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Gregory R. Peterson

Can One Love the Distant Other?

Empathy, Affiliation, and Cosmopolitanism

An ongoing debate in political and moral philosophy concerns the nature of international obligations. While cosmopolitans argue that duties of justice are independent of national borders, statist argue otherwise, sometimes basing their account on the limitations of our empathic concern, a line of argument found much earlier in Adam Smith. Although critics argue that empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient for morality, and although statist imply that psychological limitations of the kind that would be based in empathy prevent the realization of commitments to distant others beyond humanitarian aid, I argue that both these views are incorrect. While the possession of cognitive and emotional empathy is clearly not sufficient for being moral, the requirement for cognitive empathy arises out of a proper understanding of moral functioning, and the need for emotional empathy arises out of a natural necessity due to the kind of affiliative, biological creatures that we are. Since our capacities for cognitive and emotional empathy are not simply innately given but capable of being shaped by processes of learning and culture, statist arguments against stronger moral obligations across nations are poorly founded.

Let us suppose that the great empire of China, with all its myriads of inhabitants, was suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake, and let us consider how a man of humanity in Europe, who had no sort of connection with that part of the world, would be affected upon receiving intelligence of this dreadful calamity. He would, I imagine, first of all express very strongly his sorrow for the misfortune of that unhappy people. ... And when all this fine philosophy was over, when all these humane sentiments had been once fairly expressed, he would pursue his business or his pleasure, take his repose or his diversion, with the same ease and tranquility as if no such accident had happened. The most frivolous disaster which could befall himself would occasion a more real disturbance.

Adam Smith ([1759] 2009, 161)

1. Introduction

In this famous passage, Adam Smith sums up the problem faced by advocates of global justice. While individuals may feel strong obligations to those

physically near, this feeling often falls dramatically in relation to distance and social connection. Smith's words still ring true today, even though the ability of Americans, Europeans, and Chinese to affect one another is much greater than in the 18th century. True, large natural disasters can spur enormous outpourings of humanitarian relief, but these are driven by dramatic television images of human suffering that transform the distant into the near. By contrast, the grinding poverty experienced by some 800 million individuals globally attracts far less attention, and more complicated forms of injustice and oppression receive just as little or even less attention.

It is easy to interpret Smith as implying that our emotional dispositions are largely fixed, even though he gave some room for being able to control them and so enabling a concept of virtue. We find this natural fixity affirmed by David Hume, who regarded our moral sentiments as a 'brute fact' to be subject to analysis ([1777] 1975). If we interpret Smith's analysis of the limits of empathy as such a brute fact, the implications for our understanding of international obligations are stark, for even if moral theory informs us that the moral rights of Chinese citizens are identical to those of English men and women, if we are unable to conceive of what it is like to suffer through an earthquake in China, we are unlikely to do anything about it. International relations would then reduce to a state of nature as social contract theorists such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke argued. The goal of this paper is to argue otherwise. While Smith is correct that throughout most of history to the present day our circle of concern has been limited and that this limiting is associated with a corresponding limiting of willingness to engage empathetically with distant others, this is not a necessary feature of being human. Cultures vary in morally relevant behaviors, and it is plausible to suppose that our willingness to engage others empathetically varies as well.

Part 1 of the paper provides groundwork laying out one plausible account of moral functioning and the role that empathy plays in it. Part 2 applies this account to contemporary debates between cosmopolitans and statists. While this debate does not wholly hinge on claims about the limits of empathy, one rationale put forward in favor of statism is the claim that our affiliative bonds are necessarily limited to co-nationals in a way that prevents more cosmopolitan oriented concepts of moral obligation from becoming a reality. But if our empathizing is not so limited, the credence of this argument is reduced.

2. Empathy and the Morally Mature Agent-Reasoner (MMAR)

a) The MMAR, Flourishing, and the State

The relation of morality and empathy is not as clear as it often first seems, and the importance of empathy to morality depends on the theory in question. My interest here is to apply the question to what I take to be at least one plausible account of morality, rooted in an Aristotelian or eudaimonistic framework and based significantly on the concept of a ‘mature moral agent-reasoner’ (MMAR). Being morally mature requires both the capacity for well-developed moral reasoning and the capacity to act as an agent. An agent who reasons about moral matters but who behaves abominably is not morally mature. Whether the converse holds is less clear, but moral maturity entails the desirability of not only acting well but also thinking well: An agent who is genuinely morally mature engages both.

If we start with the basic question, ‘why be good?’, a standard line of argument from Immanuel Kant grounds the answer in an abstract conception of reason: We are to be good because acting in a morally bad way is irrational (Kant [1785] 1998). If one holds a divine command theory, the good is defined solely in terms of divine will, and we desire to do good motivated out of a fear of punishment, a love of God, or both.

