

Wojciech Załuski

Jagiellonian University in Kraków

On Three Types of Empathy: the Perfect, the Truncated, and the Contaminated

Introduction

Empathy is a strongly ambiguous concept which refers to various psychological phenomena. These phenomena must be carefully distinguished, and thereby the concept of empathy must be clarified, before making an attempt to tackle the following two (arguably crucial) philosophical questions concerning empathy: viz. about the ethical value of empathy and the possibility of constructing the ethics of empathy. The main goal of this paper is conceptual: it will aim at clarifying the concept of empathy by distinguishing its three types, viz. the perfect, the truncated empathy, and the contaminated. The distinction between the three types of empathy proposed in this paper draws on or is built upon the classical distinction between cognitive and affective empathy¹ and on the analysis, made both by philosophers and psychologists, of various forms of pseudo-empathy. However, this additional distinction may be, as I hope to show, useful, especially while tackling the two afore-mentioned philosophical problems connected with empathy; I shall argue that the conceptual analysis of empathy implies to a large degree the answers to these problems. While presenting the three types of empathy, I shall also try to develop, by showing its various intricacies, the concept of cognitive

Wojciech Załuski – prof. dr hab., filozof i prawnik, specjalizuje się w etyce i filozofii prawa; pracuje w Katedrze Filozofii Prawa i Etyki Prawniczej na Wydziale Prawa i Administracji UJ.

¹ Cf., e.g., S. Baron-Cohen, *The Science of Evil. On Empathy and the Origins of Cruelty*, New York 2011.

empathy (which is usually defined simply as the capacity to understand what emotion is experienced by the other person).

1. Perfect Empathy

I shall understand perfect empathy as the combination of three elements, viz.: cognitive empathy, affective empathy, and the tendency to take empathic actions. Let me discuss them successively.

(A) Cognitive empathy, *in its full-fledged form*, is the capacity for a *comprehensive and ethically proper* understanding of other people's emotions. It should be stressed that cognitive empathy may, in particular cases, be confined to understanding the other persons' *reasons for* emotions, not the emotions themselves, since the reasons for a given emotion may fail to generate the emotion itself. To give an example: a person who suffered from the loss of reason "laughs and sings perhaps, and is altogether insensible of his misery,"² but the proper reaction to the loss of reason would be sorrow. The above account of cognitive empathy (as confined to the task of a comprehensive and ethically proper understanding of the other persons' emotions) should be distinguished from the account according to which cognitive empathy is the ability to assume the other persons' "overall" perspective, combined with the willingness (motivated by respect for these persons) to assume such a perspective. By an "overall" perspective I mean the other persons' values, goals, moral and religious views. This form of cognitive empathy, called sometimes "projective empathy," is *an autonomous ethical capacity*, which is different from cognitive empathy as targeted at the other person's emotions. Without projective empathy one would not be able to respect the other person's values, goals, moral and religious views, if they were different from one's own. It is therefore strictly connected with such virtues as tolerance and leniency. Of course, there may exist empirical links between both forms of cognitive empathy: they may share to some extent neuronal bases and/or they may strengthen each

² A. Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, New York 2007, p. 13.

other (the possession of one type of cognitive empathy may increase the chance of acquiring the other). In the remainder of my paper, however, I shall not deal with projective empathy, as it is not directly connected to the problem of emotions. I shall now pass to the discussion of the two remaining elements of perfect empathy.

(B) An important fact about cognitive empathy is that it becomes ethically valuable only when it is coupled with affective empathy. Affective empathy, in its full-fledged form, is the tendency to emotionally respond to other people's emotions *in an ethically proper way*, which means that it implies cognitive empathy.³ The above – full-fledged – forms of cognitive and affective empathy should be distinguished from their simple forms, meaning only, respectively, an understanding of the other person's emotions and responding to these emotions by similar emotions (sorrow to sorrow, joy to joy).

(C) The empathic action tendency is the tendency to undertake an ethically proper action (e.g., helping or consoling) as a result of the emotional response to the other people's emotions.

