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In defense of empathy: A response to Prinz[1]

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Abstract

A prevailing view in moral psychology holds that empathy and sympathy play key roles in morality and in prosocial and altruistic actions. Recently, Jesse Prinz (2011a, 2011b) has challenged this view and has argued that empathy does not play a foundational or causal role in morality. He suggests that in fact the presence of empathetic emotions is harmful to morality. Prinz rejects all theories that connect empathy and morality as a constitutional, epistemological, developmental, motivational, or normative necessity. I consider two of Prinz's theses: the thesis that empathy is not necessary for moral development, and the thesis that empathy should be avoided as a guide for morality. Based on recent research in moral psychology, I argue that empathy plays a crucial role in development of moral agency. I also argue that empathy is desirable as a moral emotion.

1 Empathy and morality

A prevailing view in moral psychology holds that the cognitive abilities of empathy and affective perspective-taking play key roles in morality and in prosocial and altruistic behaviors. According to numerous psychologists (Eisenberg & Strayer 1987; Batson et al. 1981; Batson & Shaw 1991; Zahn-Waxler & Radke-Yarrow 1990; Hoffman 2000; Vaish et al. 2009, 2011; Decety 2011) and philosophers (Hume 1739/1978; Smith 1759/2009; Slote 2010; Goldman 2006; Darwall 1998; de Vignemont & Frith 2008), empathy is fundamental to morality.

Recently, Jesse Prinz (2005, 2011a, 2011b) has challenged this trend in moral psychology. Prinz has two major theses. First, he argues that empathy is not a necessary precondition for moral approval and disapproval. Second, he argues that empathy is prone to biases that render it potentially harmful and frequently produce morally undesirable results. His counterintuitive conclusions are that empathy plays no essential role in morality and that it interferes negatively with the ends of morality; therefore, it should not be cultivated.

I will argue against both theses. First, I will argue that empathy plays a necessary role in human moral development. I argue that empathy – understood either as vicarious sharing

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of emotion or as affective perspective-shifting through simulation and imaginative reconstruction – is fundamental to the development of moral agency. The absence or deficiency of these processes leads to the absence or deficiency of a crucial element of our morality. Second, I will argue that there is a moral benefit associated with empathic feelings. I also argue that there are certain morally demanding situations in which empathy is our best guide to moral judgment.

This paper falls into four sections. In the first section, I spell out Prinz's negative view of an empathy-based morality, and I clarify my thesis about the necessity of empathy in moral development, suggesting that the thesis should be understood as a claim about moral development in humans.

In the second section, I describe Prinz's argument against the developmental necessity thesis. Prinz's discussion of moral development focuses on three issues: moral deficits in psychopaths, moral deficits in autistic people, and theories of moral development. He argues that psychopaths' and autists' impaired empathic abilities are not responsible for their impaired moral competence, and he proposes an imitation-based account of moral development to explain how the development of moral competence involves the acquisition of emotional capacities via imitative learning. I review the empirical literature concerning psychopaths and autistic people and offer an alternative explanation for psychopaths' and autists' moral deficit which favors the empathy-based account of moral development that I propose.

In the third section, I defend a broader conceptualization of empathy that helps us to understand moral competence, and I distinguish two roots of empathy – perceptual empathy and imaginative empathy – based on distinct underlying mechanisms.

In the fourth section, I discuss Prinz's argument against the normative claim, and I argue that, despite potential biases of empathy, there are ways to resist the conclusion that empathy should not be cultivated. I argue that there are moral contexts in which empathy is a good moral guide.

2 Does empathy play a necessary role in morality?

I start with the issue of whether empathy is necessary for morality. Prinz is not the first to challenge the view that empathy is necessary here. Jeannette Kennett in "Autism, Empathy, and Moral Agency" (2002), Victoria McGeer in "Varieties of Moral Agency: Lessons from Autism (and Psychopathy)" (2008), Heidi Maibom in "Feeling for Others: Empathy, Sympathy, and Morality" (2009), and Peter Goldie in "Anti-empathy" (2011) have adopted this perspective as well. Many of those who argue against empathy as a precondition for morality adopt a Kantian rational account of morality. Kennett, for instance, argues that an examination of moral thinking in autistic people shows that moral agency can be developed in the absence of empathy, and that this evidence can support a Kantian account of moral agency.

Unlike these rationalist critique[2], Prinz's critique (2007) defends a sentimentalist account of morality. As a sentimentalist, Prinz shares the Humean intuition that emotions are essential for moral judgment and moral motivation and that moral judgments involve approval and disapproval. According to Prinz (2011a), Hume's sentimentalism can be formulated as a constitution claim: to believe that something is morally right or wrong consists of approving or disapprov-

[2]McGeer (2008) also endorses a Humean view of morality. She argues that reason-based judgments play an instrumental role in morality, that only emotions have the required motivational force that accompanies moral attitudes, and consequently that all kinds of human moral agency are rooted in affect. However, she denies that empathy and perspective-taking abilities are the basis of morality. She suggests that people with autism challenge this view. In autism, the deficit of empathy and perspective-taking abilities do not lead to a deficit in morality. She concludes that empathy should not be considered the only emotion to provide moral motivation; other kinds of affective dispositions (which are available to people with autism, such as affective concern) also play a role in morality.

ing it. Prinz endorses the Humean view of morality but dismisses empathy as the basis for moral approval or disapproval. He argues for what he calls an *antiempathic sentimentalism*.

In "Against Empathy," Prinz takes issue with the Humean thesis that empathy is a precondition for morality. He analyzes two central points of Hume's project: 1) the *definitional thesis* that empathy is feeling an emotion that we take another person to have; 2) the *precondition thesis* that empathy is a constitutive precondition for moral approbation or disapprobation. When the precondition thesis is combined with Hume's sentimentalism, it follows that empathy is a precondition for moral judgment. Prinz endorses Hume's sentimentalism but rejects his precondition thesis.

More precisely, Prinz denies that "moral approbation involves any kind of congruence between the emotions of the one who approves and those on either side of the action being approved of" (2011a: 218). There are many ways to connect empathy and moral judgment. However, Prinz rejects all theories that necessarily connect empathy and morality. He argues against six versions of the precondition thesis, corresponding to the following six types of precondition: 1) constitutive (empathy is a necessary element of moral judgment); 2) causal (empathy is necessary for causing moral judgment); 3) developmental (empathy is necessary for developing moral agency); 4) epistemic (empathy plays a necessary epistemic role in moral judgment); 5) normative (empathy is necessary for justifying moral judgment); and 6) motivational (empathy is necessary for moral motivation).

The general form of Prinz's arguments against these theses might be reconstructed like this:

P1. Moral judgments are constituted by sentiments of approbation and disapprobation.