On both accounts, the good and the reason to do the good is defined independently of human nature. An Aristotelian-eudaimonistic account differs in this regard, for even if the good is not defined solely in terms of human nature, the claim is made that the pursuit of the good is, in some deep sense, a fulfillment of human nature properly understood. Aristotelian-eudaimonists are thus committed to a concept of objective flourishing. Flourishing is not identical to either happiness or pleasure, and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle himself was careful to distinguish *eudaimonia* from pleasure as conceived in his day. But this is not to say that the two are unrelated. Normally a flourishing life will include both conventional happiness and pleasure in proper amounts, and a life totally devoid of these could hardly be counted as flourishing. Since our ability to experience happiness and pleasure is dependent on external circumstances, our ability to flourish is not entirely up to us, and external circumstances can help or hinder our capacity to flourish.

A criticism is sometimes made that a eudaimonistic account of ethics is ultimately egoistic in character. If I am focused on my own flourishing, I would pursue relationships with others only to the extent that they are beneficial to me, and so my aims are correspondingly prudential rather than

moral; to invert Kant, others are treated as means rather than ends (this line of argument is pursued for instance by Wolterstorff 2008; Scanlon 1998). I reject this argument. Someone may of course start out focused solely on their own happiness, but typically they will find themselves unhappy, finally realizing that a better life is one that is not solely self-focused. Paradoxically, the good of *eudaimonia* on the individual level can be achieved only by not solely aiming at it.

The good of affiliation provides a means of understanding this. By affiliation I mean simply the kind of bonds that form in families and friendships, relationships that are thick and meaningful to those in them. One is pressed to find clear references to affiliation in the most influential writings of Kant and J.S. Mill, yet Aristotle devotes a whole book of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to friendship. Aristotle is correct in this emphasis: Humans are indeed social, and not merely social in the way that wildebeests are. Humans form personal attachments and complex narrative relationships; if we are deprived of such relationships, we suffer considerably¹. Affiliation is thus not accidental to the good life, it is integral to it.

While affiliation is a necessary component of a good life, it is not sufficient, and not all forms of affiliation deserve moral approbation. There are healthy and unhealthy forms of affiliation, and we may limit our affiliative responses to others almost at whim. Something more is needed, and one route focuses on the way that the good of affiliation provides a solution. The first step is to focus on character traits important for strong and healthy relationships even within a small group. I would need to be able to respond effectively and appropriately to the others in my group, and this would imply a developed set of social skills to be able to do so. Among these would be appropriately developed sympathetic and empathetic responses. A flourishing relationship requires both a properly developed capacity to feel *for* someone else, as well as the capacity to think *about* the state of mind of others and even to feel *with* them².

This leads to the second step, which involves consideration of how to conceive of the mature moral agent-reasoner. Remember that we are treating affiliation as an independent moral good, one that in an ideal case is to

1 A point now well substantiated in the psychological literature on loneliness. See Cacioppo and Patrick 2008.

2 I will discuss empathy in more detail shortly, but I use 'sympathy' in a way familiar in the literature: A sympathetic response involves feeling for the plight of another, but it does not involve having the same emotion as the other. I may feel pity for a friend who has lost her job, but I do not necessarily feel the same emotion as she. I feel pity, while she may feel depressed, despondent, or angry.

be achieved maximally. If one treats one's affiliates badly, one hurts not only the others but oneself as well, because one foregoes the kind of relationship one could have had if one had treated one's affiliates well. This in turn requires the development of those skills and virtues that enable one to do this. But once one has done this, once one has become an MMAR, two kinds of scope problems emerge. First, an MMAR will naturally begin to consider the well-being of those outside of one's own group partly because of those skills developed to interact well with one's affiliates. Once one fully develops the awareness to be able to consider the suffering of another as an *other*, it makes possible the application of this awareness to all others, not just one's affiliates. Further, we might expect an MMAR to develop these responses automatically with respect to affiliates; but once rendered automatic with respect to affiliates, it becomes prone to be activated by others as well.

But there is a second scope issue: Although it is possible to live a life without making new affiliations, it is plausible to think that the MMAR will not go this route. Rather, the MMAR will actively pursue new affiliative relationships, since a life with more and different affiliates is richer than one with fewer. I can live my entire life within the confines of a single village, but in most cases this will be a much diminished life in comparison to the one that engages those across the river. Further, since the MMAR will have developed skills of moral reasoning, the MMAR will reflect on the world not only as it is, but as it ought to be. A world absent of conflict but full of opportunities for new kinds of affiliation is better than one full of conflict with the attendant destruction of affiliative relationships and possibilities that follow.

