Chapter 2
The Disambiguation of "Empathy": Affective and Cognitive Conceptions

2.1 Introduction

The question of the desirability, status, and, perhaps, the practicability of empathic responsiveness as a skill to be developed in the context of professional ethics education turns on what the words "empathy" and its derivatives mean in one's mouth. In everyday English, "empathy" connotes imaginative involvement in another person's experience of some form of suffering. Being touched or affected by it is also typically implied. That much is clear. Already departing from this usage, however, Murphy (1999), as we have seen, regarded empathy as merely perspicacity in understanding another person's perspective. While the ability to gain insight into others' feelings, beliefs, values, and desires is certainly a morally *relevant* competence insofar as facts about others' inner states are almost invariably relevant to moral problems, this skill is quite a different animal from the one Callahan (1980), Hilfiker (2001), and Coombs (1998) had in mind. These authors understood the psychological phenomenon in question less as a skill than as some kind of *faculty* that enables people to perceive morally salient features of a situation and to understand that moral problems demand attention and a judicious response. If Murphy is right, empathy is a non-moral merit which one could put to use indiscriminately for good or bad ends. If Callahan, Hilfiker, and Coombs' perceptive conception of empathy is on the right track, empathy appears to be a moral merit which, like justice, mercy, and benevolence, is oriented with apparent conceptual necessity, if at times imperfectly in practice, towards the realization of morally good ends. What, then, does "empathy" actually mean? This study aims to pursue this question but with an eye to answering another one which goes directly to the point of the broader purposes of this work: namely, is empathy a suitable label for that singular capacity to become mindful, through an imaginative act, of others' needs, feelings, desires, and threats to their weal and woe? It was this capacity, or something like it, that seemed quite plausibly basic to moral functioning and *ipso facto* crucial not to overlook in thinking about how to responsibly teach practical and professional ethics (cf. §1.2). The study will confirm, by way of an overview of the principal uses of the word in the philosophical and psychological literature, that "empathy" is a term badly in need of disambiguation; it is multifaceted,

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ambiguous, and therefore beguiling and, accordingly, there is no plain satisfactory answer to the question, “what is empathy?”. As for the second question, it will be argued that despite this confusing overlay of meaning, “empathy” carries imaginative, reflective, and intentional connotations which make the term attractive for our purposes but only on the condition that it carries the modifier “compassionate” as a bit of insurance against equivocation.

With another word, it might have been sufficient to save oneself the trouble of such a review and to content oneself to follow the time-honoured philosophical tradition to seek conceptual clarity through straightforward linguistic analysis of everyday use. Where a word has multiple discrete senses linguistic analysis can of course guard against equivocation. However, words whose use in ordinary language is erratic resist uncontroversial analyses. In these cases, linguistic analysis faces something of a paradox: it is either faithful to the word’s use and then falls short of achieving the purpose of analysis because it fails to yield clear distinctions, or if it does establish clear distinctions, it can only do so by stipulating them and then it is no longer linguistic *analysis* (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953/1992). “Empathy” is unquestionably a term that falls into the latter category. Neologisms are linguistic labels affixed to a concept with no prior name and they tend to be chosen because they seem, for whatever reason, to be an appropriate fit for the referent. This in itself is, of course, no necessary source of confusion; when a person says “I’m going to go check something on the web”, the risk of misunderstanding that he means to go investigate the cobwebs in the attic is minimal. The particular difficulty with “empathy”, however, is that it has been judged to be an appropriate neologism by some who had quite different ideas in mind. For the sake of keeping things straight, the following discussion will be framed following Sherman’s (1998) instructive distinction between two broad and to some degree overlapping notions of empathy. The first considers empathy principally as an affective psychological state. It includes “*Einfühlung*” (empathy) as it was used in nineteenth-century German aesthetics as well as empathy as it is understood in contemporary research in social and developmental psychology on pro-social behaviour, a conception of empathy that, as we will see, invites close comparison with the notion of sympathy in classical moral sense theory. The second class of empathy conceptions privileges cognition over affect and views empathy as an innate human faculty which enables one to be aware of others’ inner states. Therapeutic conceptions of empathy, particularly those developed by Heinz Kohut and Carl Rogers, clearly mirror this conception, as does the broad research programme in social cognition theory directed towards examining perspective-taking. Even though the term “empathy” as such is not used in Mead’s, Rawls’, and Habermas’ formulations of the moral point of view, it becomes clear that competency in the exercise of the faculty of vicarious introspection—empathy in the cognitive sense—is, on their views, a precondition of differentiated moral reasoning.