P2. Empathy plays a contingent role in moral sentiments of approbation and disapprobation.

P3. If empathy plays a contingent role in moral judgment, empathy is not necessary for morality.

C1. Hence, empathy is not necessary for morality.

Premise P1 expresses Prinz's emotionism[3] and will not be the target of my discussion. Premise P2 is a modal thesis, which Prinz supports by counterexamples and psychological research. The conditional premise P3 covers all the types of necessary connection between empathy and morality denied by Prinz.

In effect, there are six different versions of the argument corresponding to the six different kinds of preconditions. As we have seen above, these six precondition theses make six different claims about a necessary role for empathy in morality. For example, the developmental precondition thesis says that empathy is necessary for moral development. In Prinz's argument against this thesis, premise P2 says that empathy plays a contingent role in moral development, and the conclusion says that empathy is not necessary for moral development. This is the version I will focus on.

I will deny premise P2, arguing that empathy plays a necessary role in moral development in human beings. I argue that there are aspects of our morality for which empathetic emotions are necessary. Where Prinz uses empirical results to argue against the developmental precondition thesis, I suggest different interpretations of the results. Recent experimental work shows that empathy plays a key role in the emergence of moral agency in human beings. I also endorse

[3]Emotionism – such as defined by Prinz (2007) – is any theory that claims that emotions are essential to morality. Prinz distinguishes the term 'emotionism' – which he defines as an overarching label for any view that claims that feelings are essential to morality – from the term 'emotivism' which is a specific version of emotionism. Prinz argues for a strong form of emotionist view, defending what he calls 'constructive sentimentalism,' the view that "sentiments literally create morals, and moral systems can be created in different ways" (Prinz 2007: 9).

an ontogenetic account of the development of moral agency based on empathy. I use these considerations to reject conclusion C1, which claims that empathy is not necessary for morality, at least when this claim is restricted to human beings.

The idea that empathy is not necessary for moral judgment can be understood either as a claim about all moral systems or as a claim about human beings. The former claim is that there are possible moral systems that have moral judgment without empathy. I accept that empathy is not necessary for moral judgment in this sense. We might conceive a primitive system, for instance, like a mythical savannah (Prinz 2007) populated by early humans living in a natural state governed by pre-moral values, where people do not need empathy to follow rules and respect authority. In this primitive situation, empathy might not be involved in attitudes of approval and disapproval. In a natural state, a primitive agent might use other elements to moralize. For instance, he might use reactions of disgust or anger as guides to moral action (although one question is whether this kind of behavior counts as moral thinking or as mere regulation of behavior).

For present purposes, the necessity claim should be understood as a claim about human beings. That is, because of the way human beings are psychologically constituted, empathy is necessary for human moral development. It is this claim that I will defend. It is true that even humans can morally disapprove of others without directly passing through empathy or the affective perspective-taking process. Recent psychological studies (Haidt 2012) show that moral judgment can be a result of automatic affective reactions. We can form a moral judgment on the basis of gut feelings. However, on the view I will argue for, gut feelings in humans only count as moralizing when they express attitudes of disapproval of a moral agent, and the characteristic features of a moral agent depend on the capacity to arrive at moral attitudes as a result of a process of empathic simulation and affective perspective-taking.

3 Autism, psychopathy, and moral development

Many contemporary works in moral psychology emphasize the constitutive role of empathy in early moral development (see Batson 1981, 1991, 2011; Eisenberg 2000; Hoffman 2000, 2011; Tomasello & Vaish 2013). The central thesis defended by many moral psychologists is that empathic processes are the psychological mechanisms underlying moral agency. Morality involves processes of behavioral regulation toward others. Quite early in ontogeny, infants start using empathic processes to regulate their behavior toward others. When a child shows no empathy to others, we can predict that she will fail both to acquire concern for others and to be able to appreciate how her actions affect others. Consequently, the lack of empathy will affect her capacity to evaluate her own actions and others' actions as being right or wrong and to react to those actions either expressing disapproval or approval. We can predict that people who display difficulties in empathic abilities are also impaired in morality.

The idea that empathy plays a central role in moral development is supported by several studies which investigate the correlation between empathy, prosocial behaviors, and cooperation (Batson 1981, 1991, 2011; Eisenberg & Strayer 1987; Eisenberg 2000; Hoffman 2000, 2011; Tomasello & Vaish 2013). Early in ontogeny, children start behaving prosocially and engaging in cooperative and altruistic actions. The question here is: what are the psychological mechanisms that enable children to behave prosocially? The studies have shown that emphatic processes provide children with the affective, cognitive, and motivational abilities to behave prosocially. Empathic processes motivate altruistic behaviors, such as helping, caring, and other-directed comforting behavior and relate negatively with antisocial and aggressive behavior (Batson 1981, 1991, 2011; Eisenberg 2000; Hoffman 2000). Empirical data show that the

capacity for moral reasoning and moral agency is strongly dependent on the capacity to respond empathetically to others'affective states and to take the perspective of others into account.

Prinz challenges this interpretation and argues that there is no empirical data to provide evidence for the strong conclusion that empathy is the basis of moral development. He does not deny the positive correlation between empathy and moral judgment, and empathy and prosocial behavior. However, he denies that this correlation is evidence for the developmental necessity thesis. Prinz (2011a) addresses three potential sources of evidence for the thesis: evidence concerning psychopaths, evidence concerning autistic people, and theories of moral development.

The two pathological populations – psychopaths and autistic people – have been of special interest in moral psychology. Both populations show deficiencies in social understanding, social responsiveness, and moral competence. Both psychopaths and autistic people also have impaired empathic abilities. A popular view is that their empathic impairments explain their moral impairments (Nichols 2004). Psychological research on these populations seems to support the view that lack of empathy affects moral competence (Blair 2005), suggesting that empathy plays a key role in moral development.

Prinz (2005, 2011a, 2011b) rejects this explanation. He argues that evidence from autistic people and psychopaths does not support the developmental precondition thesis. I will consider his arguments in both of these cases, focusing especially on the evidence from psychopaths.

Psychopathy. Psychopathy is a disorder associated with callous and unemotional traits (lack of fear, guilt, remorse, and shallow affect) and antisocial and aggressive behavior (Blair et al. 2005; Patrick 2005). It is widely held that psychopaths' emotional deficits explain their lack of empathy, and their impaired empathy explains the lack of moral competence. Psychopaths lack emotions that facilitate moral education and lack emotional responses that constitute moral judgments.

