comically recalls in his autobiography World Within World) by the equally mechanical dismembering of Mill's Utilitarianism. The emotivist is especially suitable for this role of sacrificial victim because he is at once somewhat disreputable (emotivism being regarded as irrationalist) and at the same time embarrassingly likely to be taken for a close relative. Emotivism thus takes the place of whipping boy in the ritual exercises of undergraduate Introduction to Ethics classes.
But this is quite unfair. It is granted that the emotive theory was put forward by some exponents in a highly radical form. Examples would be A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (cf. above), Ogden and Richards's *The Meaning of Meaning*, Paul Edward's *The Logic of Moral Discourse* and perhaps Charles Stevenson's early article, "The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms."**

Thanks to these formulations, emotivism came to be known in the way that Alasdair MacIntyre recently portrayed it:

Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgements and more specifically all moral judgements are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character. Particular judgements may of course unite moral and factual elements...But the moral in such a judgement is always to be sharply distinguished from the factual.12

The implications of which view are:

Factual judgements are true or false; and in the realm of fact there are rational criteria by means of which we may secure agreement as to what is true and what is false. But moral judgements, being expressions of attitude or feeling, are neither true nor false; and agreement in moral judgements is not to be secured by any rational method, for there are none. It is to be secured, if at all, by producing certain non-rational effects on the emotions or attitudes of those who disagree with one. We use moral judgements not only to express our own feelings and attitudes, but also precisely to produce such effects on others.13

The result is a theory which, as Stevenson writes, "has been repudiated by some with a fervor which borders on melodrama."14 But is this a fair summary of emotivism?
To the extent that *some* proposed this extreme view, there is an emotive theory worthy of such critical treatment. Perhaps it is useful to "freeze" the theory in its extreme form, calling this form of it the emotive theory, so as to forever preserve it for the sake of the ritual exercises described above. There are two reasons why this is not entirely fair. First, Charles Stevenson's work, *Ethics and Language*, is often cited (e.g., by MacIntyre) as *the* representative exposition of emotivism. Uniformly, critics of emotivism (again, see MacIntyre and also Urmson) pounce on Stevenson's "working models," found in Chapter II of his book (p. 21). They completely overlook the fact that almost immediately (p. 22) Stevenson begins to qualify the models and express reservations about their success in capturing all that is involved in the meaning of ethical terms. For example, only two pages after providing the "working" models, he warns:

> But if the models are to help us more than they hinder us, they must be used with extreme caution. Although they give a needed emphasis to agreement and disagreement in attitude, they give no emphasis to agreement and disagreement in belief. Hence the dual source of ethical problems is not made evident. If traditional theory too often lost sight of attitudes in its concern with beliefs, we must not make the opposite error of losing sight of beliefs in our concern with attitudes. The latter error, which would give ethics the appearance of being cut off from reasoned argument and inquiry, would be even more serious than the former.15

The working models are to be retained only as "rough approximations" which may help to "prepare the way for a
complete account" (which Stevenson repeatedly disavows providing). Critics seem to completely overlook the fact that in the very next section (on methodology), in chapters on the method of (rationally) resolving disagreement, on validity, and in a chapter providing another less attitudinal model of moral language (the so-called "second pattern of analysis"), Stevenson works hard to give "close attention to the cognitive aspects of ethics." The critics have apparently found it more convenient or parsimonious to ignore the remaining 310 pages of often very careful and cautious discussion by Stevenson—a discussion which often expresses an appreciation of the diversity, flexibility and vagueness of much moral discourse.

Secondly, the critics have given little heed to the manner in which Stevenson does relate rational discussion to the resolution of moral disagreement. One might suggest that emotivism's critics did not read into Ethics and Language far enough to reach the chapter (Chapter V) which discusses this issue. However, the discussion is anticipated on page 5. As Stevenson points out there:

Our attitudes...often affect our beliefs, not only by causing us to indulge in wishful thinking, but also by leading us to develop and check such beliefs as point out the means of getting what we want. And conversely, our beliefs often affect our attitudes; for we may alter our form of approval of something when we change our beliefs about its nature. The causal connection between beliefs and attitudes is usually not only intimate but reciprocal....Any
implication that the alternatives are mutually exclusive can only be rejected. The influence goes both ways, although at times only one direction of influence may predominate. Stevenson discusses in considerable detail how both rational and partially non-rational "persuasive" factors may influence and change attitudes. The few emotivists who remain have continued to develop this idea, as illustrated by Roger Scruton's detailed discussion, "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Reasons" in the volume, Morality and Moral Reasoning, from which Bernard Williams's assessment was extracted, above. In what follows, we will review briefly the more developed emotivist view of both emotive meaning and the place of rational discussion, relying heavily both on Stevenson's later chapters in Ethics and Language and Scruton's recent essay.

The emotive theory, in its less crude form, can be summarized in terms of three assertions. Emotivists hold that (a) moral language usually, though not necessarily in every case, serves to express the emotions or attitudes of the speaker, as well as seeking to influence the attitudes and actions of the hearer; (b) rational discussion may be efficacious in resolving moral disagreements as a result of having a causal effect on the attitudes held by the participants; (c) nonetheless, there is no standard rational decision procedure or means of justification for adjudicating moral claims, nor is
there some one set of "criteria" logically entailed by moral terminology to which appeal could be made to rationally compel agreement in moral disputes.

(a) Moral Language. A central tenet of emotivism is that moral language generally serves to do more than cognitively inform. Unfortunately, the extreme interpretation of this appeared to exclude an informational role altogether, as illustrated in this excerpt from Ayer's *Language, Truth, and Logic*:

> If a sentence makes no statement at all, there is obviously no sense in asking whether what it says is true or false. And we have seen that sentences which simply express moral judgements do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood. They are unverifiable for the same reason as a cry of pain or a word of command is unverifiable—because they do not express genuine propositions.21

Other emotivists were willing to grant that moral statements may make reports, but only about the author's feelings (a view sometimes referred to as subjectivism). What distinguishes this extreme emotivist view is that it denied that moral statements make or imply any assertions about states of affairs outside of the speaker's subjective feelings. Nothing is learned at all about the object of judgement. To express an attitude does not commit the speaker to any propositional attitude towards objects of reference; no intersubjectively verifiable truth claims are made about the world: the search for
"criteria" of correctness in the making of moral judgements is superfluous.

This, however, was the extreme view. Stevenson asserts that moral language may have a descriptive as well as an emotive meaning. The emotive meaning has to do with the psychological effect which the term or statement is disposed to bring about over the course of its many possible uses. Descriptive meaning has to do with the effect which the term or statement tends to have on the belief-systems of individuals. In Stevenson's first pattern of analysis, the descriptive meaning of "this is good" is limited to a report of the subject's attitudes ("I approve of this"). The second pattern of analysis contains a full-bodied descriptive meaning, and reads as follows:

"This is good" has the meaning of "This has qualities or relations X, Y, Z..." except that 'good' has as well a laudatory emotive meaning which permits it to express the speaker's approval, and tends to evoke the approval of the hearer.

In regard to both emotive and descriptive meaning, Stevenson defines the meaning of a term according to the effects, the "psychological reactions" which follow its use. That is, he adopts a causal theory of meaning.

The chief criticism of this view is that it confuses the effect or function a term may have with the meaning of the term. Alasdair MacIntyre, in After Virtue, offers a compelling explanation of how this
confusion might have come about as a reaction to the post-1903 attitude towards moral utterances in Britain and America. According to this view the meaning of moral terms was to be identified with certain indefinable, uniquely moral properties, supposedly evident to all. As MacIntyre notes:

An acute observer at the time and Keynes himself retrospectively might well have put matters thus: these people take themselves to be identifying the presence of a non-natural property, which they call 'good'; but there is in fact no such property and they are doing no more and no other than expressing their feelings and attitudes, disguising the expression of preference and whim by an interpretation of their own utterance and behavior which confers upon it an objectivity that it does not in fact possess.

The error made by emotivists was in equating this expressive function with the meaning of moral language.

Taking cues from Scruton's essay, a more careful emotivist account of the expressive functions of moral language can be offered. With Stevenson, we can trim radical emotivism back, denying that the meaning of moral language is exhausted by the expression of emotion or by the hortatory functions of moral utterances. In addition, as Urmson, Searle and others have argued, it is wise to distinguish between the meaning of moral terms and the force which the speech acts have in which they appear. Speech acts occurring in a conventional context and employing moral terms often have the power or effect of communicating that the speaker has certain attitudes or
emotions towards the object. They may also have a 
hortatory force. This is to say that moral utterances, 
functioning as illocutionary acts (cf. the use of the 
terms by Austin and Searle) often have an emotive il-locutionary (vs accidental) force. Yet, to say this 
does not specify the meaning of moral terms, nor of the 
moral statements in which they appear. In many cases, 
it is in virtue of the meaning of the terms that the 
speech act has the effect or function that it does. Meaning and effect are here distinct. To confuse the 
two, argues Searle, is to commit "the speech act fal-
lacy."

This is confirmed by the fact that a sentence em-
ploying moral terms need not always have this emotive 
effect. J.O. Urmson given numerous examples of this. A speech act may be an instance of what Urmson calls 
"standard using" in which a previously established prin-
ciple is simply applied in a relatively cut-and-dry way. 
The statement may appear as a premiss in an argument, in 
the form of a question, or as part of a compound sentence, 
such as "no one in the days of ancient Rome believed that 
capital punishment was wrong." Searle resists the inter-
pretation that "this is good" is necessarily an act of 
commendation by the example, "If this is good, then we 
ought to buy it." It hardly seems right to translate 
this, "If I commend this, then we ought to buy it."
Whether a speech act employing moral terms has emotive force depends upon the context of discussion, and upon the manner in which the words are uttered (including such factors as intonation, facial expressions, etc.). In speech acts which do not have emotive force, the moral terms may still have the same meaning as they do in sentences which do have emotive force. It is the context of utterance (and perhaps its syntactic form) which has varied, not necessarily the meaning of the terms. This further confirms that meaning and effect are to be distinguished.

The emotivist theory of moral language may thus be trimmed in two ways. First, room can be made for the fact that moral language does have a descriptive or informative meaning. Part of the force of many moral utterances is to communicate propositional truth, which is conventionally meaningful. Secondly, this kind of meaning can be distinguished from the emotive effects which moral utterances, as uttered, often have. This is to scrap the concept of emotive meaning. Rather, we interpret the emotive effects of moral utterances as having to do with the illocutionary force of such utterances. The statement "this is good," then, may have a double or parallel illocutionary force. It may, as speech act, (1) be an act of assertion—e.g., by predicating a property or quality of the object, depending upon the
subject's understanding of the meaning of "good." The same speech act may (2) simultaneously function as an expression of the speaker's attitude, as an act of commendation, an exhortation, etc. The latter is not the meaning of the term "good," but may derive some of its power from the meaning of "good," as understood in the context of utterance.

A further objection to the emotivist view of moral language is advanced by Alasdair MacIntyre. He notes that "an essential part of the theory will have to consist in an identification and characterization of the feelings and attitudes" which are expressed by moral language. 35 MacIntyre complains, however, that emotivists have been unable to escape an empty circularity when they have attempted to characterize these feelings. Characterizing them as feelings of approval or disapproval (cf. Hume) does not explain how they differ from expressions of personal preference, while speaking of them as moral feelings is extremely uninformative. Stevenson clearly falls into the latter pitfall, when he attempts the following distinction.

Suppose that a man morally disapproves of a certain kind of conduct. If he observes this conduct in others, he may then feel indignant, mortified, or shocked; and if he finds himself given to it, he may feel guilty or conscience-stricken. But suppose that he dislikes conduct, as distinct from morally disapproving of it. He may then be simply displeased when he observes it in others, and simply annoyed with himself when he finds that he is given
to it [italics mine]. This is disappointing because it does not explain how being "indignant" differs from being "displeased."

Scruton speaks at some length about the nature of moral attitudes. He suggests that "moral" attitudes are those which manifest three features. These three features may be thought of as three tests or conditions to which an individual is normally expected to have submitted his moral attitudes, or to which he would be willing to submit them in defense or their being moral commitments. These three tests are: (1) universality (a commitment to respond this way beyond the present instance), (2) overridingness (authority over merely self-interested desires, considerations and claims, and (3) normativity (commitment to seek intersubjective acceptance).

These three features amount to what Andrew Oldenquist has characterized as "general appeal." Moral attitudes are evaluations, usually of persons or their actions, which the individual assumes to make a "tug" or pull on others. Challenges to this assumption, as well as defenses of it, revolve around exhibiting in one's judgements the kinds of characteristics listed above. An individual may assume that his feeling about $x$ is a moral attitude, but others may believe that he is actually responding from a personal prejudice. They may
challenge him to show that his attitude reflects the characteristic of universality, normativity, etc. An unwillingness to apply his feeling to other similar situations, to apply it even where it is not in his self-interest, or to try to adduce reasons why others should have the same view is regarded as evidence that he really doesn't hold a moral opinion, and is perhaps confused or deluded in calling it so. Even ethical egoists, if they represent their views as moral commitments, must avoid the language of personal preference and portray their claims in a way and supported by reasons designed to generate intersubjective agreement and acceptance. 40

In this way, Scruton answers the kind of objection raised by MacIntyre. Moral attitudes are not those which everyone would agree to per se, nor are they whatever attitudes correspond to believing in the one true normative theory. They are those attitudes towards agents and actions which make a claim to general appeal (whether or not they actually receive acceptance), entailing a willingness to submit to certain tests. Scruton asserts these characteristics while making every effort to leave unanswered the specific question of the true or rightful meaning, intensionally or extensionally, of moral terms. To this question we will return shortly.
(b) **Rational discussion and moral attitudes.** A second claim of the emotivists is that discussion of beliefs can serve to influence moral attitudes. Stevenson discusses at some length the ways in which such discussion can cause a change in attitude. In general, he asserts that when an individual is called upon to produce reasons for his moral claims, "he is called upon...to adduce considerations which will make his attitudes acceptable to his opponent, and to show that they are not directed to situations of whose nature he is ignorant." An appeal to fact helps to "remove the doubts or hesitations" of the other; it "describes the situation which the imperative seeks to alter, or the new situation which the imperative seeks to bring about; and if these facts disclose that the new situation will satisfy a preponderance of the hearer's desires, he will hesitate to obey no longer." Similarly, Scruton asserts that relevant supporting reasons are those which refer to human wants, needs and benefits in ways likely to have inter-subjective appeal. But since such wants and needs may vary from person to person, no one set of reasons are guaranteed to always be causally efficacious. This leads to (c).

(c) **The absence of meaning criteria.** The description of supporting reasons (cf. (b), above) is left purposely vague by emotivists. This is because they (1)
believe that, due to variations in human personality and situational contexts, there is a vast arena of possible facts which may be efficacious in influencing individuals attitudes. Thus, Stevenson asserts:

Any statement about any matter of fact which any speaker considers likely to alter attitudes may be adduced as a reason for or against an ethical judgement. Whether this reason will in fact support or oppose the judgement will depend on whether the hearer believes it, and upon whether, if he does, it will actually make a difference to his attitudes; but it may be conveniently called a reason (though not necessarily a 'valid' one) regardless of whether it is accepted or not.44

Also, (2) emotivists argue moral language itself, in regard to its meaning, is normative theory-bound. Though we may offer, with Hume, an explanation or ontogeny of the relatively universal impulse to moralize, it is useless to seek a universally acceptable interpretation of moral terms, as none exists. There are no moral facts, truths, or properties to which moral language clearly refers, nor can it be established that humans all implicitly mean the same thing by the moral terms they employ. Scruton asserts:

But one advantage of emotivism is that it allows the notion of justification to enter as part of the 'cognitive content' of moral language, without requiring that we should be able to give any specification, except in the loosest terms, of what this justification might consist in. In this way it captures what seems to be the salient figure of ethical discourse—that it can operate as an intersubjective and rational language without there being descriptive criteria for the application of moral terms. It can, therefore, maintain intersubjectivity in the absence of a defined decision procedure.45
We suggest that it is at this point of refusal—the refusal to seek to defend some one decision-procedure or set of meaning-criteria—that emotivism is at its strongest. Despite being a critic of emotivism as a theory of the meaning of moral terms (cf. the objections cited above), Alasdair MacIntyre has noted "the unrecognized philosophical power of emotivism." MacIntyre puts forward the "disquieting suggestion" that twentieth century culture finds itself cut off from those once-accepted Weltanschauungen which previously invested its moral intuitions and language with meaning and specificity.