Before proceeding, a caveat. The use of the terms “affective” and “cognitive” to distinguish between the two broad forms of empathy considered here is not entirely felicitous. “Cognitive” classically refers to representational or predicative thinking and is held to stand in contrast with mental states that are “affective” or consisting

in emotions or feelings (and, additionally, with "conative" or mental states of desire) (cf., e.g., Dunlop, 1984). The tendency to view cognitive and affective states as somehow strictly dichotomous and mutually opposed rather than being merely analytic categories or, even worse, to assign qualitative priority to either type of mental states as "ways of knowing" (cf., e.g., Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Code, 1991; Jaggar, 1996; Longino, 1991) risks being projected onto the difference between the two forms of empathy to which the cognitive–affective empathy distinction draws attention. This would be an unfortunate misunderstanding. At the very least, empathy understood as affect or feeling as well as emotions generally have a cognitive dimension in virtue of being *intentional*—that is to say, they have object (e.g., a person) who has a certain property or properties (e.g., suffering) understood to be a component of the affective experience (e.g., empathy) (cf., e.g., de Sousa, 1987; van Dam & Steutel, 1996). Hence, empathy understood as an affective response to another person's situation, far from precluding those cognitive processes recruited in order to gain insight into another person's inner states or being a distinct mode of knowing different from cognitive perception, in fact presupposes them. In sum, the contrast between affective and cognitive conceptions of empathy does not point to rival conceptions vying for analytic or normative superiority but intends rather to draw attention to which dimension of a conception of empathy, the affective or the cognitive, seems to be predominant.

2.2 Affective Conceptions of Empathy

2.2.1 "Einfühlung" in Nineteenth-Century German Aesthetics

It is generally agreed that the psychology pioneer Edward Titchener introduced the word "empathy" into English (cf. Sherman, 1998; Verducci, 2000; Wispé, 1987). In the course of one of his renowned lectures, published as a compilation in 1909 titled *Experimental psychology in the thought processes*, Titchener refers to the work of the nineteenth-century German psychologist Theodor Lipps, rendering Lipps' term *Einfühlung* (literally "feeling in") as "empathy". Titchener's coinage of "empathy", as Sherman (1998, p. 83) and Wispé (1987, p. 21) note, drew on his knowledge of ancient Greek; Aristotle, for instance, used the term *empatheia* in the *Rhetoric* (1991) to suggest the feeling of being profoundly moved or touched.

Lipps himself did not coin the term "*Einfühlung*" but rather had purchased it second hand from one of his contemporaries in the field of aesthetics, specifically from the somewhat mystical writings of Robert Vischer on aesthetic experience. Starting from the observation that a typical aesthetic experience somehow involves an artistic medium *expressing* some familiar emotion or feeling—a "joyful" piece of music, a "sombre" painting, the coo of dove as "mournful", and so on—Vischer proposed that aesthetic experience involved the projection of the viewer's emotions onto or into the work of art. Today, this idea might seem platitudinous but the

suggestion that aesthetic experience was not purely perceptive but involved a kind of dialectic between perception and projection (and thus a certain blurring of the distinction between the perceiving subject and its object) was at that time groundbreaking (cf. Verducci, 2000, pp. 67–68). This "symbolic interjection of emotions into objective forms" (quoted in Verducci, 2000, p. 67) Vischer labelled "*Einfühlung*". As plausible as Vischer's obviously Kant-inspired basic insight might seem, he still had to explain the fact that it is generally regarded as being pleasant and worth seeking out, since there does not seem to be any *prima facie* reason to suppose that the projection of an emotion into an aesthetic object would be enjoyable in itself. In short, he found the solution to this problem in Romantic metaphysics. Vischer claimed that both the mechanism and the pleasure of aesthetic experience could be accounted for in terms of human beings' innate impulse towards unity and harmony with nature or, in their words, in "nothing other than the pantheistic urge for union with the world" (quoted in Verducci, 2000, p. 68).