According to Prinz (2005), psychopaths' moral deficits can be explained without appeal to the empathy deficit. It is the lack of basic emotions, such as fear and sadness, and not the lack of empathy that explains the impairment in moral reasoning detected in people with psychopathy. The account Prinz favors is based on the dysfunctional fear hypothesis[4]. Under this hypothesis, psychopaths are impaired in the systems modulating fear behavior (Fowles 1988). Psychopaths show reduced aversive conditioning and reduced emotional responses in anticipation of punishment and in imagining threatening events. Psychopaths' fear deficit prevents them from being socialized and from developing moral competence. Moral socialization is achieved through the use of punishment. Aggressive punishment instills fear, and fear of punishment is often used during moral training. A child that is frightened by punishment will associate this fear with the action that resulted in the punishment and will develop conditioned aversive responses to anticipated threats. A child that does not display fear of punishment will not learn good conduct if threatened with punishment.

Prinz argues that psychopaths' moral impairment can be explained by a deficit in inhibitory behavior and inhibitory emotions. He claims that the same dysfunctional system that impairs fear in psychopaths may also impair sadness, other negative emotions, and negative reactions.

[4]Roughly, there are two cognitive models in empirical literature to explain moral deficit in psychopathy. The behavioral inhibitory system put forward by Fowles (1988) and others, that claims that psychopaths have a basic deficit in their rudimentary behavior system that underlies many aspects of emotions and causes impairment in aversive behavior and fear, and the early violence inhibitory model (VIM), updated to the integrated emotion systems developed by Blair (Blair et al. 2005), that explains the nature of the emotional impairment in individuals with psychopathy as a result of impairments in different systems, such as dysfunctional empathy, dysfunctional fear, and dysfunctional VIM.

Sadness, he claims, is crucial to morality because it is involved in recognition and response to the sadness of others, and it is a basic element that can be used to create moral emotions (such as shame and guilt).

Moral emotions are complex emotions that arise in contexts that involve conformation to or violation of a moral rule. Prinz (2005, 2007) holds the view that moral emotions (such as shame, guilt, regret and indignation) are generated by a blend of basic emotions (e.g. fear, sadness and anger), which are combined with a calibration process. In the calibration process, as proposed by Prinz, a basic emotion that initially had one set of eliciting conditions can be assigned a new set of eliciting conditions that have been elaborated through experience to form an independent elicitation mechanism. For example, Prinz claims that "guilt is just sadness that has been calibrated to situations in which one has caused harm to someone that one care's about" (Prinz 2005: 273). That is, the emotional blend can be associated with situations where the child "catches"another's emotional states (distress, negative reaction, disapproving, etc.) by copying another's emotional states through imitation or emotional contagion.

In "Imitation and Moral Development" (2005) Prinz gives imitative learning a fundamental place in the explanation of moral development. To develop moral competence, a child has to be able to react with negative emotions in the presence of caregivers' disapproval or in the presence of another's distress. To be able to react with negative feelings in those contexts requires not only the basic disposition of feelings of fear and sadness, but also the ability to"catch"others' emotions and to "catch"others' distress. Emotional dispositions are established by imitation. In our socialization process, we mimic perceived emotions (facial expressions and vocalizations), and eventually we copy (via imitation) the inner states of others, such as shame, guilt, and others' distress. Seeing others' distress triggers vicarious distress and, further in development, it triggers consolation responses. So, Prinz concludes, psychopaths are bad moralizers because they cannot learn the appropriate emotional reaction to their conduct in the context of their victims' distress, neither through imitative learning nor through emotional contagion.

However, in the following sections, I will argue that imitative learning cannot fully explain moral development. Imitative learning might explain recognition of basic emotions, but it cannot explain the development of moral emotions such as guilt, shame, regret, admiration and empathic concern. As I will argue later, we cannot "catch" those complex emotional reactions by "copying another's affective state" through imitative learning, even in the broad sense of imitation adopted by Prinz (2005). The intentional and motivational elements of those affective states are not available for direct perception and associative learning. A complete explanation for the development of moral emotions must involve empathy. If this is right, Prinz's hypothesis about psychopaths is at best incomplete.

This does not mean that we must abandon the dysfunctional fear hypothesis. Instead, we can use that hypothesis but add a role for empathy. It may be that impairment in fear[5] causes impairments in shared fear and in empathy, and these impairments in turn cause the moral deficit. It is clear that being able to feel emotions (such as fear, anger, sadness, joy, disgust, and surprise) is a prerequisite for sharing those emotions and for (emotional) empathy. So, impairment in feeling emotions (as stated in the dysfunctional fear hypothesis) will, necessarily, cause a deficit in shared emotions and in empathy. It is natural to suppose that this deficit is what leads to moral deficits in psychopaths (at least in a sentimentalist approach of morality). In effect, the hypothesis is that impaired empathy mediates the connection between impaired emotions and

[5]I will not talk about feelings of sadness, as very little is known about how sadness is affected in psychopathy.

impaired morality. This provides an alternative to Prinz's hypothesis that impaired imitative learning mediates the connection.

It is also arguable that Prinz's hypothesis cannot work unless empathy is given a key role. It is widely believed that psychopaths' moral impairments are especially tied to impairments in recognizing and responding to their victims' distress. These impairments are naturally explained in terms of impairments in sharing victims' distress, which can be seen as a form of empathic concern. Prinz's hypothesis requires that imitative learning alone can explain the recognition of others' distress. He argues that concern for the victim's distress is a metacognitive ability that emerges late in development and derives from early vicarious distress, which is a more basic ability used to catch others' distress via emotional contagion. However, in the following sections, I will argue that vicarious distress requires empathic abilities. It cannot be explained simply through emotional contagion.

It is true that there is a simple form of vicarious distress by emotional contagion in infants that does not require empathic abilities. However, this sort of early vicarious distress by emotional contagion happens before the development of full self-other differentiation. In early vicarious distress, the infant is not experiencing or recognizing others' distress; the infant is experiencing her own distress, which leads to personal distress and not to empathic concern. This rudimentary phenomenon cannot explain those elements of moral development that involve the recognition of others' distress. To explain that, one needs a more complex form of vicarious distress involving empathy. On my account, early vicarious distress in emotional contagion evolves first into empathic vicarious distress, and, then, eventually, to empathic concern. Empathy helps us to get information about the manner in which an event or an action might affect a person emotionally and cause others' distress.