The phrase “ethically proper,” which occurs in the above definitions of the constituent parts of perfect empathy, implies that *perfect empathy is not a free-standing ethical capacity*. An understanding of the other person's emotion is only partial, and may be distorted, if it does not include the knowledge of the causes of the emotion. For instance, the sorrow of the agent who experiences this emotion because of the loss of the beloved person is essentially different from the sorrow of an agent who experiences it because of the success of his or her enemy. One can therefore speak about the true understanding of the other person's emotion only if one knows its causes and, additionally, is capable of distinguishing between the justifying causes (i.e., reasons) and the non-justifying causes of a given emotion. As was mentioned earlier, the understanding may

³ Cognitive empathy is sometimes called “empathy” *tout court*, while affective empathy is called “sympathy;” the former is “feeling someone's pain” (or pleasure), the latter “feeling *for* someone who is in pain” (or rejoicing with someone who is joyous); cf. M. Slote, *The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, London–New York 2007, p. 13.

be confined only to the reasons for an emotion, if the person, unaware of these reasons, does not experience the emotion itself. Affective empathy, in turn, will be ethically proper if it means responding by sorrow to other person's justified sorrow, by joy to the other person's justified joy, and by indifference or sorrow to the other person's unjustified sorrow or unjustified joy (the sorrow of the empathic person would not be caused in this case by the other person's emotion as such but by the fact that the other person reacts emotionally in a morally inadequate way). Clearly, affective empathy may also be an emotional response only to the other person's situation justifying a given emotion, if this person is not (fully) aware of this situation and thereby does not feel the appropriate emotion. The above, rather abstract account, can be illustrated by an example of compassion, i.e., empathy directed at another person's suffering. I shall assume that perfect empathy is similar to emotions in that it has three components, viz: a belief that another person experiences a given emotion to a degree d ; an evaluation of this emotion (whether it is justifiable or not); and a feeling.⁴ Clearly, belief and evaluation refer to cognitive empathy and feeling to affective empathy. Now, a belief may be assessed as true or false, an evaluation may be assessed as correct or incorrect, and feeling may be assessed as adequate or inadequate and proportionate or disproportionate (to an evaluation). It follows from the above that cognitive empathy is defective if the belief is false or the evaluation is incorrect, and affective empathy is defective if the feeling is inadequate to the evaluation (of different "sign" than the evaluation) or disproportionate to evaluation (exceedingly intense or not sufficiently intense). Now, for compassion to be justified, two conditions must be fulfilled: the seriousness of suffering and un-deservedness of suffering (i.e., the person did not bring suffering on himself and the suffering is

⁴ These three elements were treated by Robert Nozick (*The Examined Life: Philosophical Meditations*, New York 1990, p. 87–98) as components of emotions, but, arguably, they can be regarded also as components of empathy. Indeed, the borderline between empathy and emotions is not clear; one may also argue that empathy is a capacity for experiencing second-level emotions, i.e., emotions whose objects are emotions of other persons.

not a justified punishment for his wrongful action).⁵ Thus, *B*'s compassion with *A*'s suffering is defective if and only if *B*'s belief "*A* suffers to a degree *d*" is false, or *B*'s evaluation "*A*'s suffering is undeserved" is false, or *B*'s feeling (of sorrow) is inadequate or disproportionate to *B*'s evaluation. Of course, compassion may be defective also in one more way: if it leads to an ethically improper action.

Undoubtedly, perfect empathy is a highly desirable moral capacity, since it combines an emotional sensitivity to the other persons' emotional states with the acute awareness of moral rules. It turns out, however, that it is not possible to build an ethics of empathy, because, by definition, perfect empathy is not a free-standing, independent moral capacity; it implies a sense of justice, or more generally, the knowledge of moral rules, which specify in what circumstances an emotion of sorrow or joy is justifiable, and what action is ethically appropriate in a given situation. Thus, the perspectives for constructing an ethics of empathy are very dim.⁶ Empathy, if it were to mean only an understanding of the

⁵ In my analysis of compassion I draw on Martha Nussbaum's account of compassion (cf. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 304–327), but my focus is different. Nussbaum provides empirical conditions of compassion (i.e., conditions under which compassions is likely to be felt), while my analysis is focused on normative conditions of compassion, i.e. conditions specifying when compassion is justified). Nussbaum mentions two other (empirical) conditions of compassion: eudaimonistic judgment (that "the person is a significant element in my scheme of goals and projects, an end whose good is to be promoted"), and the judgment of similarity (the person must be similar to me if I am to feel compassion towards him or her). It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyze whether these two conditions are really necessary for compassion to be felt. I shall also not analyze if the two normative conditions (the seriousness of suffering and the non-deservedness of suffering) are necessary for compassion (in that case – normatively unjustified) to be felt.