What we possess, if this view is true, are the fragments of a conceptual scheme, parts which now lack those contexts from which their significance derived. We possess indeed simulacra of morality, we continue to use many of the key expressions. But we have—very largely, if not entirely—lost our comprehension, both theoretical and practical, of morality.46

Modern society thus finds itself in "grave disorder," filled with "shrill debate," where no normative theoretical view is able to successfully satisfy everyone's intuitions and philosophically win the day.47

The result, MacIntyre suggests, is emotivism—the coming to philosophical consciousness of the fact of a "radical discrepancy" between the meanings defended by moral theorists and the uses to which they put such terms.
Emotivism on this account turns out to be an empirical thesis, presumably to be filled out later by psychological and sociological and historical observations, about those who continue to use moral and other evaluative expressions, as if they were governed by objective and impersonal criteria, when all grasp of any such criterion has been lost.

...theories of an emotivist kind secure wide implicit acceptance because of a general implicit recognition in practice, though not in explicit theory, that claims to objectivity and impersonality cannot be made good.48

It is MacIntyre's thesis that people widely think, talk and act as if emotivism was true, regardless of their avowed theoretical standpoint and their rejection of emotivism (as a theory of meaning).

Emotivism is perhaps not so pessimistic as MacIntyre understands it. The emotive approach does acknowledge a common factor spanning the use of moral language by individuals of varying normative theoretical persuasions. This common factor consists of the frequently evident emotive force, the attitude-influencing functions which are served by the uttering of moral judgements. While individuals may differ as to the meaning of their commonly used moral terms, they often agree or coincide in employing such terms for similar emotive effect. The specific practices and institutions approved or disapproved of may vary; the use of moral terms to gain intersubjective acceptance for and compliance with these evaluations is a common linguistic practice.
MacIntyre is unable to appreciate this fact because he is caught up in mourning the loss of what he believes was a set of once universally-accepted criteria of the meanings of moral terms. He posits that this meaning-consensus was embodied in the conceptual scheme current in the time of Aristotle. It was cataclysmically lost to later generations in a gradual process of disappearance of which we are today scarcely even aware. That this loss is hidden from us (in the discrepancy between meaning and use which the emotivists point out) is an element of the tragedy in which we find ourselves.

We suggest that MacIntyre is on the wrong track in two respects. First, he errs in attempting to restore Aristotelian morality to universal acceptance. Secondly, he mistakenly interprets the history of the development of morality in positing that this "loss of meaning" took place between the fourth century B.C. and modern times.

If we may risk being cynical or pessimistic, it is likely that MacIntyre's arguments for Aristotelian virtue will suffer the same fate to which he subjects the perspectives of Hume, Moore, Gewirth, et al. A more likely thesis is that the meaning-criteria of moral language will never be found—not because they have been lost, but because they never existed in the first place. Through a series of compelling examples early in the book After Virtue, MacIntyre himself admits the contemporary
"incommensurability of rival arguments."

Every one of the arguments is logically valid or can be easily expanded so as to be made so; the conclusions do indeed follow from the premises. But the rival premises are such that we possess no rational way of weighing the claims of one against another. For each premise employs some quite different normative or evaluative concept from the others, so that the claims made upon us are of quite different kinds.50

MacIntyre offers telling evidence that these different conceptual ways of viewing things have a wide variety of historical origins—e.g., from the historical influence of such thinkers as Aristotle, Hobbes, Bismarck, Rousseau, Fichte, Kant, and Marx. We find ourselves today inescapably in the wake of a rich history of theorizing; the conceptions of ethics which have been asserted are not limited to the writings of moral philosophers, but have been propagated by political leaders both in their speeches and political activity. These ideas have become enmeshed in institutions, political systems, ideologies. They find their way to common people who have never read a work in moral philosophy as ways of interpreting their own experiences, justifying their actions, and understanding the political events and institutions by which they are inevitably affected.

A whole host of conceptual approaches, fleshed out in the ideologies and institutions of current society, thus lie at hand to help the individual interpret her experience. Howard, a poverty-stricken young black man,
finds it difficult to understand Susan who, as a libertarian, emphasizes the importance of such concepts as freedom and entitlement. Roger believes that were such values to be enacted in the institutions of his society, he would probably come out on the losing end, as he has little experience, few skills, and no resources or capital to work with. He doesn't currently even have a job.

Howard leans toward a socialistic type of social structure in which, along with equality of opportunity, a basic minimum is provided even for those currently unable effectively to compete. Howard has, of course, never read Michael Harrington or Robert Nozick, but he knows that there is a difference (regardless of his inability to articulate it) between the social morality he favors and that which is espoused by Susan. When Susan and Howard talk, they disagree about numerous factual matters—among them, the shape that society would take were either viewpoint to be carried out, beliefs about human character and motivations, the source of human problems, the success or failure of past social systems, etc. But there is also, as Stevenson would say, a difference in attitude. Simply put, Howard is into distributive justice, while Susan is interested in entitlement or desert. Their moral thinking and language is shaped accordingly.
The early emotivists muddied the waters at this point by speaking of the disagreement described above as a "disagreement in interests." There may, in fact, be instances in which, though the facts are agreed upon, the self-interests of the participants intervene so that Howard regards as evil what is, to Susan good. This overlooks, though, the requirement of "overridingness" mentioned above; were this the only reason Howard and Susan disagreed, either one might justifiably challenge the "moral" nature of the contestants' beliefs. Most moral opponents would claim that more general kinds of principles are at stake than their own interests, and would be ready to show this.

A more accurate picture of their disagreement is that it involves a disagreement in attitudes, in the sense of relatively broad ways of perceiving things and different sets of concerns. Howard may be concerned for himself, but also for his black brothers—these being the people with whom he is most easily and frequently able to empathize. Further, he may be reacting to a series of experiences he has had, including perhaps the experience of failure on some occasions. The concept of entitlement has little appeal or relevance to him—not just because it would defeat his personal interests, but perhaps because getting what he deserves has never been a problem for Howard due to the limited
opportunities which he has had to perform. On the other hand, Susan may be reacting to some crucial instances in her own life in which she felt that she was unjustifiably overlooked when rewards were handed out. Or perhaps some of her friends suffered this fate. She may also find it difficult to empathize with individuals who appear to have a much lower motivational level than she does. She is attracted to newspaper stories about welfare cheaters, as well as portrayals of honest hard-working people prevented from advancing because of the excess of government regulations and the non-uniform tax structure. There are many factors, then, which may contribute to a disagreement in attitude. Not all of these may be consciously apparent or recitable by the individuals. It is certainly inadequate to scoop all of them up into the catch-all of competing self-interests.

Shall we say that either Howard or Susan do not understand the meaning of moral language? Shall we attempt to argue that either one has more correctly grasped the function or object of morality? How do we decide which individual has interpreted life's experiences correctly? How do we judge between these two ways of conceptualizing (and arguing for) morality, tied up as they are so intimately with the experience and present situation of each individual and those with whom they are interested?
There may have been an age when humans did not (yet) have readily available to them the conceptual and verbal means to advocate these different interpretations of their experience from a moral point of view. Until Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Rousseau, Marx, and others arrived to make explicit some of these ways of evaluating human societies, such disagreements may not have taken place in verbalized form. MacIntyre's grief over the present conceptual confusion and lack of consensus is more properly directed to the ascent of human cognitive capacities, verbal sophistication, and cultural development.

The mistake here is the belief, which humans give up so slowly and unwillingly, that moral intuitions have somehow dropped from the sky, ready-fit to evaluate human experience in ways which will not fail to receive intersubjective acceptance. Why should we believe that the impulse to moralize originated with an already-in-place conceptual scheme or framework? Defenders might argue that moral thinking and language came on the scene complete with a conceptual scheme to support it—i.e., that the development of moral thinking and language awaited the cognitive development of the human race sufficient to make possible a "moral point of view." Support for this might be sought by appeal to the Piaget-Kohlberg analysis of the cognitive and moral development of
Two criticisms which have been raised against the cognitive developmentalist theory apply to this view of the ontogeny of morality as well. First, cognitive-developmentalism has notoriously overlooked the affective or emotive aspects of moral thinking, construing (advanced stage) moral thinking solely in terms of, for example, the ability to take a general, rule-oriented, non-self-interested, universalizable perspective. Embarrassment's contribution, as we have noted, is in bringing to our attention the fact that much moral thinking and language also involves attitudes, such that agreement to facts does not always guarantee agreement in moral beliefs. For the cognitive-developmentalists, if two people irresolvably disagree, it must be because they are arguing from different stages—a response which is derogatory more than adequate.

Secondly, cognitive-developmentalists posit that the early stages of development are strongly egocentric in nature. As we noted in Chapter II, however, there is strong evidence for the responsiveness of infants and young children to the experience of their fellows. Young children are quite capable of sharing and comforting, behaviors which do not befit egocentrism.

There is no reason to think that humans, even as primitives, were ever entirely caught up in their own
individual interests, such that other-regarding attitudes or responses came about only after a certain cognitive and conceptual accomplishment had occurred in species development. As members of the set of desires and particular passions (cf. Chapter VI) which make up human motivation, there have always existed empathically-induced occurrent desires for fellow humans. As Butler, Hume et al. argued, there is no such thing as pure egocentrism in humans.

We, therefore, suggest the following alternative picture of origins of morality. By the nature of the case this picture is tentative and speculative; our only currently-available data are the alleged features of moral beliefs (cf. supra) and the expressive force of much moral discourse, which we hypothesize as having been an original feature of such language. We will speak, in the emotivist tradition, of moral attitudes, defining an attitude, as in a widely-accepted social psychological rendering, as "an enduring organization of motivational, emotional, perceptual, and cognitive processes with respect to some aspect of the individual's world" (Krech and Crutchfield). Moral attitudes are forms of approval or disapproval, in the sense of evaluative subjective favorings or oppositions toward characters and actions, which are moral through being those which make a claim to general appeal (as defined above). These may be
conjoined with certain beliefs about the object of judgement, perhaps in respect to the needs, desires, etc. of oneself or others. Primitive humans experienced non-moral as well as moral forms of approval or opposition, and developed a vocabulary fit to express these attitudes. Some attitudes, however, were shared, insofar as they expressed the mutual interests and, in general, feelings of the group. These shared attitudes were the ones which came to be expressed by that subset of approval/disapproval language which we speak of as moral language. To say this suggests that the objects of primitive "moral" approval and disapproval were quite contingently arrived at—i.e., by observing whatever met with the same kind of reaction from a large part of the social group. We must make three negative points in this connection. First, this implies that the division of actions into morally-approved, morally-disapproved and morally-irrelevant classes was not the result of the application of a primitive normative theory or deliberately adopted set of moral criteria. Such criteria likely only came to be recognized and conceptualized after the fact. We will discuss below some of the factors which may have been causally responsible for a society's agreeing in some evaluations.

Secondly, there is no reason to think that individuals came to view their moral attitudes as of a
different sort than their non-moral attitudes because they thought it was "the only rational thing to do." Peter Singer, for example, notes the conflict implied in saying, "I can claim that what I do is right; while what you do is wrong, merely on the grounds that my act benefits my society whereas your act benefits your society." He then states that, "reasoning beings will not, insofar as they do reason, accept this kind of conflict in their beliefs." Singer's statement may well be true for reasoning beings. The primitive hominids we are speaking of probably did not engage in this sort of reasoning, and, hence, wouldn't have been bothered at all to make the assertion Singer cites. Overridingness nevertheless exerted itself in primitive societies, however, insofar as to make such assertions was ineffective in securing any kind of intersubjective (or, in Singer's example, inter-societal) agreement. It's not that such assertions were irrational, it's just that they didn't work. Eventually, Pithicus would have to give up trying to slip the utterances "right" and "wrong" into what were obviously just examples of his own personal evaluations. Such utterances failed to gain agreement and thus had reduced, or a different, emotive force.

Third, there is no reason to posit a convention of primitive people, voting in a wise decision-theoretic manner for a social contract, replete with conventional
moral supports. The process we have described was quite unintentional, probably gradual, and only eventually conceptualized within a semantic interpretive framework. Individual, largely non-reflective decision-theoretic acts may have contributed to the development of morality, as we will suggest below, along with the operation of empathy and perhaps other factors. However, there is no reason to posit a careful Hobbesian reasoning process, carried on by all and leading to an organized, morally-interpreted social structure.

Moral attitudes, then, were those which had general appeal. Moral language evolved as a means of expressing these attitudes. Actions commonly appraised by a chorus of similar personal evaluative verbalizations came to receive their own unique verbalizations, whether being new tokens or specialized syntactic manipulations of old (personal approval/disapproval) tokens. The chief function of moral language in primitive societies was most likely to influence the attitudes and behavior of others. It was probably a very primitive, emotive language. The meaning of moral terms may not have been initially conceptually distinct from non-moral approval/disapproval language for primitive people. What distinguished it was (a) the fact that one could go around and seek and expect agreement from fellow tribal members when one expressed moral approval or disapproval. Other kinds of
approval or disapproval (namely, those attitudes which merely involved personal or self-interested preferences) did not have this effect.\(^{55}\) As a result, (b) moral language came to have a different effect or impact than had other expressions of approval or disapproval. An awareness of the consensus that, say, certain actions were disapproved of by the entire group, would cause an individual to respond differently if it was publicly declared that he was acting in that disapproved-of manner.

All of this is to suggest that the emotive force of moral language may have preceded, historically, the extended attempts cognitively to define the meaning of moral terms. In primitive societies, in want of a more extensive opinion as to the meaning of moral terms and utterances, "meaning as use" may have been true (pace Searle and the speech act fallacy). Primitive people conceivably discovered that certain of their expressions of approval and disapproval met with intersubjective agreement and concord. These expressions came to be made by means of a new vocabulary, or perhaps different and selective applications of certain previous ways of speaking. Just as individuals came to distinguish their moral attitudes from other attitudes upon the progressive discovery that when they expressed them, they met with a different reception, so there was likely a progressive creation of a distinctively-moral language game. Even
with this, however, conceptual speculation as to moral properties, etc. may have lagged for centuries or even mil lennia, awaiting the general cognitive and conceptual advances of the species.

We suggest, then, that the emotivist view may be a marvelous way to characterize the moral thinking and language of primitive man. Unwittingly, some critics have alleged as much, though in irony. It would also be a good way to characterize modern moral habits, except that, moral terms have now taken on conceptual meanings for individuals, according to their competing moral belief-systems. Disagreements in attitude, which when conceptualized are the source of different belief systems, have not come about of necessity (cf. the competing interests view). Rather, they have occurred as a natural result of the multiplicity and variety of individuals' experiences, their interpretations of these experiences, the complex nature of social structures and distributions, and the stock of available concepts and words by which the evaluations individuals make may be correlated with kinds of actions, social arrangements, etc. Every normative theory competes to try to show that it better or more consistently satisfies the three criteria which make for intersubjective acceptance. However, attempts at objective argument for these theories are diluted by the fact of the contestants' differing
personal experiences, varying sympathy-groups, differing beliefs about human nature, etc. All of these factors together make it difficult, though not logically impossible, to achieve agreement. What began as a helpful "bolstering" of moral attitudes—the development of a cognitive framework for morality—thus became a source of disagreement as a result of the unanticipated development of human thinking abilities and accomplishments.

Discussion of one final question will serve to bring this chapter to a close, as well as preparing the way for the topic of chapters to come. Why did some attitudes meet with inter-subjective agreement, as opposed to others which remained, so to speak, in the category of opinion? There are several factors to which we may have explanatory recourse. Primitive societies, like many infra-human colonies and groups, undoubtedly were characterized by "dominance hierarchies" or structures of power and privilege. In all infra-human colonies in which this phenomenon appears, the social roles which result from the establishment of dominance by some individuals over others are accepted as a matter of fact by most members of the colony. This does not rule out future challenges, but by and large life proceeds within a relatively stable acceptance of the present hierarchical status quo. Moral attitudes may have evolved as
expressions of approval or disapproval having to do with compliance or disobedience in the context of these hierarchies. There is, of course, a considerable psychological psychoanalytic literature which supports the idea that moral feelings are characterized by a certain authoritarian spirit.