Lipps' work on aesthetics appropriated Vischer's idea of a sort of aesthetic unity between the object and subject; like Vischer, Lipps held that the aesthetic object stirs certain feelings in the viewing subject, which are in turn projected back on the object such that they come to be perceived as properties of it (Lipps, 1903/1960; cf. Verducci, 2000, p. 68). However, Lipps rejected Vischer's pantheistic explanation of aesthetic pleasure and spontaneity in favour of the psychoanalytic idea of the ego. Aesthetic projection, he seems to have held, is an unconscious process whereby the imagination enlivens the aesthetic object with its own senses of striving, freedom, and power. Accordingly, aesthetic pleasure is the ego's enjoyment of its self expression. As Lipps put it, the cause of aesthetic enjoyment is "objectified enjoyment of the self" (Lipps, 1903/1960).

Whatever we wish to make of Lipps' now rather quaint-sounding hypothesis concerning the mechanism behind aesthetic enjoyment, the important thing is that "*Einfühlung*" was Lipps' and Vischer's neologism for the unmistakeably modern idea that the meaning of aesthetic objects stems in large part from the imaginative involvement of the subject's feelings with the object, an idea that Lipps quickly extended to the comprehension of the consciousness and experiences of other persons.

2.2.2 Pro-social Behaviour Research: Empathy as Affective Matching

For over 30 years, a research programme exploring connections between empathy and what is broadly labelled positive social behaviour has been apparent in social and developmental psychology. Its leading researchers include Nancy Eisenberg, Daniel Batson, Martin Hoffman, and Mark Davis. A central concern of these psychologist has been to accumulate empirical evidence in support of the claim that empathy amplifies motivation to perform pro-social and altruistic acts (see Eisenberg & Miller, 1987b; Batson, 1991; and Hoffman, 1981, 2000 for reviews) and related issues of whether empathic responding is innate or learned (e.g., Hoffman, 1981,

2000) and which circumstantial factors strengthen correlations between empathy and helping behaviours (e.g., Batson & Coke, 1981).

As Wispé (1986) argues, the term "empathy" in this context is something of a misnomer and the term is in fact used to refer to a constellation of emotional responses to another person's distress that is commonly referred to as "sympathy". Wispé argues that "empathy" should be reserved for a psychological process "whereby one person tries to understand accurately the subjectivity of another person, without prejudice" (1986, p. 320)—in other words, a faculty that will be discussed in §2.3 under the heading of "epistemological conceptions of empathy". By contrast, contemporary social psychology tends to admit a nominal distinction between empathy, sympathy, and possibly other affective states such as compassion and tenderness (cf. Batson et al., 1995) but then treat them all as just variations of the broad affective phenomenon they wish to consider. This constellation of empathic phenomena is then referred to in shorthand as "empathy". For example, in Eisenberg and Miller's 1987 review of empirical research on the association between empathy and helping the authors state that, while both empathy and sympathy are emotional responses somehow causally connected with the perception of another person's emotional state, empathy is characterized by a degree of *affective match* between the observer and the observed. Sympathy, they say, is instead characterized by a certain *congruence* between the feeling of the observer and the observed but without affective match as such. Understood in this sense, empathy is most commonly an experience associated with the enjoyment of narrative arts (cf., e.g., Sherman, 1989, p. 87). We see that circumstances have caused a character to feel frightened, anxious, or joyous and, vicariously placing ourselves in the character's position, we feel those emotions too. This conception of empathy as affective matching is evocatively captured in Titchener's 1915 definition:

> We have a natural tendency to feel ourselves into what we perceive or imagine. As we read about the forest, we may, as it were, become the explorer; we feel for ourselves the gloom, the silence, the humidity, the oppression, the sense of lurking danger; everything is strange, but it is to us that strange experience has come. […] This tendency to feel oneself into a situation is called EMPATHY. (Quoted in Wispé, 1987, p. 22)

In opposition to this kind of affective matching experienced by an empathizer—feeling roughly *the same way* that the object of empathy feels—a sympathizer, for his or her part, characteristically has emotions that are quite different from the emotional state of the observed. A case, say, where one reacts with indignation or sadness on hearing from a despondent friend that she has been unfairly dismissed from her job is according to this distinction an instance of sympathy not empathy because of the lack of affective matching: you feel indignant but your friend feels despondent (cf. Eisenberg & Strayer, 1987; Sober & Wilson, 1998). Because of the centrality of affective matching in empathy on Eisenberg and Miller's definition, the range of feelings of the empathizer may have has no limits; one may with as much coherence empathize with another's feelings of pride at another person's success or grief at another's loss. Sympathy, even in ordinary language, refers more narrowly to, in Eisenberg and Miller's words, "feelings of sorrow or concern for another's welfare" (1987a, p. 92; cf. Wispé, 1986; Nagel, 1970).