⁶ An attempt to construct such ethics was made by Michael Slote (*The Ethics of Care and Empathy*, op. cit.), and earlier by Adam Smith (*Theory of Moral Sentiments*, New York 2007). The ways of constructing ethics of empathy, however, are different in both cases. Slote's version relies on the assumption that an action is morally right iff it is an expression of a fully developed empathic concern for the other person, while Smith's – on the assumption (based on the distinction between the propriety of an emotion and the merit of an emotion) that an action is morally proper iff it is motivated by an emotion that could be sympathized with by an impartial spectator, and it is morally meritorious iff it arouses feelings of gratitude to its beneficiary that could be sympathized with by an impartial spectator. The arguments against ethics of empathy invoked in this paper apply to both versions.

other person's emotions, responding to these emotions by similar emotions (sorrow to sorrow, joy to joy) and undertaking an empathic action, would in many cases result in well-intentioned but morally improper actions. Furthermore, assume that at some time *t* we feel empathy towards two suffering persons, but we can help only one of them. The question as to which of these persons should receive our help cannot be decided by empathy alone, unless we assume a criterion that the 'strength' of our empathy should decide. But this criterion is indefensible, since the strength of our empathy is very often dependent on morally irrelevant considerations (race, sex, religion, etc.). Therefore ethics of empathy cannot be free-standing; it requires additionally a set of rules prescribing when, in what circumstance, towards whom empathy is demanded, what actions should be taken as a result of the empathic response to the other persons' feelings, and how to decide conflicts of empathic impulses.⁷ Two additional remarks may be proper here. *Firstly*, it follows from the above analysis that the ethics of *perfect* empathy might arguably be a plausible ethics, but it would not be a pure ethics of empathy, because the very concept of perfect empathy, as defined in this paper, is a normative one, i.e., it implies a set of moral rules. *Secondly*, it is clear that perfect empathy is not necessary for moral action: one can easily imagine a non-empathic agent strictly following moral rules and thereby undertaking moral actions. But it must be admitted that perfect empathy provides an especially strong motivation to undertake moral actions. Furthermore, if one were to provide an agent-based, not an action-based moral evaluation of agents undertaking moral actions, then the evaluation of a perfectly empathic agent would undoubtedly be higher than that of a non-empathic follower of moral rules.

⁷ That ethics of empathy cannot be built was the thesis held also by Max Scheler; Scheler (*Istota i formy sympatii*, transl. A. Węgrzecki, Warszawa 1980, p. 234–253) stressed that for empathy (or sympathy – the term he used) to have ethical value, it must be empathy with emotions *deserving* empathy, and in order to distinguish the emotions deserving empathy from those undeserving it we must have a prior (independent of empathy itself) conception of justice, blame, responsibility. From the psychological perspective, the limits of ethics of empathy have been insightfully described by Martin Hoffman (*Empatia i rozwój moralny*, transl. O. Waśkiewicz, Gdańsk 2006, Ch. 8).