A second possible contributor to the inter-subjective agreement which made for moral attitudes is that suggested by the traditional social contract theories. As the story would go, individuals banded together and came to a mutual agreement as to the positive utility gains to be had by all if certain rules of conduct were to be assented to. R. L. Trivers has recently supplemented this view by suggesting that certain tendencies both to moral indignation and overtly-expressed guilt may have been genetically selected because of their value in limiting occurrences of Glauconian cheating on the contract. Trivers also notes, however, the likelihood that such counteractive abilities as shame, guilt and moral hypocrisy would also be genetically selected.56

One of the most important factors responsible for the origin of moral attitudes, was, as we saw Hume arguing, that of empathy. Nicholas Rescher, summarizes the difficulty which plagues/Attempts to justify morality (and thus a social contract) on the basis of prudential self-interest--this being chiefly the invitation to
cheat referred to above. On the other hand, he notes that where there takes place an "internalization of the welfare of others" through "vicarious affects," positive increases in individual utility may be achieved which were made impossible by individuals insisting upon the self-interested prudential viewpoint.

The tendency of these considerations is clear: the general welfare, and consequently the 'welfare of others,' is something that can be internalized and made part of 'one's own welfare' in an enlarged sense. Moreover, circumstances can be realized—and indeed there are pressures at work to make them actual in an increasingly emphatic way—in which this seemingly disinterested basis of action will in fact produce results that are selfishly advantageous as well.

We will return to Rescher's discussion in Chapter XI. The important point which we end with here is that empathy, this internalization of the welfare of others, did exist as a trait characterizing primitive humans, just as it continues to characterize humans today. This introduced, as we asserted earlier, a certain preponderance of occurrent desires for the welfare of fellow species-members. These desires in turn spawned attitudes of approval and disapproval. It may be hypothesized that many of these attitudes were shared by the members of primitive societies, insofar as all mutually experienced empathic responses. Empathy, then, along with the other factors which we mentioned above, contributed in a major way to the origin of moral attitudes and moral language.
CHAPTER VIII: NOTES

1. Charles L. Stevenson, Ethics and Language (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 22 [hereafter, Ethics and Language will be abbreviated "EL"]).


3. As put forward by Ayer, emotions are clearly involved; Stevenson's early essay also speaks of emotion's. Stevenson's book, Ethics and Language, however, speaks of attitudes, which seems more appropriate. For a discussion of the emotions vs attitudes question, see J. O. Urmson, The Emotive Theory of Ethics (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1968), 40-47.


6. EL., 33.


10. Williams, 3.

11. For Ayer, Ogden and Richards and Stevenson, see note 2; Paul Edwards, The Logic of Moral Discourse (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1955). See the historical sketch in Urmson, 12-23.


13. Ibid., 11-12.

14. EL., 265. Stevenson (265, note 16) cites some particularly gruesome examples.

15. Ibid., 23.

16. Ibid., 23, 79.

17. Ibid., 23. "In the meanwhile, every care must be taken to prevent the discussion of meaning, whenever it proceeds in temporary isolation from the rest of analysis, from suggesting that beliefs have only an inconsequential, secondary role in ethics. Such a view is wholly foreign to the present work, and foreign to the most obvious facts of daily experience" (23-4).

18. An exception is Stevenson's interpretation of Hume (EL., 273-276) which has stirred (and deserved) the wrath of many critics.

19. EL., 5.


22. EL., 62-71. In EL. 72-77, Stevenson clearly argues for the common presence of both kinds of meaning in utterances.


24. EL., 22.
25. Ibid., 207.


27. An often overlooked fact, however, is that Stevenson does distinguish "meaning" from "suggestion" (cf. El., 74-f.); the distinction lies behind his generally ignored "Second Pattern of Analysis" (see El., 203-4.


29. Ibid., 16-17.


32. Searle, 152-3.

33. Urms, 133-f.

34. Urms, following Austin’s lead, nonetheless seeks to define the "central illocutionary force" of an expression, which determines the grounds of assent to utterance.

35. MacIntyre, 12.

36. El., 90.


38. Scruton, 47, cf. 88.

39. Oldenquist, 52. Cf. 53: "Features that distinguish the moral from the nonmoral include the following. We are not inclined to morally judge something unless it is a person, or the action, state of character, moral opinion, or motive of a person. We seldom think an action morally right or wrong unless it benefits or harms people or the higher animals; or concerns human sexual behavior, patriotism, or the objects of religious
prohibitions. We expect the reasons for a moral belief to appeal to the people who are being invited to accept it or act on it. We morally condemn reasonless inequalities in the distribution of benefits and penalties and in general insist that similar cases be judged similarly. We usually think of singular moral judgements as all-things-considered judgements and therefore as overriding ones. These generalizations are part of what enables us to predict when people will call opposition to something moral opposition and when they instead will consider it a mere dislike." Cf. our discussion of Hume's view in Chapter VII.

40. See Scruton, 77: "For it is not open to a man to answer a 'why?'-question by saying 'that's just what I want', he is committed to believing that others should share his desire [if he is to view it as a moral feeling]."

41. EL., 29.
42. EL., 115.
43. Scruton, 63.
44. EL., 114, cf. 329.
45. Scruton, 87.
46. MacIntyre, 2.
47. Ibid., 8.
48. Ibid., 17, 18.
49. Ibid., chapters 14, 15.


55. The fact of agreement, then, was determined by what objects were concerned and, as we will argue below, by the pervasiveness of empathy. The highly contingent nature of the origin of agreement in evaluation (from which derived morality) is here emphasized.


58. Ibid., 68.
CHAPTER IX
THE SPECIFICITY OF EMPATHIC RESPONSIVENESS: I

In previous chapters we have attempted to gain an understanding of empathy, its nature, determinants, and what its presence implies (and doesn't imply) about the motivations of human beings. We determined that while the presence of empathy does not provide sufficient conditions for benevolence, pro-social or other-regarding motives, helping behavior or altruism, an experimental correlation of empathy with helping behavior-attempts and altruism does exist. We explained this by arguing that empathy conjoined with an empathically-cued instinct to engage in helping behavior are jointly sufficient for the latter. We will henceforth speak of this cluster of biologically-tuned perceptual, neurophysiological emotional and motor events as "empathically-cued helping behavior" or EHB. Our discussion of empathy also led us, in the last chapter, to suggest with Hume that empathy was an important contributor to the origin of moral thinking and language. We accepted in a limited way the emotivist emphasis upon the expressive and
hortatory forces of moral language; empathy may have often served to cue such expressions (cf. Pithicus and Lupicus). On the other hand, this expressive function of much (if not all) moral language must not be confused with the meaning of moral utterances. These meanings are products of the normative theories employed, which in turn are reflective of the unique experience and context of the individual who holds the theory. We expressed pessimism as to the claim that any one moral theory can be "justified," at least by appeal to the supposed one true meaning of moral terms or intuitions. The apparent uniformity of moral language which seems to deserve definition or, more accurately, explanation is a product not of shared meanings, but of the original shared use of moral language to express and influence attitudes and conduct.

In this chapter, relying upon the understanding of empathy which we have worked to construct, we begin a quest to discover how empathy may be of value in making moral decisions. Does empathic responsiveness make possible a unique kind of decision-procedure? Is it a special, moral source of information? Our task thusfar has been to define, and in many ways to limit, the concept of empathy and what takes place in EHB. We will now try to find out what is left: how important is empathy to moral thinking?
There are two issues which both involve the relation of empathy (and, in general, the emotions) to moral reasoning. It is helpful to distinguish them now so as to avoid confusion. To begin, (1) we may inquire as to whether an individual's emotional responses, momentary or dispositional, are morally-significant—i.e., praise- or blame worthy. This involves questions such as how much control the individual has over his emotions, when certain antecedent emotional states are necessary to an action being termed morally good, the relation between virtue and duty, the moral significance of such terms as "propriety," and so forth. Lord Shaftesbury, Adam Smith and Henry Sidgewick are three British moralists who believed that one's emotional responses are indeed morally significant; Aristotle may also be counted in their number.\(^1\) We will speak to this question only indirectly, in the process of addressing other issues.

A second issue (2) has to do with the uses to which the emotions may be put by individuals seeking to encourage moral thinking and conduct. Patricia Green-span, for example, argues that the emotions (she cites empathy as an example) have a "special motivational force" which is of value to social adaptation, one of the chief ends of morality. For this reason, she argues that the "ideal of complete detachment" is not only a hopelessly unrealistic and utopian goal, but may
even have bad consequences, through removing one of the primary supports or mainstays of moral behavior.²

To defend this thesis for every area of emotional response would be a momentous task and, we suspect, a fruitless one. It would be difficult to argue that all things considered, fear, anxiety, jealousy or hatred are to be taken as having overall socially adaptive, and thus moral value. Greenspan's position is strongest if taken as arguing that a totally dispassionate attitude does not necessarily yield a higher percentage of moral behavior outcomes: some forms of emotive response enhance the probability of positive outcomes. The question which then naturally arises is, which kinds of emotion are these? Our interest here is, of course, in one particular mode of emotional response (which may itself involve the experience of many kinds of emotions): empathy.

In this chapter, we will seek to appraise the relevance or utility of empathy for moral reasoning. Specifically, we inquire as to whether empathy should be admitted as an influencing factor into the moral decision-making process. Or, is it more appropriate that a detached attitude be taken, in which empathic and other emotive responses are "switched off" or suppressed? Answering this question raises difficult issues concerning the nature of moral reasoning itself. The danger
lies close at hand of unconsciously introducing a particular (unargued for) normative theory at this point which will prejudice all of our conclusions. For our part, then, we will attempt to limit speaking of moral reasoning by referring only to what we regard as its most generalized, formal characteristics (cf. Scruton's conditions, cited in the previous chapter). Whatever particular decision-procedure may be espoused as leading to truly moral outcomes, it appears clear that a minimal condition for moral reasoning is that it is an impartial or unprejudiced process leading to outcomes which are universalizable, and which hence make some claim to general appeal. Rawls' "original position" concept provides a useful expression of this formal condition, assuming again that this is not asserted to provide both necessary and sufficient conditions for moral decision-making.3

We shall speak in what follows of two strategies, those of taking an empathic attitude and taking a detached attitude. Taking an empathic attitude is allowing one's empathic response tendencies to remain "switched on." It is to purposely give heed to one's empathically-mediated feelings, allowing the possibility that one's decisions should be influenced by them. Taking an empathic attitude may even involve seeking to expand one's empathic responsiveness (p.t.r.). Taking a detached
attitude is to purposely suppress or "switch off" one's empathically-mediated emotional responses. It is to determine before hand that all such emotional responses are irrelevant or inappropriate to moral decision-making, hence the refusal to allow oneself to be influenced by them. A point of qualification to this scheme is that while the detached strategy a priori commits the individual to ignoring all empathic responses, the empathic attitude strategy does not require that all empathic responses be allowed to influence the decision-making process. A part of evaluating the empathic attitude strategy will be to determine whether there exists a set of criteria by which some empathic responses are weeded out.

As something of a working hypothesis, we take note of, but will not explore in detail, the view that moral reasoning is to be strongly determined by emotional—specifically, empathic—responses. The most well-known proponent of this view was Adam Smith. Smith states:

It is thus that the general rules of morality are formed. They are ultimately founded upon experience of what, in particular instances, our moral faculties, our natural sense of merit and propriety, approve or disapprove of.4

Of this sense of merit and propriety, Smith writes:

As our sense, therefore, of the propriety of conduct arises from what I shall call a direct sympathy with the affections and motives of the person who acts, so our sense of its merit arises from what I shall call an indirect sympathy with the gratitude of the
person who is, if I may say so, acted upon.\textsuperscript{5} Moral approval and disapproval, then, is based upon our ability to sympathize with both the agent and those affected by his actions. Smith succinctly sums up his system of moral reasoning, stating that when we approve of any character of action...

First, we sympathize with the motives of the agent; secondly, we enter into the gratitude of those who receive the benefit of his actions; thirdly, we observe that his conduct has been agreeable to the general rules by which those two sympathies generally act; and, last of all, when we consider such actions as making a part of a system of behavior which tends to promote the happiness either of the individual or of the society, they appear to derive a beauty from this utility, not unlike that which we ascribe to any well-contrived machine.\textsuperscript{6}

Smith's approach is similar to that of Hume, except that Hume would not accept the first two points, and gave more discussion to the concept of an impartial spectator, or a "steady or general point of view." We bring Smith's system forward not with the intention of exploring and critiquing it, but as a model to help make mentally concrete the "emotions switched on," empathic attitude strategy as we proceed to discuss this strategy in further detail. In the remainder of this chapter and in Chapter X, we will consider objections which seek to rule out any involvement of the emotions in moral decision-making. Our ability or inability to answer these objections will determine what would happen were we to espouse a theory such as Smith's. This will help to lay
groundwork for the more defensible approach which we will seek to develop in Chapter XI.

In treating objections to the emotions-involving strategy, we will sidestep the a priori argument, as put forward by Kant, that because of the nature of moral reasoning itself (reasoning about our duty) we must exclude emotional responses from moral reasoning. Kant argues that pure reason can also be practical, and that "it alone, and not the empirically conditioned reason, is unconditionally practical." Only the latter can provide "practical laws." Moral laws must be categorical, "otherwise they would not be laws, for they would lack the necessity which, in order to be practical, must be completely independent of pathological conditions, i.e., conditions only contingently related to the will." Pure reason, generating respect for the autonomously generated moral laws, provides its own incentive and motivation.

Kant's argument's for these views in the second Critique are largely drawn from his view of the nature of moral thinking—that it must be unconditional, generated by reason, and exerting a non-contingent necessity over the will. It is difficult to evaluate these claims, as they reflect a particular conceptualization of human rational nature and motivation which would require discussion in its own right. We will instead address
ourselves, in an indirect way, to two objections which Kant raises, one of which appears in the Critique and one in the Grundlegung. In the second Critique, Kant argues that to allow the affections to empirically condition practical decision-making would inevitably lead to a "conflict of maxims," due to the varying interests of the individuals concerned. In the Grundlegung, Kant offers a series of illustrations of the generally fortuitous character of emotional responses (cf. Hume's discussion of the "variation" of our sentiments). He then contrasts this with the steadiness of the moral point of view, which binds even "if nature had implanted little sympathy in this or that man's heart."¹⁰

Both of these objections revolve around what we will call the "problem of partiality." On the one hand, individuals are alleged to be partial because of the way in which their own self-interests creep into their inclinations. On the other hand, emotional responses are partial because selective—being often highly idiosyncratic and inconsistently intense towards some objects as opposed to others. Such responses thus show a selectivity or specificity which, while not the result of a selfish motivation, are nevertheless the product of relatively fortuitous, self-bound factors which may vary considerably from person to person. This, like the first form of partiality, would appear to doom any claim to
general appeal for emotion-influenced moral judgements. These are objections which require serious attention.

The major argument against the use of the emotions in moral reasoning has to do with the supposed inevitable partiality of emotional responses. The argument employs a premise concerning the nature of moral-reasoning and a premise concerning the nature of the emotions. The following is a simple statement of the argument:

1. All moral judgements are to be "objective", unbiased or impartial

2. The emotions bias or prejudice an individual in relation to himself or his way of responding to other particular individuals, events, situations, etc.

Therefore emotional responses must be excluded from the process of moral decision-making.

This is perhaps one of the most common arguments raised against emotional involvement in moral decision-making. However, it is seldom stated explicitly. An attempt at explicit statement is found in Roderick Firth's well-known 1952 article, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer." The essay is dedicated to defending an Ideal Observer approach to moral reasoning, and to an exposition of the attributes of such an Observer. Amongst the attributes discussed, Firth informs us that the Ideal Observer is to be "dispassionate". Ideally, he is "unaffected. . .by his emotions." In fact, "it would also be possible. . .to go a good deal further and say that an ideal observer is incapable of experiencing
any emotions at all, thus bringing our conception of an ideal observer closer to Kant's conception of a 'purely rational being'. Why does Firth prefer that his Observer should be so stoically dispassionate?

Firth's theory consists of defining moral terms dispositionally, according to what an "ideal observer" would praise or blame—i.e., according to the response of an individual under certain idealizing conditions. One of these conditions is that the individual's response be "impartial". This is because moral reasoning requires, as we noted, a certain point of view which is detached from one's own involvement with any particular situation. It would be unfair, reciprocally unjust to respond to similar cases differently, due to one's happening to have a special relationship to the responder. Willingness to apply one's judgement as a rule to all relevantly similar cases (cf. "universalizability") provides a good test for the needed detachment. One strategy by which impartiality may be insured is to portray response-engendering situations only in general terms—that is, in terms of properties which might be shared by a class of things. This would guarantee detachment by weeding out such particular properties as those due to the personal history the responder might have with an object.