Despite this distinction in principle between empathy and sympathy, owing to the fact that the kind of helping behaviour that empathy research is interested in studying typically involves the relief of discomfort, danger, and other forms of distress, sympathy and negative empathy are treated as a single phenomenon. In order to allow for this conceptual range, Hoffman in more technical moments refers to "empathic distress", which he defines broadly as "the involvement of psychological processes that make a person have feelings that are more congruent with another's situation than with his own situation" connected with perceptions of others in states of "discomfort, pain, danger, or some other type of distress" (Hoffman, 2000, p. 30). But most frequently Hoffman, like his colleagues, refers to this constellation of feelings simply as "empathy".

When systematic inquiries, in psychology or elsewhere, borrow words from ordinary language in order to label key concepts, these words almost invariably take on ostensive definitions. Such shifts in meaning, as is well known, are typically a response to the need for clarity around the research question's central construct and in order to minimize variables for the sake of a study's manageability. The restricted coverage of "empathy" to feelings related to another's distress is less a limitation of the empirical study of positive social behaviour than it is a function of it.[1] And nor, it seems, is the fact that "empathy" is defined in helping behaviour research without reference to connation. Intuitively, of course, empathy understood as sympathy in the non-technical sense is not simply affective distress at another person's predicament; such distress seems analytically inseparable from a wish or desire to relieve it. Sympathy, in Wispé's (1986) words, seems best understood as not just awareness of another person's distress, but it is a kind of affective involvement "in the suffering of another person as *something to be relieved*" (p. 318, emphasis added). Nagel (1970) reached similar conclusions about sympathy and this feature of empathy is what Code (1994) has aptly referred to as empathy's "project directedness" (p. 83). Clearly, if pro-social and helping behaviour research were to adopt a definition of empathy, according to which it supposes a conative element, it would make a little point in their research, for the central question of whether empathy amplifies desire to help those in need would clearly be begged.

2.2.3 Empathy in Moral Sense Theory: "Changing Places in Fancy with the Sufferer"

The notion that sympathy plays a central role in motivating altruistic or moral acts is an important undercurrent of the school of moral sense theory which goes back, in the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition, to at least Shaftesbury

[1] Olinck (1984) offers less generous but possibly more accurate assessment of this situation, claiming that "empathy" is merely a buzz word that psychologists prefer over "sympathy" and "compassion" for its perceived air of erudition.

(1711/1999). And so at this juncture a comparison between the notion of empathy as conceived by contemporary empathy research in psychology and its analogue in the philosophical tradition of moral sense theory would seem both inevitable and illuminating.

There is little doubt that particularly in the hands of Adam Smith, widely considered to have developed one of the most elaborate expressions of moral sense theory in his 1759 *Theory of moral sentiments*, "sympathy" has all the hallmarks of "empathy" as conceived of in empathy research in contemporary psychology. In both cases, the phenomenon is identified as a spontaneous affective or emotional disturbance which (1) may or may not involve affective matching, (2) is caused, typically but not exclusively, by the direct perception of another person in distress, and (3) issues in feelings of solidarity or as Smith put it "fellow-feelings". He writes,

> The word sympathy, in its most proper and primitive signification, denotes our fellow-feeling with the suffering and not that with the enjoyments of others (43). … That this is the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels, may be demonstrated by many obvious observations, if it should not be thought sufficiently evident of itself (10). … [But] neither is it those circumstances only, which create pain or sorrow, that call forth our fellow-feeling. Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of the situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator (10).