2. Truncated Empathy

Truncated empathy lacks one of the free elements of perfect empathy, or contains one or more of them but only in an truncated form. Truncated empathy may therefore take various forms, ranging from those which are morally reprehensible, to those which are morally commendable. The morally reprehensible form of truncated empathy is the combination of cognitive empathy with the absence of affective empathy, i.e., the combination of the capacity to recognize the other person's emotions with the incapacity to react to them. This kind of combination is characteristic for psychopaths, though, arguably, is not sufficient for creating a psychopathic personality. As Simon Baron-Cohen⁸ notes, the psychopath, apart from displaying this combination, must be, *additionally*, "morally negative," which implies that the combination of cognitive empathy with the absence of affective empathy is, by itself, not sufficient for generating a psychopathic personality; for this personality to arise, some kind of profound indifference to moral rules or to other persons' well-being is needed. This indifference to other persons can be described in Martin Buber's terms as the tendency to treat other persons as things – to replace the personal relation based on "Du" with the impersonal relation based on "Es"⁹ (of course, this is still not an explanation of this tendency but pointing at its different aspect). The morally commendable form of truncated empathy consists of cognitive empathy and affective empathy in their simple form (i.e., not supported by moral rules). Clearly, this combination is desirable: a person who displays these two forms of empathy exhibits sensitivity to the other person's feelings, and this sensitivity is valuable in itself. But, as mentioned above, this kind of sensitivity, if unsupported by the knowledge of moral rules and the motivation to analyze the causes of the other person's emotions, is likely to lead to morally improper actions if the other person's emotions are unjustified (if, e.g., the person empathized with feels sorrow for immoral reasons).

⁸ S. Baron-Cohen, *The Science of Evil...*, op. cit., p. 154.

⁹ Cf. M. Buber, *Je et tu*, transl. G. Bianquis, Paris 2012.

3. Contaminated Empathy

Contaminated empathy arises by admixing one of the following four amoral or non-moral elements to perfect empathy, viz.

(a) *the feeling of relief*, i.e., thankfulness at the contrast between our fortune and the sufferer's misfortune;

(b) *the feeling of anxiety* about our own good future arising at the sight of the sufferer's misfortune;

(c) *the feeling of superiority* over the other person (i.e. *pity*);

(d) and *the personal distress*: the unpleasant feeling, arising at the sight of the sufferer's sorrow, caused by the very picture of suffering rather than by anxiety about one's own good fortune.

It is to be emphasized that all the four motives contaminating perfect empathy are self-regarding – they have as their ultimate end the well-being of the agent, not the interests of the other person. They can also function as free-standing motives, in which case they can be regarded as various forms of, what may be called, *pseudo-empathy*.¹⁰ The first two of these motives were analyzed by Samuel Butler in *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel*, in his famous polemics with Hobbes's definition of pity as “fear felt for oneself at the sight of another's distress.” The polemics was nicely summarized by Charlie Dunbar Broad in the following passage:

He [Butler] points out (a) that, on this definition, a sympathetic man is *ipso facto* a man who is nervous about his own safety, and the more sympathetic he is the more cowardly he will be. This is obviously contrary to fact. (b) We admire people for being sympathetic to distress; we have not the least tendency to admire them for being nervously anxious about their own safety. If Hobbes were right admiration for sympathy would involve admiration for timidity. (c) Hobbes mentions the fact

¹⁰ One could, following Scheler (*Istota i formy sympatii*, op. cit.), distinguish one more form of pseudo-empathy – *Ansteckung* (emotional contagion), but this form would essentially differ from the previous ones, as emotional contagion does not seem self-regarding (though it is not other-regarding either).

that we tend specially to sympathise with the troubles of our friends, and he tries to account for it. But, on Hobbes's definition, this would mean that we feel particularly nervous for ourselves when we see a friend in distress. Now, in the first place, it may be doubted whether we do feel any more nervous for ourselves when we see a friend in distress than when we see a stranger in the same situation. On the other hand, it is quite certain that we do feel more sympathy for the distress of a friend than for that of a stranger. Hence it is impossible that sympathy can be what Hobbes says that it is. Butler himself holds that when we see a man in distress our state of mind may be a mixture of three states. One is genuine sympathy, i.e., a direct impulse to relieve his pain. Another is thankfulness at the contrast between our good fortune and his ill luck. A third is the feeling of anxiety about our own future described by Hobbes. These three may be present in varying proportions, and some of them may be wholly absent in a particular case. But it is only the first that any plain man means by "sympathy" or "pity."¹¹