It appears to be this which Firth has in mind when defining "disinterestedness". He defines
"disinterestedness" as not being influenced by any "particular" interests: "Interests, that is to say, which are directed toward a particular person or thing but not toward other persons or things of the same kind..." A decision is affected by particular interests when it is made as a result of or for the sake of or in reference to some "essentially particular property or properties" of the object of judgement, these being "properties which cannot be defined without the use of proper names (which we may understand, for the present purposes, to include ego-centric particulars such as 'I', 'here,' 'now,' and 'this')." Only reactions to "essentially general properties" are disinterested ones. The Ideal Observer, to be impartial, must be entirely lacking in particular interests capable of affecting his situation.

But disinterestedness requires being dispassionate. Firth suggests, in somewhat sketchy form, the following argument as to why disinterested observers must be dispassionate. He begins by maintaining that, as according to some psychological theories, "the supposed effects of an emotion on our ethically-significant reactions, are always the effects of an accompanying or constituent interest. This leads to a form of "moral nearsightedness or blindness" due to the fact that emotional responses are "particular", being "directed toward an object only because the object is thought to have one or more
essentially particular properties." Examples of particular emotions are jealousy, self-love, personal hatred, "and others which are directed towards particular individuals as such." The nearsightedness or blindness of which Firth speaks, apparently consists of some narrow or constricted preoccupation with a particular object (as opposed to other members of its kind), most likely due to some unique historical connection between that particular object and the observer. Thus, one is jealous not over the whole class of women, but over one's girlfriend--i.e., the woman about whom presumably a certain story can be told involving oneself.

Firth's argument, then, amounts to asserting that emotional responses are interested responses and, since disinterestedness is held to be a necessary condition for being an Ideal Observer, emotional responses turn out to violate the character of the Ideal Observer. Ironically, this argument proceeds in exactly the opposite direction from Hume's. In this case, empathic responsiveness is held to imply selfishness! We note, though, that Firth's argument is enthymematic. According to Firth's previous argument, above, having an interest disqualifies an observer or responder only if it is a particular interest. In order to establish that this is the case with emotional responses, we require some further discussion of what it means to "have an
interest", and of the kind of interests emotional responses are said to involve.

We have already noted, when discussing David Hume, the many ambiguities of the term "interest." The notion of having an interest lends itself to at least two interpretations, which we will speak of as a dispositional and an episodic interpretation. One might define "having an interest" as a state or disposition of the person, such that the object of interest plays a "significant" role in the person's thoughts, a "preoccupation" or concern describable in terms of frequency of attending to x, intensity of reaction to x, tendency to recall x, from memory on cue, and so forth.14 Having an interest in x implies having a relatively enduring disposition to "pick out" x from amongst its alternatives for some kind of attention or consideration.15 An episodic interpretation of interests, on the other hand, suggests that at some moment (as opposed to an enduring period of time), S comes to pay attention to x in preference to alternative objects. S is "grabbed" or "fascinated" by x, though this fascination may last for but a moment. It may be added that for both forms of interest, having an interest need not entail that S have a conscious awareness or belief that she has an interest in x; nor need she believe consciously that x is "interesting." Outside observers might attribute these qualities to x in relation to S ("x
seems to be important to S") but S may be unaware of the influence x has on his psyche.

Are interests always coupled with pleasures? It might be suggested that objects of interest are generally things which the individual receives some pleasure in thinking about. Interests appear to be things to which the individual willingly gives his attention; even in instances in which he is "grabbed" by the object, he is grabbed because it is the kind of object he generally finds pleasurable or stimulating to think about. Yet there are clearly exceptions to this. Individuals may have "unhealthy interests" in things which are not attractive, comforting or normally entertaining (e.g., taking an interest in one's death). One may be the victim of an unconscious tendency to be fascinated by certain items (e.g., women's stockings). Psychologists differ as to whether this is to be described as the release of some form of psychological energy, the fulfillment of a need, satisfaction of a drive, or the acting out of a fixation. It is unclear whether such descriptions can be equated with the experience of pleasure. In these cases, the characteristic of willingly giving attention is absent.

A specialized sense of "interest" may be identified which perhaps offers the key to Firth's argument. One may speak of having an interest in the sense that "Sam has an interest in Renaldo's winning the horse race."
Here, interest is defined as "having a stake in something", i.e., being in a situation where one's own welfare or success is viewed as connected with the object of interest.\textsuperscript{16} The social psychologist, Muzafer Sherif, for example, develops this notion, defining "important" items as those which are "ego-involving"—perceived to be related to oneself and one's welfare positively or negatively.\textsuperscript{17} As individuals normally have some measure of concern about their welfare capable of producing an emotional response, it would not be surprising to find that many of the objects evoking emotional responses in individuals are objects perceived as ego-involving.

Firth's enthymematic argument can now be filled in. We shall assume that by interest, Firth means either dispositional or episodic interests of the special, ego-involving kind of referred to just above. Thus the argument would read as follows:

1. All emotional responses which affect the ethically, significant reactions of observers are "ego-involving" ones

2. Ego-involving interests imply a special concern with items perceived as being related in a particular way to the individual having the interest

3. Interests having objects of this kind are particular interests

4. Observers having particular interests are not disinterested, fail to be impartial and hence are not Ideal Observers

Hence, experiencing emotional responses disqualifies an individual from being an Ideal Observer.
The crucial premiss of this argument is clearly the first one. Is it the case that all emotional responses are "ego-involving" ones? To put it another way, are all people "emotionally autistic", i.e., capable of having emotional responses to objects only insofar as these objects are perceived as somehow affecting the personal welfare/self of the responder? When individuals become interested in ways which are "affectively loaded", is this always because the object of interest is viewed as self-involving?

Two separate views must be carefully distinguished at this point. We will treat the first in the remainder of this chapter and the second in the next. On the one hand, one might approach things from the psychological egoist standpoint, holding that in every case, an individual acts out of what he perceives to be his self-interest or welfare. This might be construed as implying that all of his emotional responses are also self-interested ones. The scenario is of the individual, emotionally wrapped up in the progress or setbacks of his personal projects, reputation, security, etc. All emotional responses are viewed as being caused, in part, by beliefs about the relation between the self and the object of emotional response. A second, less strong view is that all emotional responses are "self-involving", in the sense that the responder is somehow caught up in the
situation, finding himself involved due to his emotional reaction. Self-involvement here denotes the property of responding to objects, perhaps in highly individualized or subjective ways, as a function of one's personal emotional history and characteristic response patterns. For example, a nurse might be cautioned not to become emotionally wrapped up with her patients, this meaning that she is not to become personally involved, allowing herself to be affected by the situation of her patients. She is not to let them become major actors in her emotional history. This latter view does not require that self-interest be a concern or motivation which lies behind the emotional response; the nurse does not get wrapped up with her patients because their situation is somehow viewed as affecting her self-interest.

**Self-Interest and the Emotions**

It is the first view which Bishop Butler appears to have had in mind in several of his sermons. Throughout the sermons, as we noted in Chapter V, Butler labors to uphold the distinction between self-love or self-interest, and particular passions—both being forms of emotional response.

Self-love and any particular passion may be joined together; and from this complication, it becomes impossible, in numberless instances, to determine precisely how far an action, perhaps even of one's own, has for its principle general self-love or some particular passion. But this need create no
confusion in the ideas themselves of self-love and particular passions. We distinctly discern what one is, and what the other are; though we may be uncertain how far one or the other influences us. And though from this uncertainty, it cannot but be, that there will be different opinions regarding mankind, as more or less governed by interest; and some will ascribe actions to self-love, others will ascribe to particular passions, yet it is absurd to say, that mankind are wholly actuated by either; since it is manifest that both have their influence. For as, on the one hand, men form a general notion of interest, some placing it in one thing, and some in another, and have a considerable regard to it throughout the course of their life, which is owing to self-love, on the other hand, they are often set on work by the particular passions themselves, and a considerable part of life is spent in the actual gratification of them; i.e., is employed, not by self-love, but by the passions.

For Butler, "the very idea of interest, or happiness, consists in this, than an appetite, or affection, enjoys its object." Butler appears to answer affirmatively, then, the question of whether interests and pleasures generally coincide. He then distinguishes between two kinds of interest. There are the "particular passions", visceral pleasurable emotional responses which the individual is said to pursue often for their own sake. Butler speaks here primarily of desires, but one may also take account, as above, of forms of interest in objects less "willingly" attended to (stocking fetishes, etc.). In addition, there is "self-love", or self-interest, which consists in "an affection to ourselves, a regard to our own private good." Self-love may set an individual to work to gratify his particular passions or
affections; in this sense, self-love generally presupposes or implies some particular passion or appetite (viz., that which it seeks to have gratified). But despite this relationship, the pursuit of gratifying particular passions cannot be identified with self-love. "Self-love may indeed set us on work to gratify these particular passions: but happiness or enjoyment has no immediate connexion with self-love, but arises from such gratification alone." Even benevolence or love of one's neighbor, as we noted in Chapter V, are particular passions and may be implied by, and consistent with self-love. But they are not identical with it, as numerous cases of self-love/benevolence conflicts illustrate.

This distinction appears to be a valid one, for it points to the psychological fact that some emotional responses, empathy being a sterling example, may take place which are not directly a product of concern for self-interest or the pursuit of personal welfare. As Butler points out often in the sermons, individuals often take off after the pursuit of gratifying a desire or particular passion, wholly apart from or contrary to the pursuit of what is good for them. In this case, they are "interested" in a particular object, but this object is not their own personal welfare or private interest, "proceeding from cool consideration that it will be to my own advantage."
Yet an objection, from hedonistic quarters, may lodge that even if "Butlerian happiness and welfare" is not the object of all interests, one's personal pleasure may well be—as even Butler seems to have acknowledged. If emotional responses are determined by "whatever S happens to find pleasure in", then they are particular indeed; should an individual's pleasure seeking tendencies determine moral reasoning outcomes?

This objection overlooks the unique characteristics of the empathic response, as we sought to define them in Chapters I-III. We noted that empathy is an often involuntary response, resulting from a native, biologically-tuned organization of the individual's nervous and limbic system to be sensitive to the physical and emotional states of other people. To speak of this as a syndrome of individualized "pleasures" seems quite out of place. We did note that EHBs may involve occurrent desires to come to the aid of the other person. Again, however, as noted in previous chapters, desire need not, and should not be defined narrowly in a hedonistic way, such that to have a desire for something is to be pleased or feel pleasure in doing it. While it is true that acting out a desire may result in drive-reduction, displacement of excess energy or the diminution of internal dissonance, it seems an abuse of the term to refer to these psychological events as forms
of pleasure (though we would not deny that they can sometimes be the cause of pleasure). It is, thus, in error to charge that empathic responses always involve the pursuit of personalized forms of pleasure-seeking.

We have, thus, argued against the first view by considering cases in which an individual is caught up in a visceral passion and responds to it against his own self-interest and welfare. These were cited in order to show that "interested" emotional responses do not entail that partial or self-interested motivations are involved. Taking the "emotions-on" strategy would depend on finding a way to distinguish between self-interested and merely interested emotional responses. Empathic responses would appear to be prime candidates, as they are not generated by a concern for one's own welfare. On the contrary, EHB's may lead to altruistic forms of conduct. Assuming that a way were found to identify genuinely empathic responses (a problem we will address in Chapter XI), the objection would, at least as far as this kind of emotional response goes, be successfully answered.
CHAPTER IX: NOTES


4. Smith, 817.

5. Ibid., 797. For a somewhat similar view, see Philip Mercer, Sympathy and Ethics (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

6. Ibid., 843. Pall Ardal, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise (Edinburgh: University Press, 1966), discusses the differences between this view and Hume's; they are (1) Smith seeks to judge motives by sympathy and an imaginative transference; Hume does not; (2) Hume lays more stress on the "tendencies of actions" than Smith; (3) Smith judges according to how an impartial spectator would sympathize; Hume does not involve imaginary spectators in sympathy (Ardal, 133-147).


8. Ibid., 131.

9. Ibid., 130.

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12. Ibid., 340.

13. Ibid., 338.

14. Several of the usages listed for "Interest" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971 Compact Edition, 393-4) suggest this meaning; cf. "(7) The feeling of one who is concerned or has a personal concern in any thing; hence, the state of feeling proper to such a relation, or a particular form or instance of it; a feeling of concern for or curiosity about a person or thing."; "(8) The fact or quality of mattering or being of importance (as belonging to things); concernment, importance." For a psychologist's discussion, see Carol E. Izard, *Human Emotions* (N.Y.: Plenum Press, 1977); 211-238.

15. It is in this respect that the term is used in a more abstract way to reflect one's general commitments and presuppositions—a usage more common to Continental philosophers than to those in the analytic tradition. See, for example, Jurgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

16. This is the principal usage cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (op. cit.); cf., "(1) The relation of being objectively concerned in something, by having a right or title to, a claim upon, or a share in"; "(2) The relation of being concerned or affected in respect of advantage or detriment; esp. an advantageous relation of this kind"; "(5) Regard to one's own profit or advantage; selfish pursuit of one's own welfare; = Self-interest."


ed.), see esp. the Preface, and Sermons V ("Upon Compassion") and XI ("Upon the Love of Our Neighbor").

19. Ibid., xx-xxi.

CHAPTER X

THE SPECIFICITY OF EMPATHIC RESPONSIVENESS: II

In the previous chapter we noted a second interpretation of the problem of partiality. This might be called the problem of individualized preoccupations. According to this view, all emotional responses are self-involving, in the sense that one's self becomes idiosyncratically wrapped up in some way with the objects of emotional response. This view more closely approximates the first sense of "interest", treated above, viz., that to be interested is to be "preoccupied" or prone to give special attention to the object of interest. This narrowing or constricting of attention or consideration is presumably due to some special relation which the object has to the self.

It turns out that this objection is well-nigh fatal to the "switched on" policy of taking the empathic attitude in moral reasoning. In order to understand the full extent of the problem, we need to reconsider some of the conclusions which we arrived at in previous chapters. Reviewing our previous investigations, we recall...
that individual responsiveness may vary tremendously, based upon a number of determinant factors. We can speak of three kinds of "response-specificity," the first two being traceable to the originating conditions of empathy as a native response; the third is tied to that grouping of developmental and learning factors, as described by the other four theories of empathy discussed in Chapter II. We discuss these in order to illustrate the extent of the problem, but also so as to lay the groundwork for a positive approach in Chapter XI. The three kinds of "response-specificity" are:

(a) situation-specificity
(b) individual-specificity
(c) individualized response-specificity

(a) Situation-specificity. Empathy may be programmed in a situation-specific way. It is possible that individuals are disposed to respond only to certain kinds of situations. In the broadest sense, this is certainly the case—they are patterned to respond emotionally to the emotions and/or emotion-evoking situations of others. Simply seeing another person on the street does not normally evoke an empathic response. Going beyond this requirement, it may be that more specific situational-characteristics are imprinted by the program. If the nativist theory we have offered is correct, empathy enhances the inclusive fitness when it induces coming to
the aid of a fellow species member in distress. That is, distress situations may well be the paramount kind of scenario to which empathy directs itself. Experimental psychologists have noted that empathic responses tend to be much more pronounced when the recipient is in an observed negative state of emotion; in addition, negative empathically-experienced emotions have been demonstrated to be of much greater motivational significance than positive ones (e.g., empathic joy). This suggests that empathic responsiveness is "tuned" to distress or negative emotion situations.