My explanation of the role of empathy in connecting emotions and moral development in psychopaths fits well with recent research on psychopaths by Blair and others. Psychopaths show impairment in recognition of fear expressions (face, body, and voice) (Blair 2005; Marsh, Blair 2008), reduced experience of fear (Marsh et al. 2011), impairment of response to fear in others (Marsh, Cardinale 2012), and impairment of the ability to identify behavior that causes fear and in judging the moral acceptability of those behaviors (Marsh, Cardinale 2012). Also, psychopathy affects judgments of transgressions associated with harm. Psychopaths tend to err in treating conventional violations like moral violations, and they are less likely to justify their judgments by referring to the victim's welfare (Blair 1995; 2005). Their propensity to inflict harm to others indicates a profound disturbance in their empathic response to the suffering of others (Blair 2005). The ability to recognize others' distress is crucial for the experience of empathic concern (Nichols 2001). Any impairment in the early emotional recognition ability or an innate impairment in the ability to perceive and respond to the affective expressions of others will lead to a dysfunctional emotional empathy. As Blair suggests (2005), an individual that shows impairment in emotional empathy is difficult to socialize through empathy induction, a practice that involves the socializer focusing the attention of the transgressor on the distress of the victim. All this is further evidence for a role of empathy in explaining psychopaths' moral impairment.

Autism. Prinz suggests that experimental work (Blair 1996, 2005) shows that autistic people, unlike psychopaths, seem to both acquire an understanding of moral rules and exhibit a deficit of empathy. He concludes that if this interpretation is correct, "acquisition of moral competence *may* not depend on a robust capacity for empathy" (Prinz 2011b: 222). Kennett (2002), Nichols (2004), and McGeer (2008) have also argued that in autism the deficit of empathy does not inevitably lead to a deficit in morality. People with autism show a lack of empathy,

but they still have a sense of morality. According to Nichols (2004), autists' preserved ability to make moral judgment, despite their impairment in simulating another person's perspective, reveals that perspective-taking accounts of morality must be empirically wrong. From this evidence, Prinz (and also McGeer and Kennett) concludes that empathy is not necessary for the development of moral agency; if empathy plays any role in moral development, it plays an instrumental role, hence, a contingent one.

One way to resist this conclusion has been to show that while people with autism are impaired in cognitive empathy and mind-reading abilities, they are able to experience emotions, display affective empathy, and emotionally respond to others' distress. This suggests that their moral competence might derive from their emotional empathic abilities (Blair 1996; Nichols 2004).

The view that autistic people show morality without empathy has also been challenged by de Vignemont and Frith in "Autism, Morality, and Empathy" (2008). They challenge both ideas: that autistic people show a lack of empathy and that they show a sense of morality. They argue that autistic people have some degree of automatic emotional empathy: they show emotional recognition and autonomic responses to others'facial expressions of sadness and fear. Experimental work (Blair 2005) yields evidence that autistic people may have emotional components of empathetic behaviors. They are capable of displaying empathy toward the distress of others. Accordingly, while autism may involve impairment of cognitive empathy (the ability to know what another person thinks), some emotional empathy remains intact. The lack of empathetic behavior in autism has been attributed to deficits in mentalizing processes (Batson et al. 1987; Blair 2005). Despite showing preserved emotional empathy and preserved capacity of emotion recognition, studies based on parental reports suggest people with autism show specific impairments in their affective relatedness towards other people (Hobson et al. 2006). They clearly manifest signs of happiness, distress, anger, and fear as emotional responses to the moods of others, but they present limitations in experiencing and manifesting other-person-centered feelings, such as sympathy and concern; also, they rarely express feelings for and in relation to other people (Hobson et al. 2009). According to the reports, they show jealousy towards others and are affected by others' moods, but fewer show concern, guilt, or empathetic sadness. People with autism are more likely to describe situations in terms of breaking the rules rather than in terms of causing physical or emotional harm to others (Hobson et al. 2009).

De Vignemont and Frith (2008) suggest that the presence of the emotional component in people with autism may explain why they show apparently preserved moral competence. People with autism are able to detect the transgression of normative rules and to detect distress in others. Nevertheless, they do not seem capable of detecting moral violations. This detection requires correlating two facts: a moral transgression and someone's suffering without moral justification. People with autism seem to fail to correlate these two facts. De Vignemont and Frith (2007) also suggest that the problem with autistic people in detecting moral violations may be related to the way they make the distinction between allocentric and egocentric representations. People with autism display extreme egocentrism disconnected from allocentrism, meaning their social world is self-focused, they lack social intuitions and make abstract analyses of their surroundings, and "they are more interested in normative rules than in emotions due to an abstract allocentrism disconnected from egocentric interactions with others" (de Vignemont & Frith 2008: 280). Their conclusion is that we cannot rule out the possibility that the rules followed by autistic people are merely perceived by them to be conventional rules, and that their apparent capacity for moral judgment is the result of applying those conventional rules.

Although this conclusion cannot defeat Prinz's argument that autistic people are able to make moral judgments, it can offer an alternative interpretation to this phenomenon. First, emotional empathic abilities seem to be preserved in high-functioning autistic people, and this preserved ability might explain their ability to make moral judgments, despite their limitations in experiencing and manifesting empathic concern and offer comfort in the context of other's distress. Second, there is no strong evidence that their apparent capacity to make moral judgments is the result of applying moral rules or displaying moral concern.

Theories of Moral Development. Prinz's third argument is against developmental theories that emphasize the role of empathy in moral development. Developmental moral psychology describes how we evolve to become moral agents, how we come to distinguish between right and wrong, and how we learn the distinction between conventional and moral rules. Prinz's developmental story (2005) emphasizes the central role of imitation in learning to be emotionally responsive to moral judgments. He suggests that moral learning requires a different kind of imitation; children might "copy the inner states of others," and not just "their goal-directed behaviors." His main argument is that imitation helps us to acquire forms of moral comprehension. Our moral understanding involves a range of emotional capacities that depend on imitative learning to be acquired. Prinz describes five stages of normal moral development. In the first stage, infants experience the emotions of others via facial mimicry; moral responsiveness begins with emotional contagion in newborns. This stage contributes to the emergence of concern and empathy. In the second stage, toddlers engage in prosocial behavior and early consolation. In the third stage, children become responsive to moral rules. In the next stage, children begin to engage in reparative behavior and moral condemnation. In the last stage, children distinguish different classes of norms through the attainment of moral emotions (guilt, shame, outrage). According to Prinz (2005), imitative learning makes contributions to all those stages, and none of those forms of moral learning requires empathy. He concludes that acquisition of moral competence does not depend on a robust capacity for empathy.