At the end of this passage Broad treats "sympathy" (or compassion) and "pity" as identical. But there are good reasons to treat them as distinct. The distinction was neatly made by Philip Mercer¹² and recalled by David E. Cartwright¹³. Compassion, corresponding to what I have called "perfect empathy," is an altruistic – *other-regarding* – virtue having as its ultimate aim the well-being of the other person. Pity, by contrast, is egoistic – *self-regarding*: it is expressive of contempt towards the other person and aims at heightening one's self-esteem and the feeling of one's power. It embraces cognitive empathy but it lacks affective empathy: there is no feeling of sorrow at the other person's suffering or, at best, the feeling of sorrow is mixed with the joy at the possibility of increasing one's self-esteem and the feeling of one's power. Cartwright characterizes it in the following way:

¹¹ C. B. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory*, London 1930, p. 53, <http://www.ditext.com/broad/ftet/ftet.html> (20.06.2017).

¹² P. Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics*, Oxford 1972, p. 18.

¹³ D. E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity*, "Schopenhauer Jahrbuch" 69 (1988), p. 557–567.

the pitier is superior in status to the pitied. We do not pity those we respect or those we judge superior to ourselves – unless we wish to level them by devaluing their status [...] By pitying them, I elevate myself. I boost my feelings of self-esteem by exercising my pity I boost my feelings of self-esteem by exercising my pity. The same is true when I pity someone who is suffering. [...] The sufferer is helped, but helped in order to enhance my feelings of superiority. In these regards, pity is self-regarding. If we have general duties to respect other, pity incites their violations. If the moral goodness of beneficence is due to a desire to pursue another's well-being, the help rendered out of pity is not morally good.¹⁴

Pity is not morally good because it does not lead to “acts of beneficence for the right sorts of reasons.”¹⁵

All of the four forms of pseudo-empathy were recognized and described with great clarity by Nietzsche. To give some examples: he wrote in *Daybreak* that we may be attracted to sufferers

to present ourselves as the more powerful and as a helper, if we are certain of applause, if we want to feel how fortunate we are in contrast, or hope that the sight will relieve our boredom [...] and if we encounter sufferers, we might render aid because the other's suffering [...] offends us; it would make us aware of our impotence, and perhaps, of our cowardice, if we did not go to assist him. Or it brings with it a diminution of our honour in the eyes of the others or in our own eyes.¹⁶

In the same book he insightfully described the inner mechanism of pity: “To offer pity (*Mitleid*) is as good as offering contempt;”¹⁷ and: “There is something degrading in suffering and something elevating and productive of superiority in pitying (*im Mitleiden*).”¹⁸ Similar remarks were made in the “*Von den Mitleidigen*” section from the second book of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In *The Gay Science*, in turn, he wrote as follows:

¹⁴ D. E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity*, op. cit., p. 559.

¹⁵ D. E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity*, op. cit., p. 560.

¹⁶ F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, transl. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1982, paragraph 133.

¹⁷ F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, op. cit., paragraph 135.

¹⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, op. cit., paragraph 138.

When we see somebody suffer, we like to exploit this opportunity to take possession of him; those who become his benefactors and pity him, for example, do this and call the lust for a new possession that he awakens in them “love;” and the pleasure they feel is comparable to that aroused by the prospect of a new conquest;¹⁹

and also:

Pity (*Mitleid*) is the most agreeable feeling among those who have little pride and no prospect of great conquests; for them easy prey – and that is what all who suffer are – is enchanting. Pity (*Mitleid*) is praised as the virtue of prostitutes.²⁰

Cartwright comments on this last – famous – fragment in the following manner:

Someone who is suffering stands in great need of help and is more than willing to accept our aid. Thus it is easy to benefit them. It is far more difficult to benefit someone who is faring well, since they are less disposed to accept our help. Its accomplishment, however, is a greater expression of power and, as such, is something to take pride in accomplishing.²¹

In his paper devoted to the Nietzschean critique of *Mitleid* Cartwright argues that Nietzsche failed to notice two sense of *Mitleid*, which can be rendered into English as “compassion” and “pity.” According to Cartwright, Nietzsche was right in so far as his critique of *Mitleid* was a critique of pity, but he was wrong in two points: in failing to notice that there is a different, ethically commendable type of *Mitleid*, viz. compassion; and in assuming that Schopenhauer and Christianity understood *Mitleid* as pity. This opinion of Cartwright ought to be corrected only in one point: it is true that Nietzsche denied the existence of altruistic compassion, but he did not simply identify *Mitleid* with pity; he distinguished several different

¹⁹ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. W. Kaufmann, New York 1974, paragraph 14.