It is extremely difficult to further isolate the situation-specificity of empathy because the conditions of social life have changed so greatly over the millennia. Experimentally studying the empathically-motivated behaviors of infants or children may not be a good indicator of the nature of the program. There is no reason to assume that because the program is genetically passed along, therefore, the infant or child possesses it full-blown and is prepared to act it out efficiently. One's developmental stage may determine the kinds of stimuli which are operative and the forms of behavior which manifest it. Infants and children may only imperfectly act out their empathic program. On the other hand, this is no guarantee that adults will do better. This is because the program which they realize--assuming that
it remains the relatively simple one which proved its usefulness over the generations of primitive social groups--may be quite anachronistic in the modern era. It is difficult to guess how much genetic adjustment has taken place since Pithicus's time, inasmuch as, with the diversification and decentralization of social units, the empathic response may now have little direct connection to the survival of one's particular genestream. Empathy, being perhaps less relevant to fitness in a complex, interconnected society, is passed on from generation to generation (it is not selected against), but receives little modification or development due its now less crucial role. This being the case, the empathic response tendencies of humans may have become essentially "frozen", being passed on in relatively primitive form without major change for hundreds of generations. If this is so, the empathic response program may be only imperfectly realized even in adults. Individuals may never experience the developmental cues or learning experiences which were a part of growing up in primitive societies. This could result in a somewhat meagre and undeveloped capacity to empathize, even though the program is in place. Also, it is extremely difficult to measure the situation-specificity of the empathic response program, given the multitude of social and emotional determinants of thinking and behavior in
modern social life (cf. those accounted for by the other competing theories of the determinants of empathy).

Through role-taking experiences, it is possible to expand one's ability to empathize over situations one has never personally experienced. "Sensitivity training" as developed by psychotherapists primarily consists of attacking stereotypes and prejudices in the quest of broadening one's empathic responses to a variety of kinds of people and circumstances. The situation-specific dimension, then, is relatively open to "tampering" and thus becomes variable. On the other hand, native predispositions have a long range effect (whether or not we can accept Edward O. Wilson's probably exaggerated assertion that "the genes hold culture on a leash"). If a society chooses to fly in the face of situation-specific predispositions, they face the task with every new member of society of having to "retrain them as subjects. All forms of sensitivity training and role-taking experience suffer from a certain recidivism or "forgetfulness". Wilson and others argue that, on a cultural level, these forms of recidivism eventually assert themselves, so that predispositions inevitably win out—though it is hard to assess such speculative assertions. Taking these compensating recidivistic factors into considerations, let us grant that individuals' life-long norms of empathizing over a wide range of circumstances will tend to covary
within a certain range with their native predispositions to a certain degree of situation-specificity.

How specific might these native predispositions be? Infra-human data is not helpful at this point. There is considerable variation from one species to another as to empathic responsiveness (e.g., G. E. Rice, 1962, who discovered considerable variance between albino rats and guinea pigs). Many cases of infra-human EHB are cued by very specific kinds of alarm stimuli (chemical pheromones, auditory alarm signals of a certain pattern and frequency, etc.). As would be expected, only in the higher species (e.g., macaque apes and chimpanzees) does perception of the situation of the recipient go beyond a highly limited instinctual response to highly specific stimuli. Studies (cf. Hanson & Mason, 1962) indicate that some measure of learning can affect the range of situations which cue empathy in primates.

Regarding humans, it is most likely that the primary empathic response cue for early hominids was physical/emotional expressive behavior (shouting, cries of pain). This would be supported by the neo-nate data cited in Chapter II. Responses may also have been cued to the appearance of large animals, though there is no indication of any special psychological relation to non-human species in humans today. Phobias regarding certain
kinds of animals, reptiles, etc. are explainable non-natively. This differs from many infra-human species which are biologically-tuned to predators as well as prey.

We are left, then, with expressive behavior as the primary situation-specific parameter on primitive empathic responsiveness. Even in its primitive form, there must have been a range of emotions and emotion-provoking situations which had the potential of evoking an empathic response. For example, in our society, one may respond empathically to a child crying over a bloodied knee, but may not respond at all to the same child, crying because he cannot have a second ice cream cone. This instance is illuminating because it demonstrates that empathy is directed not so much at the kind of emotions, as specified in a list of emotional expressions, as it is cued by kinds of emotions specified according to the circumstances which caused them or which they intend. There is no reason to think that primitive humans did not also exercise some situationally-determined selectivity over empathic responsiveness. Even in infra-humans, mothers often ignore the cries of their young when there is no reason to view them as genuinely hungry or in danger. In humans, there is a process of learning what circumstances normally accompany expressive behavior requiring intervention. Although the range of situation-specificity
is not genetically programmed, the subject's instinctive compulsion to respond to extreme expressions of emotion (no matter what the situation) plays an indirect role in the individualized learning in which she engages over her life history. This factor would be negated in those prevented from experiencing the original, basic responses through a handicap, and by those whose development is impeded by a learning disability or emotional experiences of such overall intensity as to "drown out" the subject's empathic response signals.

It is conceivable that the average hominid would have had a threshold of sensitivity to the expression of emotion by others. Crossing this threshold, conceived in terms of volume of cries, possibly some configurational pattern of their utterance, and the proximity of the recipient to the subject, would serve to elicit EHB. The nativist model, which assumes the role of natural selection in biologically-tuning empathy, suggests that this threshold would be adjusted to exist at that level which would not entail a waste of energy in responding oversensitively to insignificant expressions, while coming to the aid of those whose survival is at stake. This is a problem, as Henry Sidgwick pointed out, for "the course of conduct by which a man would most fully reap the rewards of sympathy...will often be very different from that to which a sincere desire to promote the general
happiness would direct him." The evolutionary-set threshold of sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others may be considerably higher than what is acceptable to modern acculturated humans.

(b) Individual-specificity. To what extent is the empathic response, in its native form, selective in regard to recipients? In the absence of a clear way to isolate the specific of empathic programming in modern developed human beings, we revert again to a mode of explanation relying heavily upon the sociobiology viewpoint. Sociobiologists (see Hamilton, Trivers, Wilson) suggest that EHB has been selected because of its contribution to fitness. They are especially interested in how altruism, as the extreme case of helping behavior, might have been selected by a biological system previously thought to favor only self-preserving behavior. However, there is considerable debate as to how it is that altruism could enhance fitness. At least four major theories have been developed to explain the mechanism which is at work, these being the theories of (a) group selection, (b) kin selection, (c) reciprocal or "soft core" altruism, and (d) parental manipulation. The theory of group selection (Wynne-Edwards, 1962) applies primarily to animals' supposed altruistic restraint on reproduction, by which they avoid exploiting their habitats. The kin selection theory (Hamilton, 1964) suggests that individuals act
altruistically in behalf of those who have similar genetic complements, so as to enhance their fitness (increase the probability of successful procreational opportunities). The reciprocal altruism theory (Trivers, 1971) suggests that altruistic behaviors are selectively aimed at those who reciprocate, thus enhancing the fitness of the "trait-group" of altruistic subjects as a whole. The parental manipulation theory (Alexander, 1974) holds that altruistic behaviors are performed by offspring pressed into altruistic service by their parents for the sake of the family. All four theories seek to offer an explanation of why empathy/altruism couplings would be selected so as to appear in succeeding generations. Which theory is chosen is importantly relevant to the task of defining individual-specificity. Philosophers seeking to draw conclusions concerning the parameters of empathic responsiveness are thus led into the maelstrom of a current controversy in ethology and population biology.

As of this writing, no one theory has clearly captured the field. However, the group selection theory has run into serious problems of genetic mathematical improbability (due to internal genetic competition), while the parental manipulation theory appears to rely on a very narrow and selective data base of questionable relevance to human development. The differences
between the kin selection and reciprocal altruism theory can be simply stated. The kin selection theory suggests that altruistic individuals assist primarily their relatives, thus leading to a greater fitness of their genetic complement, despite the risk of their own individual demise. "Altruistic genes" are selected for their contribution to "inclusive fitness", as opposed to the individual fitness or survival value of the individual.\textsuperscript{14}

The reciprocal altruist theory relies upon the traditional notion of "individual fitness": altruistic individuals assist nonrelatives as well as relatives, provided there is some guarantee of reciprocity in helping-behavior. Reciprocal altruists help each other (those of the same altruistic "trait-group"); though unrelated, they tend to improve the chances of survival of each other's genestreams through enhancing, by cooperation, their entire trait-group's chances of reproduction. Since only reciprocators can participate in this mutual aid arrangement, the altruist genes are selected through the overall enhancement effects of mutual aid.

Settling the dispute between these two opposing explanations of altruism is a task chiefly for biologists, and not philosophers. One role philosophers can play, however, is that of insuring that terminology is used in a coherent and precise way. The term "altruism" requires this kind of care. Paying careful attention to
the term may help to unearth considerations which lead us to a way of assessing the dynamics each theory hypothesizes in relation to contemporary empathic responsiveness.

Wilson makes a popular distinction between "hard-core" and "soft-core" altruism. Hard-core altruism, renamed "heroic altruism" by Wispe, implies extreme self-sacrifice. This approximates the original use of the term by J. B. S. Haldane in 1932. Several current writers assume a similar notion. Wispe, for example, speaks of "a regard for the interest of others without concern for one's self interest." Campbell speaks of "patriotic self-sacrifice for the good of the social order." Cohen describes altruism as "an act or desire to give something gratuitously to another person or group because he, she, they or it needs it or wants it." Macaulay and Berkowitz define it as "behavior carried out to benefit another without anticipation of rewards from external sources." For most of these interpreters, altruism implies a form of giving or intervention which is of benefit to the other person, yet with no cost to the recipient (it is gratuitous); it is often but not always engaged in at the risk of possible danger to the self. At the very least, it is of some detriment to self in the sense that, even where danger is not involved, the subject's time, energy, resources, etc. are expended in
the direction of the other person with no form of repayment expected. Hence, Cohen speaks of this as "redistributional," opposing this to "reciprocal". Those preferring to keep the term most pure insist that the subject gain nothing from the transaction—even in terms of drive satisfaction or social approval (cf. Walster & Piliavin. Less pure ("soft-core") forms would entail only that the subject does not act for the sake of recompense for the action; social or internal forms of reward which happen to result are not excluded.

The question of the consequences of an altruistic act are crucial because of a common confusion surrounding the term. Altruism can be defined either according to motives or consequences. On the one hand, one may restrict altruistic acts to those which, as above, stem from "a regard for the interest of others." Altruistic acts are those often self-detrimental acts motivated by other-regarding concerns. On the other hand, one could speak of altruism as definable solely by reference to consequences. Altruistic acts are those which have the result of net benefit to the other as a result of detriment to the agent, whatever the motivations of the agent may have been. This entails that agents may be involuntarily, unintentionally, and even accidentally altruistic. Viewed from the standpoint of moral praise, it would be the former kind of altruist whom we would tend
to award a medal. Then again, we noted in Chapter VI that altruistic acts (e.g., rescue behavior) may be very immediate and unthinking, reflecting the individual's more general dispositions. Conceivably, an individual might be trained in her responses so as to act in this way when the situation presented itself. Hence, we might be inclined to award her the medal after all.

Neither of these ways of defining altruism is entirely sufficient. To define altruism according to motives seems to rule out altruism in primitive hominids and infra-human species. Yet, there is very apparently other-regarding behavior in species to which we are hardly inclined to attribute motivations (cf. especially the social insects). On the other hand, defining altruistic acts solely in terms of consequences seems to overlook the fact that agents of some kind are involved. The concept of accidental altruism does not seem correct.

We suggest as a compromise definition that altruistic acts be primarily defined by their other-benefiting, self-detrimental consequences. This may be supplemented by requiring an occurrent desire to help of the altruistic agent. We here rely upon the distinction made in Chapter VI between the more long-standing desires (e.g., benevolence) and occurrent, situation-elicited and perhaps instinctively-directed desires to act. The latter kind of desires could be attributed for example, to bees
responding in a highly instinctive way to chemical alarm pheromones released by fellow bees within a 10 centimeter proximity. The addition of this reference to an occurrent desire to help rules out cases of accidental altruism, yet without requiring either a developed or benevolent motivational system to the agent. Thus, altruistic behavior may be defined as Batson, et al. (1981) define it: "a person's helping is altruistic to the degree that he or she helps from a desire to reduce the distress or increase the benefit of the person in need."\(^2\) We would add to this the restriction that the motive (desire) responsible for the behavior is not the result of a desire or expectation of self-benefit, though the latter may contingently occur as a result of the action.

If we view the kin selection and reciprocal altruism theory in the light of this definition of altruism, we discover some important differences. According to the kin selection theory, the subject gains nothing for herself in terms of fitness (increased procreational opportunities) when she acts in an altruistic way. However, the fitness of her genetic-type is enhanced as a result of the benefit received by relatives who share a percentage of the same type genes. Andrew Oldenquist makes the helpful distinction between individual organisms, their genetic complements ("gene-tokens") and the genotype which they share with others.\(^2\) Oldenquist refers
to the latter as "super individuals." Where the kin-
selection theory holds true, individual organisms are,
in a sense, the most dispensable. They are, as Richard
Dawkins puts it, "gene-machines" designed to best carry
the genes on from generation to generation. Even
gene-tokens are dispensable, in that an individual al-
truistic act may bring the death of an individual, his
genes of course departing with him. It is the super
individual whose fitness, in terms of likelihood to be
well represented in the next generation, is increased by
the altruistic act of the individual.

Oldenquist suggests that super individuals be con-
ceived of on the model of an assemblage of persons, where-
by the benefit of each individual organism and gene-token
serves equally to benefit the super individual overall. Thus,
according to the kin selection theory, the individ-
ual organism's act is genuinely altruistic in regard to
her own fitness as individual organism. But as a card
(gene) carrying member of the gene-type assemblage, she
does not act altruistically, inasmuch as she—as an
expression or instantiation of the super individual—
benefits overall as a result of her action. Oldenquist
speaks of this as a form of group egoism, since the be-
havior the individual's gene-tokens cause "aim at the
good of their kind."
Whether a policy is egoistic or altruistic depends on the concept of an individual we adopt. An organism's altruistic policy can simultaneously be aimed selfishly at the good of its kind; and calling the policy selfish, as seems natural in the case of genes, ants, and perhaps members of a fanatical army, seems to presuppose a different actor, a larger self that is actually selfish, a super individual of which the particular ants and soldiers function as parts or members.27

Trivers's theory of reciprocal altruism theory paints a somewhat different picture. According to the theory, reciprocal altruism has a selective superiority over what might be called "promiscuous altruism," as a result of being directed only toward those likely to reciprocate should the opportunity arise. Altruism in this case is altruistic by our definition only in a limited sense. The action towards the recipient is altruistic in that it involves risk to the subject, is done to benefit the recipient, and offers no immediate reward to the subject. We note that Trivers applies his theory to infra-human as well as to human species. Hence, no highly reflective or decision-theoretic reasoning is presumed to take place in the subject. No assumption is made of an egocentric motive in the subject. The selective process favoring reciprocal altruists may take place without anyone ever playing the prisoner's Dilemma (pace Wilson, Rescher, Gauthier, et al.). On the other hand, the action itself is not altruistic in regard to its consequences, insofar as the subject does benefit
through being labeled as an altruist and thus becoming a candidate to receive the benefits of others' future altruistic actions. It is, to use Wilson's term, soft-core altruism.

We are now in a position to apply this material to the question of individual-specificity. There are interpersonal implications depending upon which mechanism (kin selection or reciprocal altruism) is at work. If kin selection is at work, individuals can be expected to feel a high degree of empathy towards family and relatives, and progressively less empathy towards those more distant and dissimilar from their gene stream. In terms of the behavior produced, this would tend to support strong family, tribal, and perhaps national ties. On the other hand, it could lead to clan, tribe or national warfare fought at a high, and deeply-felt emotional pitch. But how did subjects identify who were their relatives? Primitive man, of course, did not possess (nor do we) some innate ability to intuitively examine the gene streams of fellow creatures.

It is a legitimate question how kindirectedness asserts itself in the individual. Many kindirected native responses require at least a minimal process of learning and recognition. For example, the mother's nurturant love for her child, the husband's protective instincts for his family, and the repulsion felt by most
societies toward incestuous relationships all imply the ability to re-identify recipients. There is no evidence that family members are known intuitively or immediately; one must learn, through historical ties/repeated exposures who is one's father or mother. The same goes for knowledge of who are one's children, as illustrated by adult herring gulls, who can be fooled by substituting eggs of other parents or even dummy wooden eggs. Guillemots do not have this problem—they recognize their eggs by their speckled pattern. It is crucial for them to do so as they lay their eggs in flat places where they may roll and become mixed up with other families' eggs, unlike the herrings who nest on cliffs.