Unlike the broad swathe of contemporary empathy research, however, Smith's interest in empathy was thoroughgoingly critical. Smith's critical starting point, a starting point shared by all moral sense theorists—Smith's contemporaries Hutcheson (1729/2003), Shaftesbury (1711/1999), and Hume (1751/1957) as well as the more recent avatars Scheler (1954), Blum (1980a), Vetlesen (1994), and arguably Hoffman (2000)—was the general suspicion that rationalist moral theory is severely limited in its ability to explain the normative validity of moral rules or principles, or what is sometimes referred to as their "bindingness" (cf. Darwall, 1995). Of course, scepticism regarding rationalism in ethics is not unique to moral sense theory; the position in Anglo-Saxon meta-ethics known as "externalism", the communitarian orientation in contemporary social and political theory as well as the current movement in normative ethics known as virtue ethics can all be considered as having similar critical underpinning.[2] What seems to be unique to moral sense theory is the proposal that such moral concepts arise from a universal human capacity for sympathy. The opening lines of the Smith's *Theory of moral sentiments* read, "How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it, except the pleasure of seeing it. … The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violator of the laws of society, is not altogether without it" (p. 9). And Smith goes on in the same work to build an elaborate defence of sympathetic foundationalism in ethics. Anticipating Smith,

[2] For similar assessments, see Smith (1994) on externalism, O'Neill (1996) on communitarianism, and Crisp and Slote (1997) on virtue ethics.

Hume came around to the position, really only suggested at the end of his *Treatise of human nature* (1751/1957), that sympathy seemed to be a precondition of a human being's ability to recognize what he labelled the "artificial virtues" (pp. 574–578) and stated boldly if sketchily that "we have no extensive concern for society but from sympathy" (p. 579).

As Smith's statement that even the "greatest ruffian" is not without sympathy makes plain the contingent fact that sometimes some people have feelings of solidarity in sympathy with others, and act on those feelings, is hardly stable ground for moral theory. What Smith meant by "sympathy" of course was *also* that people have a capacity for or a faculty of sympathy—a "moral sense" analogous to sight or hearing—that, when functioning correctly, issues in the moral sentiments associated with sympathy understood in the *other* sense as an affective perception. For Smith, the principal mechanism of this largely involuntary and cognitive faculty is the vicarious consideration of another's perspective, what is now usually referred to as the process of role-taking and what Smith refers to in the passage quoted above as the imaginative act of "changing places in fancy with the sufferer". The postulation of such a moral sense allows Smith (and moral sense theory more generally) to close the gap between the contingency of moral sentiments and the normativity of moral judgement—that is, the idea that moral judgements are applicable and are binding independently of any affective attachments a moral agent might have with regards to the object of a particular moral judgement or the action it prescribes. Very roughly, if the proper exercise of the faculty of sympathy and the feelings associated with it have intrinsic moral worth, a point Smith took pains to support, it can legitimately claimed that anyone failing to have such feelings morally *should* do (cf. Raphael, 1976; Sherman 1998).

Returning now to contemporary psychology, unlike moral sense theory, empathy research has, with again the exception of Hoffman, little direct interest in the conceptual grounds of morality and at most a secondary interest even in morality in a strict sense as such. Adopting a sociobiological framework that is not always made explicit (cf. Hoffman, esp. 1981, 1994; Batson, 1991), empathy research submits to empirical scrutiny the observation that the range of feelings and thoughts referred to as "empathy" seems to correlate positively with self-sacrificing, cooperative, and helpful behaviours, the kinds of behaviours that are thought important for or even a sine qua non of collective enterprise (and hence of the recognized productive efficiency and material advantage associated with efficient cooperation) and of harmonious interpersonal relations (and hence of strong interpersonal cohesiveness). Seen from this angle, the system of behaviours, feelings, and beliefs corresponding to "morality" would seem to be best considered an interesting subset or possibly special case of the broader class of helping behaviours. Eisenberg and Miller (1987a), for instance, distinguish between pro-social behaviour, which in their definition is "voluntary, intentional behaviour that results in benefits for another; the motive is unspecified and may be positive, negative or both" and "altruistic behaviour", "a subtype of pro-social behaviour—as voluntary behaviour intended to benefit another, which is not performed with the expectation of receiving external rewards or avoiding externally produced aversive stimuli or punishments"

(p. 92). They mention morality only in connection with the remark that, unlike philosophers, psychologists tend to be concerned with the role of empathy in such behaviours and tend to disregard the particular moral status of such behaviours either generically or on a case-by-case basis.