²⁰ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op. cit., paragraph 13.

²¹ D. E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity*, op. cit., p. 561.

forms of pseudo-empathy, pity being only one of them. Nietzsche's mistake was therefore to deny the existence of perfect – altruistic – empathy. I shall return to this last point in the “concluding remarks.”

4. Concluding Remarks

Let me summarize the main conceptual distinctions introduced in the paper:

1. *Perfect empathy* consists of ethically grounded cognitive empathy, ethically grounded affective empathy, and the tendency to undertake morally adequate actions as a result of affective empathy.

2. *Truncated empathy* appears if there is lacking one of the elements of perfect empathy, or if at least one of its elements is not supported by the clear knowledge of moral rules (i.e., is not ethically grounded, or a tendency to undertake actions is not guided by the clear knowledge of moral rules).

3. *Contaminated empathy* is perfect empathy combined with one of the four self-regarding motives: the feeling of relief that the other, not myself, is the victim of suffering; the anxiety about one's own future; the feeling of superiority (pity), or personal distress.

4. *Pseudo-empathy* appears if any of the four “contaminating” motives appears as a free-standing motive.

As mentioned above, it was a view of a number of philosophers, including Hobbes and Nietzsche, that perfect empathy does not exist; that in each empathic action one can always seek out some egoistic motive. But this view does not seem convincing; the common experience, the famous experiments on the empathy-altruism hypothesis made by C. D. Batson,²² and the strong philosophical arguments raised by Butler support

²² Batson's method of testing the hypothesis that empathy may be “other-oriented,” i.e., connected with the altruistic motivation, consisted in setting up such experiments which could eliminate the competing hypotheses. For instance, if an agent sees a person in pain and has the option of going away and thereby removing the suffering person from her view, and nonetheless helps this person, then it can hardly be assumed that she was motivated by personal distress (since, if she was, then the least costly method of removing the distress would be to go away). The fact that she did not

the view that perfect empathy does exist. Furthermore, as Cartwright aptly remarks (in the spirit of Butler's critique of psychological egoism defended by Hobbes),

simply showing that an agent may derive pleasure, relieve feelings of sorrow or grief, feel self-satisfied, or better about oneself for helping another, is not to show that the action is self-regarding. In the same regard, simply arguing that in one sense all interests are mine, in the sense that I possess them, does not show that this is a self-regarding interest. What he had to show was that the end of the action was the agent's pleasure, feelings of self-esteem or superiority.²³

Thus, Nietzsche could have not proved that the agent can never have the other person's well-being as its end. What he was able to prove was that in many cases of purported altruistic empathy a different – egoistic – motivation may in fact be operating. But one must concede that there is some reason in Nietzsche's claim: it seems that perfect empathy rarely or never appears in an uncontaminated form. But, let me repeat, Nietzsche believed that perfect empathy never exists, even in a contaminated form; he believed that all forms of empathy are at bottom egoistic, i.e., are forms of pseudo-empathy. This is an extreme and implausible view.

Finally, let me recall the two ethical conclusions that flow from my considerations. The first one concerns the value of empathy as a moral motive. Empathy is a valuable moral motive if it takes the form of perfect empathy, which combines an emotional sensitivity to the other persons' emotional states with the acute awareness of moral rules. Furthermore, this motive is *particularly precious*: arguably, most of us would prefer to be helped by a person motivated by this kind of

go away does not yet prove that she was motivated by the "other-oriented" (i.e. altruistic – perfect) empathy because one can conjure up other explanations of her altruistic action, but this fact increases the probability of the empathy-altruism hypothesis. This probability further increases when, by means of analogous experiments (which Batson conducted), other hypotheses competing with the empathy-altruism hypothesis are eliminated. Cf. C. D. Batson, *The Altruism Question: Toward A Social-Psychological Answer*, New York 1991.