Eventually, recognition becomes non-inferential, but an initial (albeit short) process of learning is required. The emotive connection between relatives, though powerful, is cued by learning; one may have powerful feelings about or toward one's father, but have very scratchy evidence that so-and-so truly is (genetically, at least) one's father. Knowledge of genetic fatherhood is, for humans, based on reports (e.g., from one's mother), a history of relating, and were one forced to justify it, an inductive speculation that the individual playing the functional role of father probably is one's father.
It is likely that empathy was cued in a similar way. Individuals playing the functional role of relatives as a result of genetically motivated drives to care for offspring or close-relations, came to be identified as empathy candidates. Kinship ceremonies probably evolved to help these identifications become explicit. In primitive societies, which were close-knit and comprised largely of those having blood-ties, one only came to recognize and know very well those who also happened to be relatives. The rule "be nice to any member of the species you meet" would work for small groups geographically concentrated. Non-relatives were also strangers, aliens, unfamiliar and probably difficult to distinguish from each other because of their foreignness. Relatives, on the other hand, known by their functional role and familiar presence, were relatively easily distinguished and hence recognized. Their cry was easily distinguished, and one empathized with it.

A useful analogy for this recognition process, is offered by R. L. Trivers (1971). He discusses "cleaning symbioses," special relationships between host fish (e.g., grouper fish) and other fish (e.g., wrasse) which they allow to come into their territory without being eaten. The wrasse fish are permitted to enter because they perform the task of cleaning the grouper fish of ectoparasites. Sometimes the wrasse enter even into
the gill chambers and mouth of the host fish without being eaten. Trivers notes that cleaners are distinctive in behavior and color. Further, host fish often frequent the same cleaning fish, which are identified not only by appearance, and by certain movements announcing their intention to clean, but also by their site specificity—that is by their regular availability at specific sites. Thus, Trivers cites the study of Linbaugh, Pederson and Chase. (1961) on six species of cleaner shrimp:

The known cleaner shrimps may conveniently be divided into two groups on the basis of behavior, habitat and color. The five species comprising one group are usually solitary or paired....All five species are territorial and remain for weeks and, in some cases, months or possibly years within a meter or less of the same spot. They are omnivorous to a slight extent but seem to be highly dependent upon their hosts for food. This group is tropical, and the individuals are brightly marked. They display themselves to their hosts in a highly conspicuous manner. They probably rare serve as prey for fishes. A single species, Hippolysmata Californica, comprises the second group....This species is a gregarious, wandering, omnivorous animal...and is not highly dependent upon its host for survival. So far as is known, it does not display itself to attract fishes.33

Regular appearance at the same site ("site-tenacity") is thus an important contribution to recognition or identification. This applies as well to humans. Regular presence within the subject's socio-geographic space, particularly as this was conjoined with functional, need-meeting interactions, serves to bring about familiarity.
This is also well-illustrated by the process of imprinting which takes place in many species of fowl.34

Most likely, then, candidates for empathy were judged according to (a) similarity relations (e.g., similarity of appearance) to one-self and (b) historically-established familiarity ties to the recipient (that is, recognition of an individual as a result of the other's extensive role in one's own experience, e.g., as one's father, brother or uncle, and his presence in one's socio-geographic space). In its primitive forms, such judgements were no doubt quite automatic (cf. imprinting), in the same way as a small child is easily able to identify his mother. A "learning rule" may have been involved by which individual's were natively predisposed to developing quickly the skills to recognize those most likely to be their relatives.

Kindirectedness, then, would be a function of familiarity, of which recognized similarity and historical ties both play a part. However, this must be reconciled with the crucial observations, noted several times already, that even infants express empathic responsiveness, and do so in response to total strangers. A useful way to achieve this reconciliation is to posit (cf. Chapter II) stages of development empathic responsiveness. Here, we will note the three stages. First, there is the highly instinctive experience of emotional
and visceral physiological activation at the sight/sound of another's sufferings and distress. While this response may be directed even at strangers, it is not omni-directional. Martin and Clark (1982), in the study cited in Chapter III, note that the neo-nate infants respond differentially to the cries of infants their own age, as opposed to the cries of apes, computer-simulated cries, the cries of infants five months old, and their own cries. Nonetheless, no distinctions are made between kin and non-kin. We might then posit a second stage in which learning plays a major role. Here, familiarity is important in directing or shaping empathic responsiveness. If Kohlberg's theory be accepted on this point, a third stage can then be posited, as the individual continues to develop even more in cognitive abilities, the capacity to deal in abstractions might allow for a broadening of or generalizing of response-criteria. Non-familiar individuals might become candidates for empathic response. Hence, the individual-specificity of empathic responsiveness could well resemble an inverted bell curve, allowing for non-kin-directed forms of response at infancy and in adulthood, while in late childhood and adolescence, the individual-specificity range would be narrowed to family and peers or close friends.

If this analysis is correct, empathic response is selected for the benefits it provides for one's kin group.
But kin identification takes place in terms of familiarity, which we have analyzed as involving recognition of similarity and historical ties with others, especially as these ties played important functional roles in terms of basic need fulfillment. In prehistoric times, the set of familiar humans and one's kin coincided relatively closely. But with the development of increasing cognitive skills and the restructuring of societal relations, familiarity no longer provides an indication of one's relatives. The individual-specificity of empathic responsiveness in modern times can thus be hypothesized as being a carryover from earlier stages of human development; it retains its original motivating potential, but has become highly susceptible to individual-specific variation and indeed, in terms of the original evolutionary function which it played, is susceptible to "misdirection" through experiencing of empathic responses toward those with whom one has familiarity but no genetic relationship at all.

In terms of individual-situation-specificity, then, the human genetic program does not place any inherent limitations upon the range of possible individual recipients of empathy. Kin-relatedness, according to the kin selection theory, serves as the reason (the evolutionary rationale, so to speak) for the passing on of the capacity and tendency to empathize (with its
incumbent motivating force to helping-behavior). It does not, however, program an inviolable limitation of empathic responsiveness to particular blood-related individuals. Individual-specificity of response is limited only by one's capacity to become familiar with other people. This capacity, which may perhaps admit to some differentiation among individuals in terms of native cognitive potential, is highly variable and susceptible to expansion through learning. The interpersonal target of empathic responses, then, is not genetically fixed or programmed.

This explains the seeming radical divergence of the kin selection picture from that of modern humans, who, as we noted, appear to have a relatively variable and malleable individual-specificity dimension. We posit that increasing cognitive sophistication would allow for a generalization on similarity and history relations to include individuals more abstractly connected with oneself (thus leading to empathic responsiveness to those not actually sharing one's genetic complement. It should also be noted, in connection with the conditioning theory (cf. Aronson, Brandt) that similarity and historical relatedness to oneself might be thwarted as candidating factors if those closest to the subject consistently rejected her and came to be regarded as a source of pain. Vice versa, by stimulus generalization,
just as the historical relation with the mother is coupled with a history of need-fulfillment, so others who often serve to fulfill needs might come to be accorded an empathic response. Again, we make no attempt to settle exclusively upon any one theory as the explanation for the modern forms empathic response.

The reciprocal altruist theory paints a different picture in that EHBs and altruism are directed, in the primitive scenario, not just to kin but to all who show promise to reciprocate. If reciprocal altruism is at work, the empathic response is more flexible and variable, but also loses some of its constraining power and force.

As Edward O. Wilson notes:

> In summary, soft-core altruism is characterized by strong emotion and protein allegiance. Human beings are consistent in their codes of honor but endlessly fickle with reference to whom the codes apply. The genius of human sociality is in fact the ease with which alliances are formed, broken, and reconstituted, always with strong emotional appeals to rules believed to be absolute.40

Identification of reciprocators requires considerably more cognitive ability; this explains why reciprocal altruism arrangements are discovered only in the higher species, such as rhesus macaques, baboons, anthropoid apes, as well as in some African wild dogs and wolves.41 Donald Campbell has argued that reciprocal altruism is thus more properly identified as a product of socio-cultural, rather than biological evolution.
By socio-cultural evolution, Campbell means "at a minimum, a selective cumulation of skills, technologies, recipes, beliefs, customs, organizational structures, and the like, retained through purely social modes of transmission, rather than in the genes." Reciprocal altruism, it is alleged, comes along at a later stage of the evolutionary process, inasmuch as it requires a much greater amount and more sophisticated kind of cognitive processing in regard to the prediction and remembering of the behaviors of others. Campbell holds this view, however, on an oft-stated assumption that biological evolution can only be selfish in nature (and is hence to be resisted and counteracted by culture). This begs the question of whether reciprocal altruism, as non-selfish (or at least, soft-core altruistic) is biologically selected.

Campbell's argument that the tendency to act altruistically towards only those who reciprocate as a cultural invention is more challenging. It is difficult to conceive of what kind of genetic program would be required to produce a reciprocal altruist. It would appear to require the development of a certain evaluative attitude, whereby the subject was vigilantly on the lookout to see who was acting altruistically (toward himself and others) and who was cheating. We are reminded of Adam Smith's view, cited in Chapter IX, in which approval
and disapproval is based upon a sympathetic "checking into" the affections, intentions and motives of others. This seems much more of a cultural product, as Campbell suggests, though the development of the requisite cognitive capacities would be biological. On the other hand, we must be careful not to project the subtlety of contemporary human moral transactions back in the Prehistoric era. Identifying reciprocators may have been as simple as watching for a stereo-typic altruistic action, such as sharing food, helping fight off the sabre-tooth cat, and so forth. Again, a simple learning rule facilitating just these kinds of imprinting might have been a part of the reciprocal altruist's equipment.

It is not absolutely important whether reciprocal altruism developed in the early days of human culture or if it is biologically transmitted, provided it is today uniformly and universally influential on individuals. This it appears to be; reciprocity is one of the few virtually universal human moral values. Our concern here with reciprocal altruism is as to how it would shape situation-specificity. It is difficult to judge this. On the one hand, empathy might come to be developed only toward those likely to respond in similar fashion. It is conceivable, as Wilson suggests, that reciprocal altruist "hung out" together in trait-groups, while they scrupulously avoided non-altruists. Anyone
observed acting altruistically towards someone else would be a trustworthy member, as they would be likely to help in the future as well. Empathy could be extended to all members of this sub-group safely. On the other hand, empathic responsiveness might develop in the way we described when discussing kin selection. In this case, it would be directed primarily toward those who are familiar, with potential for greater responsiveness through learning; as such, it would be available to aid in offering help to fellow altruists. It would also yield responses toward non-reciprocators, but these might perhaps be suppressed as a result of an additional response felt towards them of suspicion, moral indignation or resentment.

To conclude this lengthy discussion of individual-specificity, we have seen that, neither theory clearly suggests that empathy is genetically-programmed towards a predetermined or fixed group of individuals. Empathic responsiveness is a function of familiarity; promise of reciprocation may also function as a determining criterion of response, though the mechanism of identification is not completely apparent. Familiarity is established by what are probably learning rules, directing the individual to become familiar with (and hence empathically responsive to) those perceived as similar, and with whom she has experienced a functional need-meeting
relationship within a defined social-geographical space. We noted, however, the pliability of empathy through further learning and experience.

(c) Individualized response-specificity. This factor has already received attention in Chapter II, and was implied by (a) and (b) above. Whatever the antecedent parameters natively applied to empathic responsiveness, these can be overridden by a wide variety of life experiences, social pressures, physical conditions, etc. In this respect, empathic responsiveness is most malleable, and hence very much open to the charge of being an "individualized preoccupation." On the other hand, we reassert our earlier thesis that where native predispositions do exist, these will tend to condition the individual's response patterns over time, even if not predictably in any one instance. But even this does only diminish the malleability of an individual's response pattern. It at best suggests that most people will empathize with at least some others, in circumstances which they have come to associate with those which produce relatively intense emotion in the recipient. Extinction of this responsiveness, while not impossible, is made difficult by its being a native predisposition. Little more can be said, however, to rescue the empathic attitude strategy from the charge that, due to the individualized nature of the learning involved in empathy,
taking an empathic attitude as a guide to moral decision-making would be fraught with idiosyncrasy and hence unallowably partial.
CHAPTER X: NOTES


2. Edward O. Wilson, On Human Nature (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1978), 175. The full statement is: "Can the cultural evolution of higher ethical values gain a direction and momentum of its own and completely replace genetic evolution? I think not. The genes hold culture on a leash. The leash is very long, but inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool. The brain is a product of evolution. Human behavior--like the deepest capacities for emotional response which drive and guide it--is the circuitous technique by which human genetic material has been and will be kept intact. Morality has no other demonstrable ultimate function."


14. See Wilson, Sociobiology, 67, 118, and our discussion in Chapter VI.


17. In Wispe, ibid., 5. Wispe cites a number of definitions.


22. See the chart in Nicholas Rescher, Unselfishness: The Role of the Vicarious Affects in Moral Philosophy and Social Theory (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1975), 11, which distinguishes between
other-regarding, benevolent, altruistic, disinterested, self-indifferent and self-sacrificing character traits.


25. Dawkins, 26, 37.

26. Oldenquist, 114. An ant colony would be an appropriate example.

27. Ibid., 117.


29. Ibid., 96-f.

30. Ibid., 110-111.

31. Ibid., 108.

32. Trivers, 39-43.


34. See Tinbergen's discussion of "innate releasing mechanisms," 37-44.


36. The ability to enlarge one's scope of empathic responsiveness in this way often depends upon developing the requisite cognitive role-taking and generalizing skills. Evidence is offered by Augusto Blasi, "Bridging Moral Cognition and Moral Action: A Critical Review of the Literature," Psychological Bulletin 88 (1980): 1-44. On the other hand, (a) the same results may be achieved by a simple "childlikeness," in which familiarity has not yet been narrowed by rigid friend and family distinctions.
Thus, children with severe learning disabilities may be either highly sensitive to the needs of others, or una-
shamedly obtuse (to the normal cues of more complex social situations). See Cheri L. Brent, "A Social Skills Training Program for Mainstreamed Learning Disabled Students," Master's Thesis, Ohio State University, 1982, see esp. 20. Also, (b) this is not to suggest (as the cognitive-developmentalists too often seem to do) that cognitive development alone is the remedy for narrow-minded or constricted responsiveness. For a critique of cognitive-developmentalism on this score, see Elizabeth Leonie Simpson, "A Holistic Approach to Moral Development and Behavior," in Thomas Lickona, ed. Moral Development and Behavior: Theory, Research, and Social Issues (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1976), 159-170.

37. See Sidgwick, 500.

38. Cf. the discussion of the apparent anomaly (for the kin selection theory) of warning alarms emitted by birds, gazelles, etc. with no apparent focus of advantage for relatives only. See Dawkins, 182-3. One theory, which would apply to human EHB, is that the "altruistic" responses develop in a non-specific way, and that it is not genetically advantageous, in terms of selection, to develop incremental modifications of the response such that only relatives are warned. The genetic "expense" of a trial-error development would not be worth the advantage gained. This holds true, provided there does not exist a high level of inter-demic competition.

39. Cf. Chapter VI.


41. Wilson, Sociobiology, 120.

CHAPTER XI
THE USE AND ABUSE OF EMPATHY IN MORAL REASONING

Our efforts over the span of the last two chapters have been devoted to gaining an awareness of the problems which surround taking the empathic attitude strategy in moral reasoning. We noted in Chapter IX the objection that involving the emotions in moral reasoning introduces partiality because of the essentially self-interested character of emotional response. We sought to show that this analysis of the emotions is inadequate to explain all emotional responses and noted that, in particular, empathy does not seem to be affected by it. In Chapter X, though, the empathic attitude strategy ran into serious difficulties. We will briefly review some of these difficulties.

Viewed as a native response-pattern, empathy has a number of inherent limitations which make it vulnerable to the problem of partiality. We noted that in terms of situation-specificity, empathy is rendered idiosyncratic by the fact that the breadth of one's own repertoire of emotional experience affects the spread of empathic sensitivity. As a native response, empathy is keyed to the
expressive behavior (chiefly physical/emotional pain-behavior) emitted by recipients. The subject learns to distinguish between significant and insignificant expressive behavior by learning to discriminate between situational contexts. The neo-nate makes no such discriminations; adults, with more developed cognitive abilities learn to discern when the situation of the recipient is one which requires intervention, and when expressive behavior is being emitted for playful or other reasons not connected significantly to the recipient's welfare. In modern people, such discriminations become highly tuned by learning and the spread of empathy-evoking situations is broadened to include theatrical dramas, imagined future states, etc. Obviously, this leaves room for great idiosyncrasy or eccentricity in individual response-patterns.