And why shouldn't they? Given the complexity of practical judgement, any attempt to frame a category of "moral behaviours" for the purposes of empirical study seems bound to be endlessly controversial. Still, and as an aside, it would seem to be a mistake to conclude on the grounds that empathy research in social psychology is not directly concerned with the moral domain that it is not relevant to the normative dimension of ethics. For one thing, from the point of view of so-called internalist views of moral judgement that tend to consider a lack of moral motivation as being principally a failure of practical rationality (cf. Smith, 1994), confirmation of the received idea that empathy indeed does contribute to helping behaviours raises very concretely the possibility that empathic feelings contribute to consistency between an agent's moral judgements and his or her actions (cf. discussion in Doris & Stich, 2003). Further, given the close conceptual relation between altruism as defined in empathy research (cf. Eisenberg & Miller's 1987a definition above) and the idea that a moral intention is, among other things, an intention that is necessarily focused on others, rather than self-directed, from the point of view of moral socialization and education, it is not at all beside the point to know something about whether empathic responding is innate or learned (e.g., Hoffman, 1981, 2000) and which circumstantial factors strengthen correlations between empathy and helping behaviours (e.g., Batson & Coke, 1981). Indeed, one can with confidence speculate that it is precisely because empathy research seems to have implications for conceptions of morality and moral education that psychologists are drawn to the empirical study of empathy in the first place.

2.3 Cognitive Conceptions of Empathy

2.3.1 Social Cognition Theory: Perspective-Taking, Social Referencing, and Empathic Accuracy

To call forth a concept, as Wispé reminds us in the subtitle of his 1986 paper, a word is needed and in light of the state of confusion pertaining in regards to "sympathy" and "empathy" in psychology—a state of affairs that he ably exposes—he argues that a great deal of this confusion would be cleared up should "sympathy" be reserved to refer to the phenomenon of responding to another's suffering with feelings of compassion and a desire to help. His delineation of "empathy" by contrast captures the introspective, objective, and often effortful process of attempting to understand other people's thoughts and emotions. In these terms, sympathy is relational and affective; it is an experience of openness "to the immediate reality of another's subjective experience" (Wispé, 1986, p. 318). Empathy is rather a vehicle for understanding or

knowing what others think. As such, its "most important problem", as Wispé puts it, is "empathic accuracy" (p. 318): the problem of whether one's judgements about another's inner experiences are correct. Though unquestionably attractive, his plea that future research be oriented in relation to the distinction between empathy and sympathy, as he sees it, strikes one as being something of a solution in search of a problem, a situation that demonstrates the persisting validity of his own thesis that there is, to say the least, little consistency in the use of the word "empathy" in psychology (as elsewhere). As we have already seen, contemporary empathy research indeed studies *exactly* questions surrounding what he terms "sympathy". For its part, questions concerning Wispé's "empathy" have, for over 30 years, been studied as a branch of contemporary psychology known as social cognition theory.

In contemporary psychology "social cognition" seems to be an umbrella term for research interest in the cognitive processes involved in social interaction, how people understand themselves and others, and interactions with others in social contexts broadly construed; using the tools and based on the assumptions of cognitive psychology, it currently dominates as the approach and model in social psychology (cf. Sternberg, 1994). Naturally, one particular issue in social cognition theory is that of how people come to accurately (and inaccurately) infer other people's feelings, intentions, and thoughts. This problem, process, faculty, or competence has gone under the name of "perspective-taking" or "role-taking" (see, e.g., Schantz, 1975; Selman, 1980; Flavell, 1992) and, its latest avatars, "mental simulation" (Gordon, 1996) and "empathic accuracy" (Ickes, 1997). The latter term, despite the fact that it refers to the *aim* of the process under study rather than the process itself, is the most, if you will, accurate of the three on the grounds that the others could be interpreted as begging the question of the psychological mechanisms by which people acquire information about others' internal states—that is, by "taking their perspective" in one's imagination.