This account of the MMAR in turn has implications for how we conceive of state obligations. On a liberal account of the state, the function of the state is to provide an arena and boundary conditions that allows citizens to pursue their own understanding of flourishing, or 'projects' as Rawls puts it (1971). Liberalism is sometimes understood to be in principle neutral with respect to conceptions of flourishing, but this account is problematic precisely because some projects, those that challenge the very presuppositions of liberalism, are excluded. MMARs, concerned as they are with the flourishing of self and other, will endorse at least a liberal conception of the state precisely because it protects basic components of flourishing. Traditionally, such protections have been grounded in terms of rights, and a rich literature exists on basic rights, including subsistence rights, that states are obligated to protect (see, e. g., Shue 1996; Pogge 2002; Hassoun 2012). Grounding rights adequately is sometimes seen to be problematic, but on the account being developed here it is natural to conceive of them emerging out of the capabilities that are necessary constituents of human flourishing. This is essentially

the approach promoted by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, and Nussbaum in particular has made some effort to connect the language of capabilities to that of rights and liberalism (Sen 1999, 2009; Nussbaum 2007, 2011).

The MMAR on this model has a strong sense of moral obligation to fellow citizens within the state, but that sense of obligation is not limited to co-citizens. For the MMAR, a world connected and at peace, mutually entangled in rich affiliative networks, is better than one that isn't. It follows that the MMAR will follow some version of cosmopolitanism on the international scene; the only reason to resist such a move would be if it turned out that there was some limitation of human nature that foreclosed possibilities for considerations of justice and well-being to be supported across nations and not just within them.

b) Empathy and the MMAR

The preceding is but a sketch to indicate how one might move from considerations of individual well-being and flourishing to that of the community, state, and world. Once one starts to conceive of MMARs, it is difficult to see how empathy could not be a crucial component of the capacity to be an MMAR at all, since a mature moral agent and reasoner must act with deep concern for the others he or she is in contact with. But this raises a number of questions, not least that of the best and proper account of what empathy is. For the past two decades empathy has been the subject of intense and ongoing research in psychology and related fields, and partly as a result there is greater need for being clear what we mean by the term. C. Daniel Batson (2009) has listed up to eight different meanings of 'empathy' used in the empirical literature, while Decety and Cowell (2014) distinguish between emotional, motivational, and cognitive empathy.

For the present purpose, I will utilize the distinction between cognitive and emotional empathy employed by Decety and Cowell and which is found elsewhere in the literature (e. g., Shamay-Tsoory 2011). By emotional empathy I mean the capacity to feel the same emotions or sensations as another. This includes but is not identical to emotional contagion, since the paradigm cases of emotional contagion involve automatic processes involving mimicry that give rise to the emotion. Emotional contagion is important, but not all emotional empathy is emotional contagion.

Cognitive empathy involves the capacity for theory of mind/mindreading. This can be understood in terms of the ability to put oneself in the shoes of another or to more directly imagine what it would like to be another person in a given situation. Batson differentiates these two capacities, as does

Peter Goldie (2011), but I class both abilities as cases of cognitive empathy because such efforts do not necessarily involve a strong emotional component. Indeed, in a given situation, the emphasis may be on what another person is thinking rather than feeling. But cognitive and emotional empathy can be combined, and one may be consciously trying to figure out how someone will feel in a situation and as a result produce that feeling within oneself. If my friend is going skydiving, I may choose to imagine her experience while she is doing it, prompting feelings of fear, vertigo, and excitement in the process³.

A second important question concerns the relation of empathy to dual-process models of mental activity. On the dual process account, our cognitions and feelings are divided between the implicit (unconscious and automatic) and explicit (consciously accessible and at least sometimes controlled), and a large body of literature has developed concerning the ways that implicit processing may influence behavior even though the subject is not aware of the implicit motives at work (Bargh 1997). The basic version of this model and the research that underlies it is problematic, since among other considerations it fails to take into account both long term and short term longitudinal effects. It is more plausible that such processing be described as interactive, since past explicit efforts may result in the development of implicit traits and biases. Learning to play piano is a paradigm case. That being said, clearly at any given moment both implicit and explicit processing may be occurring, and such processes may work in tandem or in opposition⁴. We can conceive of empathic processing as having both implicit and explicit forms. In the case of cognitive empathy, there is now much evidence for implicit empathic processing associated with mirror neurons or 'shared circuits' in the brain, now found in several areas and associated with a range of activities (Pineda 2010). Implicit emotional empathic processing is perhaps a bit harder to conceive, but we are sometimes, perhaps often, not aware of the source of our emotions, and these may give rise to forms of bodily arousal of which the subject is at best dimly aware.