²³ D. E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer's Compassion and Nietzsche's Pity*, op. cit., p. 564.

motive than by any other kind of motive (and especially, by the Kantian motive of acting for the sake of duty). However, the other types of empathy (truncated and contaminated) as well as pseudo-empathy are either morally dubious (as they are not based on a clear awareness of moral rules) or simply morally wrong (if the element of selfishness is prominent, as it is, for instance, in the case of personal distress). The second conclusion concerns the possibility of constructing the ethics of empathy. As already mentioned, the ethics of empathy cannot be built without recourse to moral rules, specifying when empathy is to be felt, what actions it should lead to, and how to decide conflicts of empathic impulses; thus, the ethics of empathy cannot be free-standing, which amounts to saying that there cannot exist this kind of ethics as ethics *sui generis*.

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Abstract

On Three Types of Empathy: the Perfect, the Truncated, and the Contaminated

In the paper a distinction is made between perfect empathy, truncated empathy, and contaminated empathy. Perfect empathy is defined as the combination of three elements: cognitive empathy (the capacity for a comprehensive and ethically proper understanding of other people's emotions), affective empathy (the tendency to emotionally respond to other people's emotions in an adequate way: sorrow to sorrow, and joy to joy), and a tendency to undertake an ethically proper action (e.g., to relieve the sufferer's pain) as a result of the emotional response to other people's emotions. The phrase 'ethically proper' in the above definitions shows that perfect empathy is not a free-standing ethical capacity. An empathic emotional reaction and empathic action are justified only if they are based on the comprehensive and the ethically proper understanding of the other person's emotion, i.e., the understanding which enables one to assess whether this emotion is justified by its causes. But such an understanding is impossible without a sense of justice, or more generally, without the knowledge of ethical rules which say in what circumstances an emotion of sorrow or joy is justifiable, and, additionally, what action is ethically proper in a given situation. Truncated empathy, which may take various forms, lacks one of the free elements of perfect empathy. Finally, contaminated empathy arises by admixing one of the four following amoral or non-moral elements to perfect or truncated empathy, namely: thankfulness at the contrast between our fortune and the sufferer's misfortune; the feeling of anxiety, arising at the sight of the sufferer's misfortune, about our own good future; the unpleasant feeling of distress, arising at the sight of the sufferer's sorrow; or pity.

Keywords

affective empathy, cognitive empathy, empathic action, pseudo-empathy

Abstrakt

O trzech rodzajach empatii: pełnej, częściowej i skażonej

Celem artykułu jest wyróżnienie trzech rodzajów empatii: pełnej, częściowej i „skażonej” oraz zbadanie relacji między nimi. Empatia pełna obejmuje trzy składowe: empatię kognitywną (zdolność wszechstronnego i etycznie właściwego rozumienia cudzych emocji), afektywną (skłonność do adekwatnego reagowania na cudze emocje, tj. smutkiem na smutek i radością na radość) oraz skłonność do podejmowania etycznie właściwych – empatycznych – działań (np. zmierzających do uśmierzenia bólu osoby cierpiącej). Wyrażenie „etycznie właściwe” pojawiające się w powyższych definicjach pokazuje, że empatia pełna nie jest samoistną zdolnością etyczną. Empatia afektywna i empatyczne działanie są uzasadnione etycznie tylko wtedy, kiedy są oparte na empatii kognitywnej, w której definicję wpisana jest znajomość reguł etycznych, pozwalających stwierdzić (m.in.), kiedy smutek i radość drugiej osoby zasługują na reakcję empatyczną. Empatia częściowa występuje wtedy, kiedy brakuje jednego z trzech powyższych elementów składowych (może więc przybrać wiele różnych postaci). Wreszcie, z empatią skażoną mamy do czynienia wtedy, kiedy do empatii pełnej lub częściowej dochodzi jeden z następujących amoralnych lub pozamoralnych elementów: niepokój o własny dobrostan, dyskomfort pojawiający się wskutek obserwacji cierpienia drugiej osoby, poczucie ulgi czy zadowolenia z powodu kontrastu między sytuacją osoby cierpiącej i sytuacją własną.

Słowa kluczowe

empatia afektywna, empatia kognitywna, działanie empatyczne, pseudoempatia