For it is far from being obvious that comprehension of other people's thoughts and feelings is primarily mediated by imagining oneself in another's position. Indeed, cases of believing simply *that* a person is having a certain thought or feeling are quite obviously not. The judgement, for instance, that "Maria thinks she will win the match" is surely better understood as being inferred from visual and contextual cues rather than from imagining oneself in Maria's situation. That said, *understanding* Maria's thought of winning the match and *sharing* some of the feelings that often supervene in such circumstances are far more plausible candidates for psychological events mediated by some kind of vicarious involvement. The pervasive view in social psychology that individuals seek knowledge about others' inner states by imagining themselves into the other's place is, according to Higgins (1981) and Davis (1994), a bias that is traceable back to Piaget's foundational work in developmental psychology on visual perspective-taking (e.g., Piaget, 1955; cf. Eisenberg et al., 1997, p. 75). Be that as it may, there is no doubt that cognitive and affective perspective-taking have received overwhelmingly more systematic attention in social psychological research than have other pathways to other-directed introspection.

According to Flavell's (1992) analysis, the ability to comprehend others' emotions or mental representations presupposes four knowledge components or competencies: (1) that mental states *exist* (what he calls "existence"); (2) that some situations *call for*

knowledge of other's mental states ("need"); (3) the competency to *obtain* such knowledge ("inference"); and, (4) the competency to appropriately *use* inference skills ("application") (cf. Eisenberg et al., 1997, p. 74). The bulk of research in social cognition focuses on the existence and inference components even though, as Eisenberg et al. (1997) point out, the others are by no means of secondary interest (p. 74). Most important, however, is the observation that in addition to perspective-taking, the inference and application components of empathic accuracy may involve other processes such as those that would seem to fall under Higgins' (1981) idea of "social reference". As Higgins (1981) contends, a judger's beliefs about the motives, attitudes, and responses of a "target person" are sometimes generated by way of a process in which the judger first places the target person into either a known category of persons or compares the target person with a person she knows well (i.e., a parent or friend)—what Higgins (1981) calls a "salient individual"—and then assumes that the target person's motives, attitudes, and responses and so on will be the same or very similar to the known social group or individual (see Higgins, 1981, esp. pp. 139–141). Another process discussed by Karniol (1982, 1995) involves a parallel process wherein only the central reference is made to familiar and, hence, predictable narrative patterns or social scripts rather than to specific social categories or salient others.

An interesting corollary of this "mixed economy" view of empathic accuracy is that we might expect, as Higgins (1981) implies, that part of the application component is to decide which of these various inference strategies—perspective-taking, social referencing, or some other process—is called for or is best adapted to particular situations. For instance, comprehending a friend's thoughts and feelings while in the throes of romantic love might best be achieved by drawing on memories of one's own past experience of being in the throes of romantic love oneself rather than attempting to imaginatively adopt the friend's perspective. Comprehending the feelings of a person in completely unfamiliar or unlikely situations—being the last person alive on Earth or winning at Wimbledon will stand as examples—would seem far more likely to demand the prioritization of imagination rather than memory retrieval. In any case, if one accepts that mental simulation is just one of a range of cognitive processes that aims to achieve empathic accuracy, social cognition research can be credited with providing a conception of empathy (understood as a type of social cognition of others' inner states) according to which it is possible to experience empathy without "empathizing" (understood as a process of *vicarious* introspection): a conception, in other words, of the a cognitive process by which people come to have information about others' inner states that does not necessarily entail imagining themselves in another's place.

2.3.2 Formalist Ethics and Empathy: Mead, Rawls, and Habermas, and the Moral Point of View

As noted above, moral sense theory characteristically assigns empathy *in the affective sense* a central place in moral life and moral deliberation: feelings of empathy, understood as being underwritten by a natural sense of concern for others and the ability to perceive threats to others' weal and woe, help to explain both the validity