We also noted that individual-specificity may be affected by varying learning experience. According to the kin selection explanation of the ontogeny of EHB, EHBs were originally keyed to promoting the welfare of those who were relatives. We determined that relative identification took place by means of familiarity judgements, which broke down into (a) perceived similarity of appearance, and (b) a history of functional relationship with the recipient. Friends and neighbors, of course, might fulfill these criteria; in primitive,
geographically isolated demes, anyone in the deme was likely to be a relative, at least distantly. This would not be true today. The reciprocal altruist theory explained EHBs as directed toward those perceived as reciprocators. As suggested in Chapter VIII, this may have contributed to the development of moral feelings of guilt, indignation, etc., leading to the acceptance or exclusion of individuals from the social group depending upon their demonstrating that they were either reciprocators or cheaters. A "judgmental" and vigilant sort of attitude, with a heightening of the perception of faithfulness in "doing one's part" may have thus evolved as part of the subject's equipment for maintaining the purity of the ranks. This characteristic would also be open to variation in development, depending upon modeling, styles of parental upbringing, experience with authority figures, etc. Thus, if empathic responsiveness was selected as a result of the operation of either mechanism (we did not attempt to choose between either), we can expect today considerable idiosyncrasy in responsiveness. Uniformity or consistency in response would appear to be the exception instead of the rule. Nicholas Rescher was forced to conclude:

The central facet of the vicarious affects is that when they come in the door, impartiality flies out the window. The vicarious affects generate a differential approach in the treatment of other people, underwriting a difference in concern in a man's
approach to the welfare-interests of his own parents and to those of other people...\textsuperscript{1}

Empathy is also rendered idiosyncratic by the fact that it can be significantly deterred or retarded by the presence of other, overpowering self-absorbing emotional states. It is difficult to isolate the purely empathic response from these other, often self-interested responses. Empathically-stirred emotions may be of such intensity that they prevent a rational assessment of the situation—thus, in some cases encouraging hasty and possibly mistaken actions. Further, the simplistic and immediate nature of the response may lead the subject to view complex states of affairs in simplistic terms such as victim/victimizers.\textsuperscript{2} Empathic responsiveness may, however, be enlarged to include a broad spectrum of kinds of recipients and a rich variety of responses to situations. To the extent that this takes place, though the risk is taken of introducing cultural/ideological prejudices from which the response was previously free.

It should also be noted that as the response tendency originated prior to the onset of established moral codes (and makes its appearance in each individual developmentally prior to moral conceptualizing), it may sometimes be curiously blind to moral aspects of situations. One may have empathy for one whose rights have been violated; this perception, however, depends upon
the application of moral norms already known and respected. One comes to learn that among the many kinds of suffering an individual can undergo, one kind is that of being treated in a way which the individual perceives as unjust. In some cases this might have been a form of suffering even if no moral norms existed in society (e.g., through the aversive experience of working for what one has learned to expect as a reward and then having it stolen). Some kinds of suffering, though, would require that one understood the already existing laws and norms to appreciate the "indignation" of the recipient.\(^3\)

In general, we note the difficulty implied by following a response-pattern introduced into humans millennia ago in what were conditions very much unlike those existing today. Darwin and Dewey are among those who have suggested that the emotions experienced by humans today may have long outlived their original purpose and usefulness.\(^4\) If it is held that some emotional (specifically, empathic) responses continue to have use, criteria must be found for weeding out those which, as cited above, are selective, overly intense, or not genuinely empathetic (e.g., as a result of a non-veridical emotion-identification).

A recent attempt to provide criteria for judging one's emotional responses is that of Richard Brandt in
A Theory of the Good and the Right. Brandt wishes to argue that some kinds of emotional responses (this would include empathic responses) can be judged to be cognitively appropriate and inappropriate. This is to be done "by appeal to facts and observations" as part of a process which Brandt refers to as "cognitive psychotherapy."

A fully rational person, according to Brandt, is one "in whom the mechanisms underlying desire, pleasure, and action have been fully suffused by relevant available information." Such desires, pleasures, etc. can be criticised because "beliefs and thoughts play an essential role in the genesis of desires and enjoyments."

...if they do, and if we knew that an essential belief or thought was itself unreasonable or incompatible with available information, we could conclude that the desire or pleasure was irrational—it would not have occurred in a fully rational person.

Brandt thus embarks on the search for what might be called the Ideal Emoter—one whose emotional response patterns have been cleansed of emotion-causing false beliefs, artificially aroused desires and aversions, hasty generalizations from untypical examples, exaggerated valences from experience of early deprivation, etc. Not only does he believe that he can show that some kinds of desires and aversion (e.g., phobias towards certain objects) would never appear in a rational person. He also believes he can show "in some cases that a
certain kind of thing would be enjoyed or desired by every rational person." Three alternatives which he considers are (1) desires for what is natively liked, (2) the desire for pleasure, and (3) the desire for the happiness of others (benevolence). He ends up rejecting (2) and (3) and affirming (1), though it is never clear why a person's natively liking or disliking something makes it a rational emotional response.

Brandt's approach is ambitious, and praiseworthy in the sense that he wishes to strive after what Aristotle spoke of as an "education of the emotions." However, he never clearly specifies what he means by a "rational" emotional response. Sometimes he appears to mean by this, any emotion which has not resulted from false beliefs. At other points, he seems to mean any emotion which cannot be extinguished by counter-conditioning, while in other places, he speaks in terms of the pursuit of one's self-interest, rational emotions being whatever somehow fit that goal. Brandt also relies heavily upon a classical conditioning model, and thus directs much of his attention to emotional responses which most heavily relate to physical dispositions (hunger, thirst, sexual desire, etc.). More subtle emotional responses are overlooked (e.g., hope, shame, joy, anxiety, etc.). Also, Brandt never specifies what would be involved in a session of "cognitive psychotherapy." Would it be an
instance of Rational-Emotive-Therapy (cf. Albert Ellis),
or would it be oriented more closely to the behaviorist
tradition (Brandt often cites, for example, Bandura's
social learning approach)?

On this unfortunately flawed foundation, Brandt
attempts to develop a moral theory in which "the good"
is replaced by "that which is rationally desired." A
justified moral code is that which would tend to be sup-
ported by an individual who was fully rational. Brandt's theory ends up being a modification of the
Ideal Observer theory, except that what an Ideal Observer
would choose or favor is here replaced by "desire" (i.e.,
find emotively satisfactory). As Brandt is never able to
decide whether stringent selfishness or benevolence is
the more "rational" attitude, he is compelled to find
some way to justify a moral system to both kinds of indi-
viduals. This amounts to, on the one hand, a Lockean-
type argument that, without a moral covenant, selfish
individuals would find themselves in a state of nature.
On the other hand, it is assumed that benevolent crea-
tures would find their desires best fulfilled by parti-
cipating in a moral system in which all are taken care of.

Despite the attention it pays to psychological
data, particularly to experimental work on empathy. Brandt's system is, as should be evident, extremely dis-
appointing. Though we have not, of course, given it
extensive treatment, its basic errors are clear. Brandt's assumption is that, were all individuals to reason correctly, they would never desire anything but that which would lead to social harmony and moral justice. Just taking empathy as an example, we have already clearly seen that this will not do. Empathy, and perhaps many human emotional response-tendencies, may well be the result of an evolutionary tuning-process which occurred millennia ago; these may have been, even then, highly nepotistic and perhaps barbaric, and may be of only borderline adaptive value today. Brandt's further assumption that a method of cognitive psychotherapy exists by which all of the emotional responses of an individual can be judged cognitively appropriate or inappropriate, and this without assuming any prior value considerations except "the desire to be rational," is extremely doubtful. As noted, Brandt does not specify in any detail what this would be. Its connection with moral outcomes is also quite unclear.

Brandt's system stands out (and hence we gave it attention) because it is an attempt to derive criteria for judging between emotional responses. We have noted that if empathy is to play a determinative role in moral reasoning, some such set of criteria must be developed in order to point out prejudiced, mistaken, and deficient cases. Brandt, as we observed, attempts to derive
these based upon the cognitive processes (particularly beliefs) presumed to underlie and inform emotional responses. We have already noted, in Chapter III, that empathy does not require this kind of cognitive processing, except in cases in which reflection about the situational context of the recipient is involved. Even in these cases, it would be difficult to arrive at a set of criteria of veridical responses and how to weigh them in moral decision-making by means of the concept of the "fully rational."

Placing the weight of an entire moral decision-procedure on the empathic response does not make sense. In previous chapters we have argued that empathy contributed to the origin of moral attitudes and moral language. The moral point of view and the plethora of moral concepts used to do ethics came much later, probably long after moral language had come into use and was serving the emotive kind of purpose of which we spoke in Chapter VIII. If this is true, then, empathy had only an indirect connection with morality from the start. Empathy contributed to the origin of morality through evoking in a large number of the people in primitive societies a common displeasure with (or at) actions which were perceived to cause suffering in one of their fellows. Moral language came to stand for these expressions of common displeasure (and vice versa, for the common
expressions of pleasure at, say, instances of food-sharing or rescue behavior). In primitive societies, it is likely that there was a fair amount of uniformity in empathic response, such that if one individual felt empathic displeasure towards a particular action or actor, others (of one's tribe) could be expected to respond as well. Empathy contributed to this state of affairs, from which morality resulted. At no point, however, did it play the role of an epistemic indicator of moral actions.

Nicholas Rescher, in a recent book, Unselfishness, admits to the problems associated with empathizing, but argues convincingly that to ignore what he calls the "vicarious affects" leads to a skewed perspective in moral theorizing. He makes this point when offering a critique of traditional utilitarianism. Rescher notes that according to traditional utilitarianism, the social merit of a policy "is to be assessed purely in terms of its favorable and unfavorable effects on individuals and ... this issue of individual impact is to be the sole standard of social merit." Individual utilities are unalterable givens which collectively determine the social good. Rescher notes, though, that because of the operation of the vicarious affects (which he refers to as sympathy), individual utility cannot be calculated in isolation.
If we refuse to take account of the vicarious affects, we meet the complaint: 'How can you decline to recognize the pleasure (or displeasure) a man derives from the good fortune (or ill fortune) of his connections (family, friends, colleagues, etc.)? The pleasure (or pain) a person obtains in this way is every bit as real as that which he derives from developments that affect him personally. Nay—a parent may well feel his own child's successes and failures every bit as acutely as his own. 19

What this amounts to, as Rescher notes, is a challenge to the basic, primarily Western, atomistic concept of the individual. 20 This concept is present not just in the utilitarianism Rescher criticizes, but also in all attempts to cast morality in the guise of pursuing rational self-interest (cf. Hobbes, Gauthier, etc.). Rescher argues, as we also argued in Chapter IX, that interest is not a matter of purely selfish concerns viewed as such. If the subject's hedonic welfare is in part contingent upon the welfare of others, the concept of an individual whose interests are entirely disconnectionable from those of other people is something of a mythical or, as the Marxists would argue, an ideological view. It is not based in the actual way in which the subject's utility structure is in part a function of the perceived utility of others. Thus, the ideal of individualistic utility-maximization is a form of denial of a normally-functioning part of the human person. 21 Systematically ignoring the presence of empathy is a curiously pathological phenomenon.
Empathy, then, is a datum relevant to understanding human nature and the structure of human interests. Any moral theory which attempts to establish that the good is to be identified with self-interest as individual utility-maximization relies on a flawed concept. Such theories must show why that part of the utility structure of the self which is empathically-responsive to the utilities of others is not also to be admitted into the concept of self-interest, and hence of the good.

Rescher maintains that empathy acts as a good stimulus to taking the social point of view. This in turn leads to the search for moral codes which can adjudicate between individuals in conflict concerning actions or distributions which affect everyone involved. Empathy helps to constrain individual utility-maximization by bringing vividly and powerfully to consciousness the circumstances of others, particularly as these circumstances have an emotional effect upon the recipient. When empathy operates, actions or policies which cause pain or misfortune for the recipient become hedonically negative for the subject. In this way, the empathic response reminds the subject that if she is to be happy, she will need to learn to view things from a perspective broader than her own. The vicarious affects help individuals to jump the gap between interest and morality, and should thus be encouraged, not suppressed.
Rescher has here overstated his case. The relationship between empathy and the social point of view is similar to that between empathy and benevolence (cf. Chapters V, VI and VII). The presence of empathy makes it more likely that individuals should desire the happiness of their fellows, and that they should come to take the viewpoint of society's interests or the common good. Empathy alone does not constitute a sufficient condition for either of these attitudes, though, it often contributes causally to their occurrence. That the pain of others is hedonically negative for the subject does not imply that society, as a whole, is (or should be) a value for her, except in the sense that she may discover over time that taking the social point of view is a convenient and effective way to anticipate whether certain policies are likely to cause pain for recipients. By the same token, empathy is a stimulus to viewing things from a moral perspective insofar as an indirect result of the operation of empathy, adjudicating disputes and achieving equitable distributions has become a value to the subject. The fact that empathy contributes to the impulse to view things in these ways is significant. It must not be assumed, however, that empathy alone, apart from other, more broadly-based desires (whether instinctually-formed or the result of contingently-formed attachments) is a sufficient reason to
take either the social or moral point of view.

Empathy, then, is an important part of human nature. It should be acknowledged as such, and its frequent occurrence should be relevant to the shaping of human goals, actions, policies, etc. To empathize *per se* is not to take either a social or moral point of view, though it may incline individuals to do so. As a result, suppressing empathy when making moral decisions would be an oddly paradoxical approach, seemingly undercutting a major motivational contributor to taking the moral point of view in the first place. This is to say that were empathy to be successfully suppressed over the span of a broad segment of human thinking and behavior, taking the moral point of view might go out of fashion. This would be curiously counter-productive.

This last observation provides a hint as to the proper role which empathy is to play in moral reasoning. There is a certain sense in which empathizing is "in the tradition" of moral thinking. In primitive society, some correlation did exist between empathic responses of individuals and what came to be recognized as morally acceptable and unacceptable modes of conduct. This is why we spoke of empathy as a contributor to the origin of morality. This correlation occurred because empathy contributed to the inclusive fitness of the group (as well as, perhaps, to the individual fitness of the
empathizer, if the reciprocal altruist theory be accepted). Morality enhanced this inclusive fitness effect by marshalling the wrath of entire societies against forms of conduct which endangered their members. This represented an advance over the mobbing behavior of infrahuman species through its coming to be verbalized, reinforced by social sanctions, eventually being stated in moral codes, etc. Had empathy not been present at all, individuals would have ignored the plight of their fellow species-members. Had empathy not been a pervasive response, it seems doubtful that empathy-evoking actions would have gained social significance and eventual morally-significant status.

Empathy continues to be relevant to moral reasoning by fulfilling the same function which it had in primitive societies: it may function as a cue. Empathy may be thought of as a valuable supplement to any reasoned attempt to act in a way which makes a general claim for approval (to arbitrate disputes, to arrive at peaceful and stable solutions, to find distributions acceptable to all, etc.). As empathy (or at least, empathic distress) is instinctually conjoined with the motive to helping behavior, and as morality emerged from the resultant attempts of humans to mutually aid one another, the experience of empathic distress may be taken as providing a prima facie reason for moral concern. When a
fellow-species member is emitting empathy-evoking distress signals, this is an indication that possibly a situation exists of the sort which helped to bring about moral attitudes. It is not that morality is entailed by empathy; rather, the two were correlated in the originating conditions of morality, so that empathic-distress-inducing states of affairs were often those which provoked moral responses.

To suggest that empathy provides a *prima facie* reason for moral concern is not to say that it plays the role of a final arbiter or moral crystal ball. Empathy is not a sort of "moral perception," nor are the forms of arousal which it entails "moral sentiments." Empathy functions as a cue, indicating that another is in distress. Where this distress is seen to be the result of actions, policies or institutions, the empathic distress reaction is held to provide a *prima facie* reason for moral concern, investigation or intervention.