There are at least two obscure points in Prinz's developmental moral story. First, he explicitly neglects well-known empathetic processes that emerge in human development and are fundamental for developing sociality and moral competence (2005). It is widely accepted that those processes contribute to the acquisition of moral competence. As I argued in a previous work (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008), imitation and mirroring processes are necessary but not sufficient conditions for children to develop morality. Imitation provides the basic sense of social connectedness, including mutual acknowledgment of existing with others that are 'like me' (Meltzoff 2007). However, for morality to develop, imitation and mirroring processes need to be supplemented by an open system of reciprocation and shared representations (of emotions and other mental states). Imitation and emotional contagion decreases as the individual develops other cognitive capacities. Developmental research shows that from the second month, mimicry, imitative, and other contagious emotional responses are bypassed. Imitation gives way to signs of reciprocation and emotional co-regulation. As joint attention to objects develops, shared affective representations also emerge. Eventually an explicit moral sense develops, accompanying the emergence of mind-reading and imagination by age 4. Around age 5, children show explicit understanding of the mental states that drive others in their behaviors and beliefs, allowing children to understand the motivational aspects that trigger moral attitudes (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008).

Second, Prinz's imitation story is only a partial story about understanding others' minds. Imitation and emotional contagion are just the foothold for understanding others as bearers of mental states. Further developments are needed for understanding other types of mental

states, which are far from purposive actions, desires, visual perception, and basic emotions. For these states, there is a relatively close coupling between the underlying mental states and their expression in bodily action. We can infer those states through perception and imitation, as Prinz argued. Empathy is not the only way to understand others. However, it is psychologically our most pervasive method for identifying mental states in others. It enables us to infer other mental states in a faster and more accurate way. Empathy allows us to make faster and more accurate predictions about other people's needs, their emotions, and the intentions of their actions. In addition to this, empathy is the only reliable mechanism for understanding the mental states of people to whom we do not have direct perceptual access and whose thoughts are not overtly expressed in their actions. It is especially relevant to grasping false beliefs, divergent beliefs, divergent affective and cognitive perspectives, and secondary moral emotions.

To moralize – that is, to think morally – depends on sharing others' affective states and taking others' affective perspective into account. Sharing, simulating, and imagining others' emotional states is necessary for developing secondary emotions, such as feelings of empathetic concern, shame, guilt, regret, resentment, outrage, and admiration. I argue that a basic empathetic mechanism is necessary to acquire secondary moral emotions. The mere capacities to imitate basic emotions (fear, anger, disgust, happiness, or sadness) or to copy the inner states of others are not enough for understanding and internalization of secondary emotions, which are fundamental components of our moral competence. For developing moral agency, we need a complex emotional regulatory system which is more sophisticated than mere imitation and emotional contagion processes. The empathic systems play this role (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008). In the next section, I will suggest another developmental story that leads from imitation to perceptual and imaginative empathy.

4 From imitation to perceptual empathy and imaginative empathy

Empathy has been defined in a number of ways (Eisenberg & Strayer 1987; Eisenberg 2000; Batson 1998, 2011; Hoffman 2000; de Vignemont & Singer 2006; Decety & Jackson 2006). The term 'empathy' ("feeling as the other feels") and the associated term 'sympathy' ("feeling concern for the other") have been used to refer to a wide family of psychological processes. To define empathy, it is important to distinguish it from a variety of other phenomena, such as emotional contagion, sympathy, mental projection, and empathic concern. Emotional contagion is a phenomenon whereby an emotion is automatically spread from one individual to another, and it is characterized by self-other non-differentiation (e.g., a baby that begins yawning when she sees another baby yawning). In contrast, empathy implies self-other differentiation. Mental projection is a mental process in which we put ourselves in the other's position in order to understand them through simulation (Goldman 2006; Decety 2004), mind-reading (Gopnik & Meltzoff 1997), or perspective-taking. Sympathy is characterized by participating in an emotion experienced by another. It involves feeling concern, sharing suffering with others, and seeking their well-being. Empathic concern, as defined by Batson (2011: 11), is "*an other-oriented emotion elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of someone in need*"; it includes empathic emotions, such as feelings of sympathy, compassion, sadness, distress, and concern.

I will adopt here Nancy Eisenberg's widely accepted conceptualization of empathy. According to Eisenberg and Strayer (1987), empathy involves sharing the perceived emotion of another; it is a vicarious affective reaction that "may occur as a response to overt perceptible

cues indicative of another's affective state (e.g., a person's facial expression) or as the consequence of inferring another's state on the basis of indirect cues (e.g., the nature of the other's situation)"(Eisenberg & Strayer 1987, p.5).

Traditionally, psychologists distinguish between two psychological processes involved in empathy: *emotional empathy* (vicarious sharing of emotion) and *cognitive empathy* (mental perspective taking) (Smith 2006; Davis 1983; Hoffman 1977). Cognitive empathy involves cognitive perspective taking of the thoughts and beliefs of others. Emotional empathy involves sharing affective states with another person. The different ways of conceptualizing empathy focus on one or another of those two components. Some researchers focus on the emotional aspects of empathy, while others focus on the intellectual process of inferring others' mental states. Psychologists and philosophers distinguish those processes using narrow and broad definitions of empathy. The narrow definition tries to capture empathy in its most basic form, identifying it with emotional contagion, as an automatic process of affective resonance. The broad definition describes empathy as a multidimensional phenomenon which combines both processes (affective and cognitive) involved – or a set of processes as proposed by Davis (1983) – as they emerged in early development[6].

Prinz defines empathy narrowly[7]. He defines empathy as a vicarious emotion that involves"feeling what one takes another person to be feeling"(Prinz 2011b; 215). According to his account, empathy is "a matter of feeling an emotion that we take another person to have" as a response to an automatic contagion or the result of an exercise of the imagination (Prinz 2011b: 215). In his sentimentalist account, Prinz emphasizes the perceptual and emotional aspects of empathy and downplays the rationalist and intellectualist notions of empathy that emphasize the role of imagination, simulation, and mind-reading. However, Prinz affirms that empathy is not always an automatic process in the way that emotional contagion is; "sometimes imagination is required, and sometimes we experience emotions that we think someone would be experiencing, even if we have not seen direct evidence that the emotion is, in fact, being experienced" (Prinz 2011a: 212). Nevertheless, Prinz claims that imagination is "overly intellectual"and"a mental act that requires effort on the part of the imaginer" (Prinz 2011a: 212).