So, empathy may be emotional or cognitive, and it may be implicit or explicit. A third question is this: To what extent should we consider the

3 While it is plausible to think that all cognitions are emotionally valenced, I think the distinction between cognitive and emotional is useful, since strong emotions in particular have motivational power in a way that merely thinking about something does not.

4 A simple example of such 'in tandem' processing would be the play of chess experts. As is well documented, much of the knowledge that chess experts rely on is implicit in character, developed over thousands of hours of practice, but this implicit knowledge is employed in conjunction with explicit considerations and goals, not least that of winning the game (Gobet, Retschitzki, and de Voogt 2004).

capacity to empathize to be something that we are born with? The capacity for empathy is widely held, and nearly all of us automatically and without reflection employ empathic processing daily. Indeed, the inability to think and feel empathetically results in major social difficulties. Autism spectrum and Asperger individuals are particularly well-known for being deficient in their ability to engage in cognitive empathy in particular, but their condition is inclusive of emotional empathy as well. Psychopaths are also widely believed to be empathetically deficient, although the story here so far is complicated. Psychopaths suffer from lower emotional response generally, and evidence suggests that they are not completely devoid of the capacity for cognitive empathy as they are able and inclined to employ it at will (Blair and Blair 2009; Keysers 2011).

It is thus plausible to think that the capacity for cognitive and emotional empathy is something that we are born with in a nontrivial sense. They are capacities that nearly everyone has, and those that have significantly altered or diminished capacity for empathy are individuals whom we now class as suffering from a cognitive disability. Infants begin imitating facial expressions within days of birth, and babies at 12 months can imitate goal-directed actions (Schwier et al. 2006). The ability to detect false beliefs in another, widely considered an important marker for mindreading and thus cognitive empathy, typically appears in 3–4 year olds. Indirect evidence of emotional empathy can be found in the spontaneous other concern and comfort giving of children as early as age two (Davidov et al. 2013). Such developmental studies provide limited evidence for claims about the innateness of traits like empathy, but they are enough to indicate that empathy occurs as part of the normal maturational pattern of human beings⁵.

If empathy is at least to some degree an innate and natural capacity, to what extent can it be learned? One might be inclined to say that if the trait is innate then no learning is necessary, but in the case of empathy this claim is problematic because individuals differ in their patterns of empathic cognition and emotion. The question of the extent to which empathy can be learned is also highly relevant to certain kinds of ethical issues, not least of those being whether we should regard empathy as a virtue. Aristotle argued that virtues are not something we are born with since, to be an element of

5 A full story would include evidence from genetics, and future discoveries will likely prove revealing. But complex social traits are unlikely candidates for simple genetic explanations and undoubtedly involve a number of genes that serve not only our capacity for empathy but other functions as well. So we may call empathy a natural trait of being human, where 'natural' implies relative fixity of a trait due to genetic/developmental constraints within the range of biologically normal environments.

character, virtues have to be developed (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 2, chapter 1). On Aristotle's account it follows that if our capacity for empathy is fixed biologically, then empathy is not a virtue (this line of argument is taken, e.g., by Battaly 2011).

I will take up the issue of empathy and learning again in section two, but it is important to point out two indicators that, while we may be said to be in some sense empathic by nature, we nevertheless learn to apply empathy in different ways. One study provides evidence that empathy can be learned by showing that the circle of empathic response of children is limited to familiar individuals, especially their mother (Davidov et al. 2013). From three to nine years, children start to modulate empathy according to social categories, and evidence indicates that they can be shaped by implicit attitudes, group preferences, and social status (Rhodes and Chalik 2013; Hogeveen, Inzlicht, and Obhi 2014). Adults vary considerably on self-report empathy scales, and such empathic connections, emotional or cognitive, are not limited to our species. Although women are commonly thought to be more empathetic than men, studies suggest that this, too, is culturally modulated (Ickes 2009). Preliminary recent work also suggests that the reading of literature can influence positively our capacity for empathy (Kidd and Castano 2013).

With these factors in mind, we assess the relevance of empathy for MMARs. Is empathy, or the right kind of empathy, important for becoming a mature moral agent and reasoner? The answer might seem to be obviously yes, but we should be careful. Having the capacity for cognitive and emotional empathy, whether held together or separately, is not sufficient for being an MMAR or even a moral agent at all. Since most humans possess some degree of cognitive and emotional empathy, and since most humans are not MMARs, it follows that the capacity for empathy is not sufficient for being moral. Further, while the perspective-taking capacity of cognitive empathy can be used for good purposes, it can also be used for distinctively evil ones; a torturer is all the more effective if he can imagine what procedures will be maximally painful⁶. Similar problems emerge with emotional empathy, since my emotions may improperly lead me to give preferential treatment to some, and I may lack proper emotional responses when perceiving the plight of others different from me⁷.