Empathy, then, does not say, "this is the moral thing to do." Rather, it indicates, "this may not be the right thing to do," or "perhaps you shouldn't allow this situation to go on unheeded." All of this implies an already-existent commitment to seeking moral outcomes. Empathy is not helpful in justifying morality (i.e., in explaining why S should be moral), though as noted above, the fact of empathy does militate against the atomistic,
individualistic concept of humans which often underlies the refusal to cooperate with the moral enterprise. Empathy is also not helpful in picking out moral theories—at least not decisively. If S holds a moral theory, and yet carrying out the judgements of her theory lead her to act in ways which cause her frequent empathic distress, this would serve to indicate, at least *prima facie*, that all is not well with her theory. This does not imply that her theory is irrational or the wrong one. S may be facing a number of moral dilemmas in which someone must be hurt or deprived; empathic distress may be unavoidable. For example, how could S serve as judge in a courtroom, with the power of sentencing, without occasionally feeling empathic distress for some of the defendants. Yet they may fully deserve their sentences. Still, empathic distress ought generally to be an incitement to her to investigate her theory and its applications. In more primitive times, actions which caused empathic distress did not receive intersubjective positive evaluations, and hence stood little chance of being regarded as morally acceptable. As C. H. Waddington argues, there is a certain "wisdom" in Nature's ways. 23 Empathic distress amounts to a *prima facie* hint that something is quite possibly askew.

A natural objection comes from those espousing the detached attitude strategy. A well-trained observer
(perhaps the omniscient being of Ideal Observer theories) would carefully scrutinize the situation to begin with, and would notice all of the aspects of the situation which the empathic subject becomes reflectively aware of only at later stages of the process. What does the empathic observer come to know that the perfectly rational observer could not find out without experiencing any empathy? Assuming that empathy is evoked by a (largely automatic) cognitive process of situation-appraisal and expressive-behavior recognition, and that later reflection only serves to retrace this process, why is the emotive component required?

The cognitivist's objection is theoretically correct, but realistically irrelevant. In theory, he is correct that the empathic observer learns nothing more about the situation through empathy than what is within the capacity of the perfectly observant cognitivist. The problem is that, whatever the ideal capabilities of perfectly cognitive observers, few if any have ever lived. At least four advantages accrue to the empathic observer which are not available to the ordinary rational but non-empathic observer. First, empathy is much faster, under normal circumstances. Because it is a genetically patterned and proven response tendency, empathic observers may be capable of assessing the situation much more perceptively than non-empathic
observers. They are less likely to become bogged down in details. Secondly, empathy brings to situations to attention which detached individuals might tend to overlook. Empathy introduces the emotional impact of the recipient's plight directly into the psyche of the subject, where it may condition attitudes, beliefs and feelings which may be (possibly covertly) influencing the subject's moral reasoning. Even if a subjectivist or an emotivist theory of ethics is not accepted, it must be granted that the activity of giving moral reasons is highly vulnerable to often subconscious psychological manipulation. Empathy helps to "even the odds" by introducing, through an instinctually-guided mechanism, the datum of another's physical-emotional distress. Empathic responses, as we have seen, can be victimized by psychodynamic factors as well, but where this occurs, it is generally in the direction of impedance of empathic responsiveness. Where empathy does occur, it should be heeded, and may provide a powerful counteracting force to narcissistic tendencies or rationalizing activity.

This leads to a third advantage, namely that, as Rescher pointed out, empathic observers are less likely to be constrained by self-interested considerations than non-empathic observers. Though empathic response is unfortunately selective, it is not, as we have seen,
correlated with self-interest; empathic observers often come to the aid of strangers. Because of its largely involuntary nature, the empathic response bypasses considerations of self-interest which might enter into slower, more reflective and complex conscious rational assessments of the situation. Again, we are presuming here a contest between the ordinary, non-idealized empathic observer in that situation where she does respond and the ordinary, non-idealized non-empathic but highly trained/highly rational observer. Fourth, the empathic observer is often able to more accurately weigh the degree or significance of emotional hardship of the subject than the purely rational observer. Because the empathic observer vicariously experiences the emotional distress of the recipient, she has first-hand and immediate knowledge of the experience of the other person. It is granted that the purely rational observer, highly trained in discerning emotional states and their effects, might also have the ability to make accurate assessments of the effects of policies on the emotional states of other persons. Empathy, however, opens up to the subject an information source which, in a sense, has received millennia of finetuning in terms of emotion-recognition. Empathy is valuable too in that it adds a certain "realism" to the assessment of others' situations through the vicarious experience of their emotion. Again, this
operates as a valuable corrective or counter-force to self-interest.

It is important to remember that we are putting forward empathy only in terms of its function as a cue—not as a full-blown information source or moral decision-procedure. Gwynn Nettler, in a recent work, mounts a blistering attack on "Empathetic Explanation."

The relation of information to empathy-building, of empathy-arousal to the quieting of curiosity, and of information, empathy and its sometime-consequent, 'understanding,' to predictive power is an open matter....While empathy pacifies curiosity, it may not require knowledge (accurate information), and it may frustrate as well as assist prediction.

Nettler's concern is with empathy as a source of information or a way of explaining behavior (cf. the method of Verstehen) regarded as being uniquely appropriate to human behavior. She rightfully points out the dangers of vagueness, being unmethodical, selectivity, covert moralizing, a cognitivist bias, etc. What she critiques, however, is what we rejected above: empathy as a special kind of perception, or as a moral crystal ball. Rather, empathy is most valuable to moral reasoning if taken as an initiatory cue, as a prod to moral investigation and concern. While much attention has been given to competing moral theories, little has been given to the circumstances and factors which, in any particular situation, prod the individual to take up the moral point of view in regard to that situation. Yet a deficiency in this
regard may well be more serious in its effects than holding the wrong normative theory.

This does not eliminate the need for a way to distinguish between veridical and non-veridical empathic responses. Even cues can be "false alarms." From the subject's standpoint, seeking to insure the veridical character of an empathic response can be construed as engaging in a procedure which seeks to facilitate maximum exposure to the recipient and his circumstances. It is this which can be referred to as taking the empathic attitude. It involves placing oneself in the situation of everyone involved and attempting, as fully as possible, to judge how the action or policy would affect them. This is very much like Roger's approach, discussed in Chapter I. Adam Smith describes this procedure quite nicely:

In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiment between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents; and strive to render as perfect as possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded.26

There are numerous ways in which empathic responsiveness can be enhanced, made more uniform (non-selective) and veridical. We noted that familiarity judgements function to direct much empathic response.
Familiarity is a dimension which can be broadened through education, cross-cultural experience, etc. A philosophical viewpoint placing value on all humans (as well as perhaps some infra-human species) would help to encourage attempts at familiarizing with those outside of one's immediate vicinity. This is not to imagine that simply teaching a philosophical viewpoint can cause an individual to react as strongly to the situation of those on the other side of the world as to her neighbors. It is unrealistic to expect that familiarity with a total stranger can be achieved equivalent to that which exists with people seen everyday. The biological tuning of empathy has predisposed subjects to react most strongly to those who are most prominent and functional in their environment. As one's actions may be most likely to affect these individuals, it may not even be sensible to seek a completely uniform response to all possible persons. Provided one mentally compensates for this "variation in viewpoint" it does not present an insuperable problem. Here, Hume was correct in calling for a "steady and general point of view," though Hume interpreted this as a moral decision-procedure, whereas we have a much less ambitious aim.

We have emphasized throughout this work that empathy is often an involuntary response to the perceived plights of others. It is this aspect which makes empathy
especially valuable to moral reasoning. While we spoke above of making an effort to empathize, as described by Smith, it is involuntary (unintended) empathizing which plays an even more crucial role. If an individual intends to take the empathic point of view, this implies that she has already recognized the need to examine an action or policy. Unintended empathizing, however, may alert the individual to a state of affairs of which she was not previously aware; it may also play an important role in motivating her to helping behavior (whereas intentional empathizing implies an antecedently present desire at least to look into the situation).

While we have argued for a native tendency to empathize, the disposition to experience unintended empathy may also be expanded. This is because one's original native tendencies may be overshadowed or impeded by the variety of factors mentioned in Chapter II. The only antidote for this is a full scale moral education program, begun at an early age, which encourages the development of empathic skills. Individuals who show empathy should be rewarded before their peers. Role-playing exercises should be practiced, in order to broaden individuals' repertoire of emotional scenarios and awareness of cross-cultural mores. Students might practice in groups' anticipating the emotion of others in particular situations, subsequently receiving feedback
in order that they may evaluate their empathic skills and correct them accordingly. Students should also be helped to become aware of the ways in which their empathic responses may be selective, especially through stereotypes, ethnic prejudices, etc. An ethic of universal empathic responsiveness, suggested above, might be taught, offering a pragmatic rationale for responding empathically to those outside of one's family or particular ethnic group, socio-economic class or national identity. Finally, general counseling with the goal of individual psychological integration and health is recommended. This is because, as we have noted, empathic responses may be drowned out by other psychological needs and tensions of greater intensity. As these forces have their onset later in the developmental cycle of the individual, there is reasonable hope that they can be treated therapeutically, allowing native tendencies to again have influence. Some form of family counseling would also be beneficial, as we noted in Chapter II the role which parental models and child-parent relationships play in detering or enhancing the level and spread of empathic responsiveness. Lest all of these steps be taken as excessive, the gravity of the current world situation must be taken into situation. Humans may well be in a situation of possible extinction unless empathy can somehow help to bring about intersubjective agreement.
How does empathy relate to moral theorizing? We have sought to find a place for empathy as a cue to being morally concerned. As a cue, an empathic distress reaction only indicates (prima facie) the possible presence of a state of affairs which, under examination according to the subject's moral theory, may turn out to have morally-relevant features x, y, z, etc. We do not assert that the phenomenological characteristics of the empathic experience are translatable into morally-significant features of a normative theory. This would be to revert back to the view that empathy functions as a (normative decisive) information source. We have already argued at length for its unsuitability in this regard. Instead, empathy functions, and should be allowed to function, as a stimulus to moral evaluation. We cannot emphasize enough the practical impact of this "sensitivity factor" on moral reasoning in terms of the extent of its applications. Whatever normative theory an individual holds, her theory becomes worthless if it is employed to only a limited range of situations, this due not to the theory's short-sightedness but because of the theorist's insensitivity to her fellows.

We thus end up espousing a relatively limited, but highly important role for empathy in relation to moral reasoning. While its role in explaining the origin of moral reasoning (cf. Hume) may be greater, empathy is
not an infallible device for deciding between either moral theories, or particular action or policy alternatives. Empathy is, as the previous chapters have illustrated, simply too pliable and inexact a response to provide a determinative basis for moral decision-making. What empathy does do is help to provide the motivation to humans to continue seeking normative theoretical frameworks which will make for just and equitable distributions of resources and reasonable balanced solutions to conflicts acceptable to all non-malicious persons. It has been our argument in this work that while humans are innately equipped with a basic sociability towards each other, they are left to their cooperative devices to arrive at the normative theory which is able to gain the intersubjective acceptance which is a feature of morality. In the meantime, individuals are left to espouse their particular normative theories, whether these be utilitarian, Kantian, divine-command theories, Intuitionist, etc. Perhaps, at least, the role of empathy in all of this theorizing will be more clear—and the importance of an empathic attitude recognized all the more, whatever normative theory is able to win the day. One suspects that had empathy been pursued with the vigor of normative theorizing, philosophers might find less to disagree about and the world might be a less volatile place.
To conclude, the argument of this dissertation has been that empathy constitutes a native part of human nature. It was selected by evolution as a result of its ability to add to the fitness of human individuals and societies characterized by it. It consists, in its most basic form, of a disposition to respond imitatively to the perceived plight (primarily distress) of another person; it is found to be instinctually coupled with a tendency to engage in helping behavior, which may be altruistic in nature. Empathy itself does not provide either a reason or a causally sufficient condition for benevolence, but as coupled instinctually with an inclination to helping behavior, it provides individuals with at least occurrent pro-social motives. This implies a basic sociability in humans which militates strongly against the illusory concept of individualism, which seeks to construe all human experience on the model of atomistic self-limited interests and concerns. Humans are inextricably bound up with each others' circumstances not simply as a moral ideal, but as a matter of fact. We have suggested that the attempt to suppress this is both pathological and not in the interest of social well-being and survival.

Empathy was most likely a contributor to the ontogeny of moral thinking, language and institutions. Yet, empathy provides a guide to the correct moral theory
only in the sense that any moral theory which, when en­acted, causes frequent empathic distress is to be sus­pected as inadequate. We have not put forward an "Em­pathic Theory of Ethics." Empathy serves as an innate cue to moral evaluation and investigation activity. The occurrence of an empathic distress response constitutes a prima facie indication of a need for moral interven­tion. Empathy thus unsettles the moralist and draws her into the circumstances of another. For this reason, empathic responsiveness is to be encouraged and vigor­ously developed in a moral community. As Theodore Lipps wrote in 1903:

> If I see someone suffer and succumb, and if the suffering and defeat bring home to me the fact that it is a human being who suffers, then, this means that what is evoked in me is not just this or that mode of my self-activity, but rather that in it I become aware of my being human. I experience my­self as a human being in the most general sense of the word 'human.' And this evocation can be realized just because I am human. I feel the harmony between another person and myself; it permeates me; I feel myself as a person in someone else. I have this most joyful and universal feeling of sympathy, which is at the bottom of all other feelings of sympathy. And I have it the more intensely, the more I am touched by the sorrow and defeat of another person, or the more the humanity of another person is brought before my consciousness by his sorrow and defeat. Empathizing is experiencing. It is not just simply knowing that somewhere in the outer world there is something mental or inward, some joy, sorrow, woe, or despair, nor is it merely imaging such things.29

There is no present indication that humans have suffi­ciently progressed in their cultural development to make
unnecessary an instinctual mechanism drawing their attention in this way to the needs of their fellow-species members.


3. Cf. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 34-5, 108-9, where Hare discusses the kind of imaginative reconstruction which we have seen connected with purposeful empathizing. According to Hare, an action's being disapproved of from the hypothetical point of view is not because it would be aversive to the subject, but because the subject "cannot accept the singular prescription that in the hypothetical case it should be done to him" (109). This does not (as critics of Hare's formulation have pointed out) ultimately explain, or provide a basis for determining what ought to be prescribed or not prescribed. It specifies a decision-procedure, but one which, as we have seen, is vulnerable to the variations in sympathy and responsiveness. Hare admits as much in reference to the Nazi fanatic, 157-185. While Hare's procedure does reflect one of the features or conditions of morality we discussed in Chapter VIII, it would be mistaken to think (a) that this universalizing activity alone is a rationally sufficient way to determine moral outcomes, or (b) that differences in individual empathic responsiveness can, on a practical level, be kept from influencing the kind of procedure Hare describes.


9. Ibid., 110.

10. This is perhaps the most important, and unfortunately the weakest section of Brandt's book (see 110-148).


12. Ibid., 126-f.

13. Ibid., 194, cf. 185. Moral right and wrong is "whatever would be [allowed or] prohibited by any moral code which all fully rational persons would tend to support, in preference to all others or to none at all, for the society of the agent, if they expected to spend a lifetime in that society" (194). For a recent critique of Brandt's approach which goes into more depth, see Nicholas L. Sturgeon, "Brandt's Moral Empiricism," Philosophical Review 91 (1982): 389-423.

15. Brandt offers a very lucid discussion of empathy when discussing benevolence (138-148) and is one of the few moral philosophers to refer to the psychological literature which we have noted in this study. However, Brandt (a) adopts the classical conditioning theory to explain empathy and (b) seems to make the assumption that sympathy alone is sufficient to explain the existence of a benevolent attitude. We have questioned both of these assumptions.


17. Ibid., 91.

18. Ibid., 92.

19. Ibid., 92.


21. Gauthier, after decades of trying to make Hobbes's argument work, appears to have come to recognize the importance of a "social consciousness" to utility maximization. What is required is a "different conception of rational man." "Hobbesian man is unable to internalize the social requirement that he subordinate his direct pursuit of survival and well-being to the agreed pursuit of optimal outcomes which best ensure the survival and well-being of each person. Thus, in our terms Hobbesian man actually remains in the state of nature; the civil power, the Sovereign, can effect only the appearance of civil society, of interdependent action. The real difference between the state of nature and civil society must be a difference in man, and not merely in the external relations of men," David Gauthier, "Reason and Maximization," Canadian Journal of Philosophy 4 (1975), 431. We commend Gauthier's conclusion, but note that the Hobbesian "state of nature" is a poor description to start with of primitive man characterized by empathy.

22. Rescher, 98-100.

23. C. H. Waddington, *The Ethical Animal* (N.Y.: Atheneum Press, 1961). This assumes, of course, that the survival of the species is a "good." That certain facets of human behavior and responsiveness have been selected
by evolution is not in itself an argument for their goodness; it is required that species survival is itself a good (which would be hard to deny) and that there are no better ways to accomplish this.


25. See Nettler's extensive critique, 33-84.


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