As Prinz notes, his definition of 'empathy' is similar to the definition of 'sympathy' used in the tradition of moral philosophy, including David Hume and Adam Smith. However, emotional empathy alone may not play the crucial role required for a sentimentalist account of morality. Even for sentimentalists like Hume and Smith, moral approval and disapproval involve impartially placing oneself in the perspective of the person affected and sharing their emotions and reactions. To understand the role (if any) that empathy plays in morality – at least according to sentimentalists – we should adopt a broader conception of empathy that includes

[6]The multidimensional approach of empathy has been suggested by different studies. Hogan (1969) and Davis (1983) have suggested a scale of empathy (either cognitive or emotional) in which empathy is considered as a set of constructs that all concern responsivity and sensitivity to others. To some psychologists, empathy is a unitary process that includes a class of phenomena – such as emotional contagion, sympathy, personal distress, and cognitive perspective-taking – that share the same mechanism. Hoffman (1977, 2000) suggests a unitary account where the ontogenetic development of empathy starts from birth with global empathy (emotional contagion) leading to the emergence of egocentric empathic distress by 14 months, and the emergence of veridical empathy in the second half of the second year when children fully differentiate between self and other. Conversely, Blair (2005) claims that the term "empathy" subsumes a variety of different and dissociable neurocognitive processes, varying from emotional empathy and perceptual empathy to cognitive empathy.

[7]De Vignemont and Singer (2006) also suggest narrowing down the concept of empathy. However, they argue for the exclusion of the automatic component as part of its definition. They define empathy as a conscious affective state, isomorphic to another person's state, that is elicited by observation or imagination of another person's affective state.

both emotional empathy (sharing of emotions) and cognitive empathy (affective perspective-taking).

The broad definition (including both cognitive and affective empathy) specifies the content of empathy as a reaction to the observed experiences of another that is shared (sharing cognitive states and sharing emotional states). However, the distinction between cognitive empathy and emotional empathy does not capture all the processes involved in sharing emotions. I suggest an additional distinction that focuses not on the empathic reactions (cognitive or affective), but on the underlying psychological mechanisms necessary to access others' affective states. I will distinguish empathy as a response to a direct perception of others' emotions – which I call *perceptual empathy* – and empathy as a response to imaginative or projective simulation of others' affective perspective – which I call *imaginative empathy*. These mechanisms help explain how emotional empathy develops into a more sophisticated emotional state that allows us to directly perceive or imagine or simulate others' emotional states. These two processes are part of a continuum of empathetic processes that emerge in early human development of the ability to understand and identify another's emotional state. As cognitive abilities develop, there is an ontogenetic chain of processes leading from mimicry and emotional contagion to empathy, sympathy, compassion, and perspective-taking. This distinction helps us to understand the developmental basis of the connection between empathy and morality.

In early development, we distinguish different levels of empathy. This process starts from birth via neonatal imitation and emotional contagion, and leads to the capacity to mimic and resonate with other's emotional states. Later, an understanding of others' emotional states and intentions develops, along with affective perspective taking via joint attention, simulation and imagination. The ability to understand and respond to another's emotional state appears in the very beginning of an infant's development and increases to complex levels of empathy over time.

Elisabeth Pacherie (2004) suggests three degrees of empathy and of their respective psychological mechanisms, on a continuum going from imitation and emotion contagion to perceptual and imaginative empathic processes, covering different stages of child development. In each stage of ontogeny, children develop empathic abilities corresponding to the understanding of three aspects of others' mental states: 1) the type of emotion experienced by others, 2) the situation that is causing the specific emotion experienced by others, and 3) the motivational factors triggered by the emotion. The three degrees of empathy are the ability to identify an emotion, the ability to understand the intentional object of the emotion, and the ability to understand the connection between the type of emotion, its intentional object, and the motivational factors triggered by the emotion. In this respect, my developmental proposal can be seen as an elaboration of Pacherie's account.

The first level is emotion recognition, which is the ability to *identify the type of emotion* experienced by others. How does our capacity to use perceptual clues to understand the emotion experienced by others emerge? This level starts with early imitation of facial and vocal expressions in newborns. According to Meltzoff (1977), newborns can equate their own unseen behaviors with gestures and facial expressions they see others perform. Facial imitation suggests an innate mapping between observation of another's expression and execution of a motor action. In imitation, there is an automatic correspondence between the visual information of the observed facial expression and the proprioceptive information of the motor representation. When a baby imitates a facial expression, her imitation is based on a motor representation formed when she is observing another's expression. In early imitation there is a correspondence between observing an expression, adopting a facial expression or a body posture, and feeling

the corresponding emotion (Meltzoff 1977). Newborns' facial mimicry leads to emotional contagion through facial and vocal feedback. By two months, infants engage in face-to-face proto-conversations, reciprocating with others in what amounts to a process of emotional co-regulation and affective attunement (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008). Imitation and emotional contagion are based on two distinct processes: a direct connection between perception and action and a direct connection between proprioceptive perception and facial expression (Pacherie 2004). Early imitation and emotional contagion always involve proprioception – an awareness of our body's movements and positions – but do not involve an explicit self-other distinction.

Unlike imitation and emotion contagion, empathy emerges when an infant becomes aware of self-other distinction. In early development, specific cognitive functions emerge that allow infants to distinguish emotional contagion – which involves no awareness of self-other distinction – and empathy – which involves awareness of self-other distinction. As Pacherie (2004) points out, the first level of empathy involves the emergence of a direct connection between the evoked motor representation and the emotional experience *without having to necessarily go through the proprioceptive stage*, i.e., without the corresponding imitation of others' expression. In the early form of perceptual empathy, infants have perceptual access to another's emotional state through facial gestures and vocal expressions without necessarily forming a motor representation through proprioception. This allows infants to distinguish between feeling their own emotions, observing the same emotions in others, and sharing others' affective states.

The second level of empathy is the ability to *understand the object of the emotion*. At this level, the subject identifies the relationship connecting another's emotion with a given situation. This ability emerges with the development of joint attention processes, social references, and intentional communication. With the emergence of the drive to co-experience events and objects in the environment with others, by nine months, babies start learning and developing shared meanings about events and objects and understanding the intentions of others' behaviors. The meaning of a perceived event (e.g., whether something is dangerous or threatening or disapproved) is now referred to through others' emotional responses; to some extent, it is evaluated in relation to others (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008). This cognitive capacity allows the subject to understand others' affective states. In joint attention and social reference processes, when a child observes an object or an event that is the focus of her mother's attention, the child treats the mother's emotions and her facial and vocal expression as a commentary on the object or event. We interpret another's emotions as a commentary and an appraisal of situations and events, which gives us information about the environment. Such processes allow the child to understand the causal role of emotions and understand the motivations of others' affective reactions. As Pacherie (2004) points out, in becoming referential, toddlers develop access to agents' motivations and develop the ability to identify the immediate intentions of the agent by observing the way she behaves. Our intentions are reflected in our body movements, and the mere observation of an action performed by others allows us to detect others' intentions and motivational states.

In the first two levels of empathy, there is a direct connection between perception and action, which allows the subject to identify the type of the emotion and to understand the intentional object associated to the observed emotion (Pacherie 2004). This form of empathy as *direct perception* I call *perceptual empathy*. Perceptual empathy plays a crucial role in situations where the subject has perceptive cues that allow direct access to the type of emotion and its intentional object through perceptual mechanisms. It allows the subject to understand others' mental states, such as goals, attitudes, motivations, and affective states, and to identify the situation that is causing others' emotions.