6 A point made by Nussbaum (2001), among others. Whether emotional empathy can be used in the same way is less likely: It is hard to imagine torture ever occurring if the torturer experienced the same sensations and emotions as the tortured subject.

7 Xu, Wang, and Han (2009) provide neuroscientific evidence for this, demonstrating that the *anterior cingulate cortex* activates differentially for racial ingroup and outgroup members. See Miller 2013, 127 for discussion.

So, possession of neither cognitive nor emotional empathy is sufficient for being moral. Are they necessary? In the case of cognitive empathy, it is hard to conceive of how one could function well morally without the capacity for perspective-taking that cognitive empathy entails. To understand how to behave correctly with respect to *you* as an *individual* requires a sensitive understanding of how you will react to what I say and do. Many standard moral *dilemmas* often treat people as abstractions, but much of our life involves interactions with people whom we know at a deep level, with the result that we understand which words motivate and lift up and which words destroy. But all of this requires perspective-taking, both implicit and explicit, and for many of us, much of our day is taken up with thinking about what other people are thinking and doing and how they will react to our thinkings and doings. It is precisely for this reason that people with diminished capacity for perspective-taking, such as those with Asperger's Syndrome, find the social world so bewildering. This is not to say that such individuals cannot act morally *at all*, but rather that their ability to do so is diminished.

These considerations imply that cognitive empathy is a necessary feature of morality, since one cannot form proper moral motives without engaging in perspective-taking. What of emotional empathy? This argument is more difficult, since it might seem that I can still have the proper motives and perform the morally correct actions without having to feel the same things others feel. The fact that I lack empathy does not imply that I lack emotional responses, only that my emotional responses do not match others. When I engage in perspective-taking, it seems possible for me to imagine *that* someone will get angry without feeling anger myself, and I can feel sympathy *for* someone injured in a car accident without feeling pain *with* the suffering individual.

While this seems possible, there are difficulties, and I propose two arguments for the necessity of emotional empathy for the moral life. The first argument involves the idea of natural necessity: While *in theory* an organism can function as a moral agent and lack emotional empathy, in practice this is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. Normal human cognition is integrated with emotional processing, and when areas of the brain that integrate cognitive and emotional dimensions of decision-making are damaged, impaired judgment, including impaired moral judgment, follows (Anderson et al. 1999; Young et al. 2010). If individuals were separately impaired for emotional empathy, I suspect we would find a corresponding difficulty in making moral judgments. Because our emotions are prompted by implicit cognitive processes, they are 'snap judgments' about a situation, prompting immediate reaction. Without that capacity for snap judgment, including a

snap judgment about the emotion of another that involves the phenomenon of ‘feeling with,’ our processing takes more time and is more prone to error⁸.

This first argument includes conjectural elements, and would depend on how empirical evidence plays out. But a second argument, while more general, is stronger, and goes like this: A central feature of a good life, of a life worth living, is affiliation, the capacity to form deep and lasting relationships. But to have deep and lasting relationships requires the capacity for emotional empathy, to *feel with* one’s loved ones. Imagine a world where spouses, parents and friends did not engage in emotional empathy, where the parent could not feel joy with the child at her graduation, could only complement the child or, at best, feel joy at the same time, but only joy for oneself⁹. Such a world is qualitatively poorer; recognizing the good of affiliation entails recognizing the significance of emotional empathy for that good.

Nevertheless, some important recent objections have been made regarding empathy and morality. In a widely read article, Paul Bloom (2013) makes a twofold argument against an empathy based morality. First, he argues that empathy can often lead us astray, citing the example of ‘baby Jessica.’ In 1987, 18 month old Jessica McClure fell down a narrow well, and the more than two days it took to free her prompted a media frenzy and a flood of donations. While individual tragedies and those that are highly visual attract a great deal of attention, other tragedies that are just as – if not more – significant, such as the crisis in Darfur that began in 2003, get less attention. These anecdotes on the problematic partiality of empathy are supported by empirical research, and Bloom cites an experiment by Kogut and Ritov (2005) showing that subjects presented information on an individual child in most cases donate more than when shown information about a group of eight children. Secondly, he argues that individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome are able to function with a moral code even though they are deficient in empathic processing. So, according to Bloom, the fact that empathy is prone to partiality shows that empathy is not sufficient for morality, and the

8 Evolutionary considerations might support this. Why, after all, do we have the capacity for emotional empathy? Possibly emotional empathy is an adaptive sort of self-deception, but if emotional empathy has a function, it is plausible to think it is because it enables us to make better decisions, not worse ones.