The third level of empathy involves the ability *to understand the correlation between the type of emotion, its intentional object, and its motivational factors*. This form of empathy relies on simulation and imaginative capacities. By the age of two, children start engaging in elaborate games of imagination and symbolic pretense in which objects and actions in the actual world are taken to stand for objects and actions in a realm of make-believe. They start imagining hypothetic situations and creating imaginative characters. This capacity increases once additional cognitive abilities emerge during child development. Children progressively acquire imaginative flexibility and the ability to simulate others' cognitive and affective perspective. This more elaborate form of empathy – which I call *imaginative empathy* – is necessary when the situation provides the observer with no transparent or direct access to others' mental states. In opaque contexts, emotions are not overtly expressed, and the motivational aspects may differ from our own motivations in similar contexts. In the early stages of empathy, imitation and emotional contagion processes involve mainly basic emotions (e.g., happiness, fear, sadness, anger, surprise, and disgust), which are characterized by universal facial expressions that the subject can have direct perception and transparent access. In imaginative empathy, imagination and mental simulation are fundamental mechanisms that allow the subject to understand secondary emotions (social and moral) and to infer their motivational potential. According to Pacherie (2004), in *transparent contexts*, both forms of perceptual empathy – identification of the type of emotion and understanding the connection between emotion and its intentional object – can emerge from perceptual mechanisms that establish a direct connection between perception and action. In transparent contexts, we can overtly perceive cues that indicate another's affective state (e.g., a person's facial expressions or body gestures). However, in *opaque contexts*, in the absence of perceptible clues, we must rely on imaginative empathy to grasp the ternary connection between the type of emotion, its intentional object, and the motivational factors triggered by the emotion.

Throughout most of our lives, we are involved in opaque contexts where we need imaginative empathy and mental simulation to understand and infer others' emotional states. Empathy, defined as this capacity to understand via perception or imagination the type of emotion and the connection between emotion, motivational aspect, and intentional object, is essential for moral development. The capacity to express moral attitudes involves the capacity to understand and identify secondary emotional reactions like guilt, shame, contempt, regret, admiration, outrage, and concern. Imaginative empathy plays a central role in understanding those affective reactions and allows us to internalize those emotional reactions as we imagine or simulate them based on others. We can experience, for example, feelings of shame, guilt, regret, admiration, or outrage in certain circumstances, because we can place ourselves in the shoes of those primarily affected by the action and share their reactive attitudes. This is the way children come to understand and internalize moral rules and moral attitudes.

According to this conception, empathy involves mental simulation and imagination of others'feelings, imagination of how others perceive our actions, and imagination of whether or not they approve of us. The internalization of imagined feelings and the simulation of others' affective perspective is crucial for the development of a moral agent capable of following moral rules and behaving morally. The characteristic features of a moral agent depend on being able to arrive at moral attitudes as a result of a process of empathic simulation and affective perspective-taking. As I have argued, imitation and emotional contagion are only the first step of this process. The emergence of perceptual and imaginative empathy is required to develop the capacity to think morally.

5 Is empathy beneficial for morality?

Should empathy play a role in morality? Should we cultivate empathy in morality? According to Prinz (2011a, 2011b), empathy-based morality is harmful to society. He argues that empathetic emotions may lead to inaccuracies in our moral judgments and do not contribute to any good moral practices. An empathy-based morality has many limitations as a guide for moral motivation. Empathy can lack motivational force in driving prosocial behavior and altruistic actions; it is vulnerable to bias and tends to be highly selective. It can also lead to preferential treatment and crimes of omission. According to Prinz, if empathy produces biases in moral judgment and interferes negatively with morality, then it should be avoided as a guide for morality. Prinz concludes that empathy should be discouraged as the central motivational component of a moral system.

Prinz's prescriptive argument might be reconstructed like this:

P4. Empathy produces biases in moral judgment and interferes negatively with morality.

P5. If empathy produces biases in moral judgment and interferes negatively with morality, it should be avoided as a guide for morality.

C2. Hence, empathy should be avoided as a guide for morality.

Premise P4 is based on experimental work that suggests that empathy is harmful and produces biases in moral judgment. Those results lead Prinz to the conclusion that empathy should not be cultivated. I argue against this prescriptive conclusion by rejecting the second premise P5.

The argument derives a prescriptive conclusion (empathy should be avoided) from an epistemic premise (empathy biases moral judgment). Similar arguments have been defended by Holton and Langton (1999) and Struchiner (2011). They emphasize the limitations and distortions empathy could bring to morality. Holton and Langton (1999) worry about relying on imaginative identification as an epistemic tool for morality. One of their main concerns is that empathy leads to parochialism. Empathy is prone to parochialism because it occurs more readily vis-à-vis individuals who are salient, currently perceived, and spatially closer to us or bear resemblance to us (Goldman 2006). As noted by Hoffman (2000), though we empathize with almost anyone in distress, it is easier to empathize with those like us.

One objection proponents of empathy might raise to Prinz's argument is that empathy might be improved by combining it with additional epistemic tools and helpful devices. Goldman (2006) shows that empathy, as a process involving imagination and simulation, can be enhanced by perceptually derived information to generate more accurate representations of an anonymous and distant individual and to transcend the parochialism of a self-affective perspective. Prinz suggests that improvements of this sort might lead empathy to play an inert causal role in this process and that it could easily be replaced by other emotions such as anger and outrage.

Struchiner (2011) also argues that empathy is not necessary for moral judgments, moral development, or moral motivation. Following Prinz, he claims that empathy is a 'dangerous' emotion that leads to acts of cruelty and injustice, and it should be avoided, or even eliminated, in legal systems. Struchiner argues that an empathy-based decision-making model in legal systems can result in errors, distortions, and abuses. He argues that empathy is as potentially harmful to legal decisions as it is to morality. On that basis, he concludes that a rule-based

decision-making model captures the essence of law, and a good decision-making model for legal decisions should overrule any empathic component[8].

Struchiner proposes that legal systems should be guided by reasoning based on an autistic perspective. He defends what he calls 'the contingent morality of autistic rule-based decision-making.' The pivotal idea here is that people with autism show the right virtues for a good model – the virtues of rules. They love systematizing, they are rigid rule followers, and they take seriously the literalness in which rules are formulated. Struchiner suggests that the legal system should embrace these virtues. Autistic thinking, from which empathy is absent, would produce less bias in moral judgments and less distortion in legal decisions.

Clearly, there is a problem with this characterization of the autistic mind. As I argued before, the capacity for following rules and detecting normative transgressions that characterize autistic reasoning do not result in a capacity for detecting moral transgression. Consequently, the presence of those abilities does not result in moral competence in people with autism. Furthermore, even if we concede that we might find autistic minds as Struchiner describes them – in which moral competence relies on following normative rules – this will not vindicate the rule-based legal system. Even if such a system works better in certain circumstances, we still have to consider situations in which legal systems cannot make decisions based only on following rules. There are situations that necessarily require our imaginative power and capacity for taking the affective perspective of those affected by the action – e.g. situations involving moral conflicts are one of those circumstances. In these situations, legal systems should be able to transcend distortions of egocentric perspective views. Judges should reason as disinterested participants that can take the perspective of those affected and make decisions based on imaginative flexibility.

There are two implicit ideas in Prinz's account. The first idea is that if empathy is not necessary for all kinds of moral judgment, then empathy is not necessary for morality; it could therefore be systematically substituted by other emotions. The second idea is that morality is nevertheless based on a single kind of emotion. Prinz suggests that *outrage* might be the kind of emotion that would play a central role in morality, because it has more motivational power than empathy, and it is less susceptible to bias. According to Prinz (2011a, 2011b), we should cultivate an outrage-based morality[9].

According to the view I defend, empathy is a critical feature of moral development. Important aspects of our morality are related to empathetic feelings. Furthermore, empathy should be cultivated. The fact that empathy produces distortion and bias does not imply that it is not beneficial to morality overall. Empathetic emotions can distort our perception and are prone to self-perspective distortions, but this is true for other emotions too, such as fear, shame, regret, admiration, guilt, outrage, anger, and jealousy. Outrage, for instance, can lead to lynching, a collective violence in which a group punishes an individual that transgressed moral rules.

Our emotional reactions can distort our view and interfere negatively with our moral judgment, leading to incorrect judgments and morally wrong actions. We can be 'misguided'

[8]Struchiner's rule-based model of decision-making is based on Frederick Schauer's conception of rules, which is itself a response to Ronald Dworkin's arguments against legal positivism in "The model of rules" (1967).

[9]For example, Prinz (2011a) affirms, "We should rage against the wrong. (…) From a practical perspective, we might be best off trying to cultivate a sense of outrage for injustice wherever it occurs and a sense of joy in helping the needy wherever they may be. The assumption that empathy is essential for these ends may be mistaken, and efforts to expand our moral horizons by empathetic induction may make us more vulnerable to errors of allocation." And in a criticism of feminist ethics (2011b), he affirms "a feminist morality bent on liberation should not be an empathy-based morality if that label is meant to describe a morality that makes empathy into the primary emotional resource. An outrage-based morality might be more effective."

by our affective reactions (Goldie 2002). Emotional reactions can lead to misunderstandings in moral judgment. This shows that we must not rely on our affective reactions as the only source of our moral attitude. Moralizing involves transcending our egocentric affective perspective (Rochat & Passos-Ferreira 2008) and taking the affective perspective of those affected by the action into account.

If we exclude all emotions that could lead to distortions, limitations, or biases in moral judgment, moral sentimentalists will be left with very little to count as a positive guide for moral approval and moral disapproval. Sentimentalists need emotions to distinguish right from wrong. For non-sentimentalists, excluding these emotions will be less problematic. For example, Kantians and other moral rationalists can rely on reasoning abilities to develop moral competence (as Kennett (2002) suggests). However, sentimentalists (like Prinz and myself) have no alternative but to rely on affective dispositions, including some biased emotions.

On the sentimentalist view that I advocate, empathy is a crucial element of morality with moral motivational force. In some specific circumstances, it is our best guide for morality. The reason is that empathy allows us to transcend our egocentric-affective perspective and to simulate the perspectives of those affected by an action. Transcending our own perspective and taking the affective perspective of those affected by an action is required for moral judgment, and empathy often provides the best way to access the perspectives of others. This access may be imperfect, but, nevertheless, it is highly beneficial overall.

A similar perspective has been defended by some advocates of the ethics of care. This tradition has helped to emphasize the role of empathy-related emotions. As Virginia Held (2006) notes, the ethics of care values emotions, such as empathy and sympathy, as an epistemic tool to ascertain what morality recommends. The ethics of care also rejects the idea that you should favor abstract reasoning and impartiality to avoid bias and arbitrariness (Held 2006). Empathy plays a key role in contexts of caring and helping for individuals who cannot express their emotions, desires, and beliefs.

Furthermore, imaginative empathy is often beneficial in these cases of caring. In "Who Needs Empathy?" Coeckelbergh (2007) analyzes the decision-making process in an intensive care unit for babies, and he shows that imaginative empathy plays a central role in decisions about the lives of those who cannot express themselves in a transparent manner. Health care units for babies are opaque contexts where we cannot rely exclusively on perceptive cues and perceptual empathy to decide what is morally right or wrong. We have to use our imagination and simulate babies' internal affective perspective to make decisions. We should exercise empathy with people who suffer and are not able to express their desires and concerns. They appeal to our imaginative powers and they might want us to share their vulnerability and suffering as fellow humans. As Coeckelbergh (2007) affirms: they appeal to "an imaginative effort on the part of the helper to imagine *what it is like to be the other person* by taking the internal perspective (imagine what it would be like to be the sufferer) and by the communication of this imaginative effort."(2007: 69).

In our society, caring for those who lack autonomy, including those who never developed autonomy and those who are temporarily unable to act as autonomous moral agents, is a central value. As part of our morality, we approve of the practice of caring for those who, for various reasons, are not able to express their concerns and desires. This group includes babies, people with disabilities, and patients in terminal states who have lost consciousness or bear other mental illnesses. In these situations, empathetic abilities are essential in avoiding the distortions from taking our own perspective or applying rigid rules that might potentially produce errors and injustices. In cases where we must provide aid and care to those whose affective experience

is opaque to us, a lack of imaginative empathy will lead to distortions in moral judgment and also in legal decisions. In these cases, empathy is morally beneficial.

6 Conclusion

I have argued that empathy is a crucial element in morality and that in some specific circumstances it is our best guide for morality. I have argued against two theses of Prinz's antiempathic sentimentalism. I have argued against his developmental thesis, which says that empathy is not necessary for moral development. I have also argued against Prinz's normative thesis, which says that empathy should be avoided as a guide for morality.

To think morally, we need to transcend our egocentric affective perspective in order to correct the limitations and distortions of this perspective. We can do this by sharing affective states and imagining the reactions of those affected by our actions. In this way, empathy serves as a positive guide in moral judgment.

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