9 Here, the distinction between fuller emotional empathy and emotional contagion is crucial; one might inadvertently feel happy at a graduation but not know why one is happy. It is crucial to the good of affiliation that one feels the joy of the graduate, not simply generic joy or one’s own joy. Empirical evidence for spousal emotional empathy is provided by Singer et al. (2004), who use fMRI to show that part of the pain matrix of a spouse’s brain activates when witnessing the other spouse receive a painful stimulus.

fact that Asberger's individuals can behave morally shows that it is not necessary. Jesse Prinz (2011) supports these arguments but also adds another: When it comes to moral motivation, he argues that empirical literature indicates that other emotions such as guilt and anger are stronger motivators for moral behavior, while empathy is relatively weak.

A basic problem with the arguments that Bloom and Prinz make is that they do not clearly distinguish between cognitive and emotional empathy, and this produces considerable ambiguity. Certainly, they are correct that empathy is not sufficient for moral behavior, and they are correct that empathy, perhaps especially emotional empathy, can lead us morally astray. But it is difficult to see how the capacity for cognitive empathy is not a requisite for effective moral decision-making and it is difficult to see how emotional empathy is not in practical terms necessary in a broader sense. Much hinges on their argument that individuals with Asberger's both lack empathy and have something like a fully functioning morality. But we should at best proceed cautiously here. Surely Asberger's individuals can and do function in society and are capable of following explicit moral norms. But their impairment is also relevant, affecting their capacity for moral judgment in important respects. In one study, individuals with high functioning autism were unable to clearly distinguish between accidental and intended harms (Moran et al. 2011). Similarly, we should be cautious about Prinz's argument that empathy is a weak motivator. Cognitive empathy likely plays some role in motivation, since it is crucial to perceiving moral situations correctly, but cognitive empathy is just as if not more important for determining which actions are appropriate once a moral situation is perceived. In the case of cognitive empathy, then, motivation is at best half the story. If we understand Prinz to be speaking of emotional empathy, his argument is potentially inconsistent, since he argues that (a) empathy is a strong motivator for bad moral behavior as well as (b) not a strong motive for good behavior. This is of course logically possible, but we should be suspicious. The experiments cited do not reveal how emotional empathy is bad *in toto* but rather how emotional empathy can go astray, especially in situations that occur at the borders of empathic concern. This is a real issue, but only serves to show why empathy is not *sufficient* for moral functioning, not why it is not necessary.

To summarize: I have so far argued for a eudaimonistic account of ethics that incorporates an understanding of the good of affiliation and the concept of an MMAR. These provide grounding for understanding the nature of our moral obligations, with implications for understanding political obligations as well. Further, I argued that both cognitive and emotional empathy

are integral to mature moral functioning. The question now arises: What role can and should empathy play in current debates about obligations to distant others?

3. Populations, Institutions, and MMARs

When we turn to matters of obligations and the state, we find ourselves faced with two kinds of problems. One concerns understanding how and to what extent we commit morally to compatriots, our fellow-citizens within the borders of the state. The second concerns our ability to commit across state borders. To most observers, the first problem, while significant, is a lesser one, and while philosophers may ponder the justification for commitments to the state and compatriots – social contract theories being a dominant approach – empirically it is clear that many peoples have little problem embracing such commitments. More troublesome are the obligations across nations. For contract theorists like Hobbes and Locke, the relation between nations *just is* the state of nature, revealing the claim that the concept is not a mere abstraction.

Peter Singer's (1972) essay on famine opened the contemporary philosophical debate on international moral obligations. In political philosophy, debate has centered on contrasting views of 'statism' versus 'cosmopolitanism.' For statists, we only have duties of humanitarian concern to those outside our borders. As a result, justice, especially distributive justice, can only occur within state borders. For John Rawls, this is based on the different kind of social contract arrangements that ought to apply within a people and across peoples. For Thomas Nagel, it is because the requirements of justice emerge as a result of our mutual coercion enforced on one another through the state (Rawls 1971, 1999; Nagel 2005). Cosmopolitans reject this, and while cosmopolitans are diverse, they are held together by the conviction that moral and political obligations across nations involve more than national self-interest and the occasional act of humanitarian aid. For the cosmopolitan, justice applies across nations, often based either on a concept of universal rights or on a modification of Rawls' social contract approach (Shue 1996; Pogge 2002; Brock 2009).

In section 1a), I argued that an MMAR would in fact believe that we have duties and obligations not just to compatriots but also to non-compatriots, and that this realization arises out of (a) the development of critical and emotional capacities, including sympathy and empathy, that apply not only to affiliates but also to non-affiliates, and (b) the positive valuing of new

and more extensive affiliative networks. Given this, the limit of obligations by the statist to those of extreme humanitarian concern seems implausible to the MMAR. Given the commitments of an MMAR, a better world is one where not only oneself but others flourish as well, including distant others. A world where some live in abundance beyond measure and others eke by is a world that has not yet met its potential, and it is incumbent upon those living in abundance to use it well.

How this is to be done leaves out a great many details, including questions of how to balance obligations to affiliates, compatriots, and non-compatriot non-affiliates. Here, I wish to focus on a challenge that may arise due to perceived limits of empathic abilities. Statists sometimes imply that human beings simply have a natural limit to their capacity for empathy, and because of this it is unrealistic to expect people to have genuine concern for non-compatriots. This is what Adam Smith was arguing in the passage cited at the beginning of this article. It is just a fact of human nature that our willingness to act arises out of emotional responses, and if we are incapable of feeling strong emotions concerning the plights of distant others, we are incapable of acting even if we ought to.

Rawls (1999) himself makes an argument along this line:

It is the task of the statesman to struggle against the potential lack of affinity among different peoples and try to heal its causes insofar as they derive from past domestic injustices. . . . Since the affinity among peoples is naturally weaker (as a matter of human psychology) as society-wide institutions include a larger area and cultural distances increase, the statesman must continually combat these shortsighted tendencies (112).

Since Rawls is arguing only for humanitarian aid, the implication seems to be that the statesman [sic!] has the difficult task of motivating citizens to get to even *that* point, let alone stronger forms of international concern. As this passage indicates, a crucial factor for Rawls is what he envisions as the natural weakness of “affinity among peoples,” for which empathy ought to play a key role.

We find a similar line of argument by David Miller. Like Rawls, Miller does not mention empathy specifically, but in *On Nationality* (1997) he argues on behalf of nationalism and ethical particularism based on our abilities and inabilities to form affiliative ties. Nationality for Miller emerges out of a sense of identity that is sourced in mutual obligations, relations, and shared history. Such identity is presumably underwritten by our capacity for empathy, in this case perhaps especially emotional empathy. Miller further grounds this as a natural capacity and limitation by appealing to Hume in a crucial footnote (1997, 58).

As presented so far, these arguments are quite loose, and neither Rawls nor Miller develop their foundations at length. Further, it is easy to imagine that there exists a stronger and weaker version of each argument. The weaker version would claim that all people are by nature limited in their empathic capacities in the way that Smith outlined, and it is because of this that no obligations stronger than humanitarian assistance can be required. But the premise of this argument is obviously false, since individuals exist who are so motivated and devote considerable time, effort, and money to that end. The stronger version of the argument would thus acknowledge that such individuals exist, but then argue further that such individuals are only a small fraction of any population. More precisely, such individuals are *necessarily* a small fraction of the population. But why think this?

Here the literature on cooperation and empathy has potential significance, and the statist can appeal to the kind of empirical research cited by Bloom and Prinz. A study by Mitchell, Macrae, and Banaji (2006) indicates that individuals reflecting on the decisions of others engage brain areas associated with simulation/empathy only when the other is perceived to be like them. An experiment by de Dreu et al. (2011) indicates that heightened levels of oxytocin increase in-group affiliation and out-group hostility. And there are theoretical reasons to think that our capacity for empathy and affiliation may have limits. On a group selectionist account, it is argued that we would expect the development of strong affiliation with in-group members, including the ability to emotionally empathize with them, but group selection does not support such out-group identification, and may even militate against it (Sober and Wilson 1998). More empirical work is needed, but we see the plausible line of argument that the statist can make supporting Smith and Hume: We are by nature limited in our capacity for both cognitive and emotional empathy, and so we should not expect individuals to identify strongly enough with distant others to promote anything more than humanitarian aid.

How might the cosmopolitan respond to this? Recall the argument in section 1a) that empathy is not simply innate but also learned. The statist might reply that even if this is so, there is a limit, and that limit lies at the boundary of our affiliative and national commitments. But we should now be suspicious of this claim. To begin with, there is a *prima facie* problem with inferring claims about human nature from the kind of empirical research cited, since the fact that a behavior is widespread does not by itself make it biologically innate: That we all believe that the sun rises in the east does not by itself imply that we are genetically predetermined to do so. While studies of children lend plausibility to the innateness scenario, it is still difficult

to disentangle the respective roles of culture and biology. Further, there is ample evidence that (a) people vary considerably on self-report scales of empathy (Keysers 2011) and (b) that culture plays a significant role in how and to what extent individuals are willing to play by moral rules and cooperate. In the case of the latter, I cite but two examples. In a series of well-known cross cultural studies, Joseph Henrich et al. (2000, 2006, 2010) found considerable cultural variability in subject's altruism, willingness to punish, and willingness to accept unfair offers in the ultimatum game. Similarly, a study by Benedikt Herrmann and colleagues (2008) shows significant cultural variability was also found among different European nationals playing a public goods game when subjects were given the opportunity to punish 'cheaters' and when given the opportunity to punish the punishers (labeled as 'anti-social punishment').

The researches of Henrich and Herrmann do not test for empathy in either of its forms, but they give us a hint of what direction empirical empathy research might go. On the statist account, we should not expect populations to support more than humanitarian assistance because of natural limits of our ability to empathize with others. As the work by Henrich demonstrates, our conceptions of fairness and our willingness to support a conception of the common good are culturally variable¹⁰. But since morally based cooperation requires the presence of both properly trained cognitive and emotional empathy, we should expect that these abilities can not only be learned, but that they can be learned by many. This is not to say that such a learning process is easy or automatic, and the literature that the statist is able to cite is a reminder of this. But what it does indicate is that moral learning is not simply an individual process but a cultural one, requiring the building of communities that form networks of support to rising generations.

In *Political Emotions*, Martha Nussbaum (2013) develops a number of proposals for developing such networks of citizenry. Some of her proposals are plausible. Following Kant, Nussbaum recognizes the human capacity for radical evil, and sees this capacity as something that is a nearly inevitable aspect of development to be addressed. Those emotions which are politically problematic, such as disgust when applied socially, need to be tamped down in development, while other emotions need proper nourishment and cultivation. Contrary to some cosmopolitans, Nussbaum sees patriotism in the sense of love of country as having a valuable role if cultivated properly.

¹⁰ But, I should add, not absolutely so. For instance, in Henrich's cross-cultural study of individuals playing the ultimatum game, which involves an offer by one player to split money and a decision by the second player to accept the offer or refuse it with the result that neither player receives any money, no population accepted worse than a 75/25 split.

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Nussbaum also gives a prominent place to liberal arts education, especially to the role of literature and theater in developing better and appropriate skills of empathy.

Although not all of Nussbaum's proposals are equally promising, I highlight them as paths that are worthwhile to pursue and which also are deserving of more empirical research¹¹. We have at this point a strong sense of our capacity for cognitive and emotional empathy and some of the ways in which our capacity for empathy can be misapplied. But we have much less sense of why and how differences in levels of empathy occur, let alone how proper skills of empathy, to empathize in the right way, in the right amount, at the right time, are best developed. These are yet important paths to explore.

4. Conclusion

Although critics argue that empathy is neither necessary nor sufficient for morality, and although statisticians imply that psychological limitations of the kind that would be based in empathy prevent the realization of commitments to distant others beyond humanitarian aid, I have argued that both these views are incorrect. While the possession of cognitive and emotional empathy is clearly not sufficient for being moral, the requirement for cognitive empathy arises out of a proper understanding of moral functioning, and the need for emotional empathy arises out of a natural necessity due to the kind of affiliative, biological creatures that we are. Since our capacities for cognitive and emotional empathy are not simply innately given but capable of being shaped by processes of learning and culture, statist arguments against stronger moral obligations across nations are poorly founded. Support for statism, if there is such, must come from elsewhere.

What this might imply for variations of cosmopolitanism would need further development. One can hold cosmopolitan principles while endorsing the current global system of states and institutions, but cosmopolitans such as Brock argue for the need for stronger global governance structures, and some even for global government. While it is possible that a better understanding of empathy could play a role in assessing the desirability of these alternatives, it is likely that other factors, including historical/pragmatic ones, will play a more important role. A further question is whether

¹¹ For instance, Nussbaum analyzes the use by the Roosevelt administration of photography and specific photographic techniques to create positive emotions of empathy and sympathy. While the ends may have been laudible, such methods by themselves do not create MMARs and can instead serve as tools of political manipulation.

empathy can be linked more specifically to forms of government. Nussbaum's treatment of empathy and the treatment here suggest that a properly developed capacity for empathy is at least a civic virtue. But the civic virtue of empathy can exist in both democratic and non-democratic polities. Does properly developed empathy move one towards sympathetic identification with democratic rather than nondemocratic forms of government and governance? Plausibly it does, since to respect others *as others* is to desire the flourishing of others and not just oneself, and this would include a desire to see others fulfill their own political expression. The consideration of empathy as a virtue, indeed a *democratic* virtue, to be nurtured and cultivated, is thus worthy of further exploration.

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