of moral principles in terms of rules or norms that promote human well-being and also why people are motivated to act in accordance with moral principles—namely, to promote others' well-being and avoid harm. Because such feelings presuppose a capacity for insight into others' inner states, it should come as no surprise that empathy in the perceptive sense is a staple of traditional thinking about moral justification. The so-called Golden Rule's exhortation to consider whether one would accept to be treated in the same way that one proposes to treat another is nothing other than a test of the moral validity of particular acts that centralizes perspective-taking. In the same vein, what the formalist ethics of Mead, Rawls, and Habermas all have in common is that they provide a principle of justification—that is, one that is meant to discriminate between legitimate and illegitimate norms in terms of their impartiality or fairness—that explicitly (albeit at times in subtle ways) invokes perspective-taking (cf. Habermas, 1990c, pp. 197–198). According to Mead's notion of ideal role-taking (cf. 1943) norms or plans of action are justified from a moral point of view only if they can pass the test of being accepted by all those affected; the moral judgement, therefore, is principally concerned with vicariously putting oneself in the position of those affected by an action proposal (cf. Joas, 1985, p. 121ff.). Similarly, Rawls proposes that valid social policies are those that would survive assessment from the "original position": an abstract and idealized judgement situation in which the rational judge is ignorant of how he or she would stand to benefit or loose out if the policy were adopted (i.e., of her "social position") (cf. Rawls, 1971, pp. 118–192). For its part, Habermas' combined principles of discourse (D) and universalization (U) provide a similar test for the validity of norms. Taken together, they state roughly that only those norms are morally valid that could be met with approval in an ideal discourse situation involving the fair participation of all those potentially affected by the norm being accepted (Habermas, 1984, 1987, 1990a, 1990b, 1993b). Both Rawls and Habermas state explicitly that their conceptualizations of the moral point of view are consistent with Kohlberg's (cf., e.g., 1978) empirically grounded analysis that development towards the highest levels of moral reasoning coincide with improved competency in perspective-taking (cf. Rawls, 1971, pp. 461–462; Habermas, 1990b, pp. 119–133). According to Kohlberg's schema, the progress from the pre-moral through to the conventional and the post-conventional levels of cognitive moral development is underlain by a progressive shift from an egocentric or first-person perspective (punishment and reward, approval and disapproval) to one which is able to coordinate and assess the validity of diverse perspectives, a process labelled "de-centration" in good piagetan tradition.

2.3.3 Kohut, Rogers, and Psychotherapy: Empathy as Vicarious Introspection

The conception of empathy assumed by contemporary empathy research and moral sense theory captures one important dimension of ordinary intuitions about empathy: people seem universally endowed with a capacity to engage in a processes of

vicarious identification with others and that when such imaginative attention is directed towards the suffering of others it typically and spontaneously gives rise to feelings of sympathy, solidarity, and a desire to help. From this perspective, empathy's potential worth as a moral motivator, if not somehow as a precondition of moral judgement itself, seems obvious if complex (cf. Maxwell & Reichenbach, 2007). However, this conceptualization of empathy fails to capture another important normative dimension of empathy, namely, empathy viewed as a moral excellence related to caring or responding to others. In Sherman's (1998, p. 86) words:

> To be a good listener, to be caring, to communicate not just through action but also through affect are part of our contemporary culture. We expect political candidates to be not just policy wonks but to be caring; doctors to know medicine, but also to express an interest in their patients and understand something of their patients' fears and anxieties in facing illness; good parenting to involve the transmission of values and skills, but as importantly, to show a concrete engagement in a child's interests and feelings. Empathy seems part of our new age sensitivity.

One may disagree with Sherman's assessment that empathy as a component of caring is anything particularly new. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a world in which something akin to empathic responsiveness as she characterizes it is not desirable in caregiving. As Sherman points out herself (1998, p. 91), Smith (1759/1976), hardly classifiable as a new-age thinker, seemed to have had an appreciation for this dimension of empathy. Further, a stance of mutual empathy for the sake of promoting self-understanding and awareness is central to Aristotle's (4th Century B.C.E./1995) conception of mature friendship (cf. Books 8 and 9).

What does seem attractive in Sherman's analysis, though, is her claim that the popular contemporary conception that empathy is a social or moral excellence is strongly informed by the psychoanalytic intellectual tradition of the twentieth century. The new normative grounding that psychoanalysis provided for the capacity to understand and be compassionate with others as an aspect of caring, she suggests, is connected with the assumption that there exists some kind of basic universal human need to be understood and to be recognized by others—a need, in other words, to be *empathized with*. If empathy is inherently therapeutic both clinically as well as in an informal social sense it is because it fills this need. Sherman (1998) tells us that Freud's (1953–1975) mention of Lipps' (1903/1960) notion of *Einfühlung* is limited to a few scattered remarks about group psychology and humour but that his followers Theodore Reik (1948/1983) and Robert Fliess (see Sharma, 1992) elaborated further on the idea and anticipated a larger role for empathy in the therapeutic process (cf. Verducci, 2000, p. 71–73). It was not, however, until Heinz Kohut, founder of "self-psychology", and Carl Rogers, founder of "client-centred therapy", did empathy come to be seen as *the* central competency of the effective psychotherapist. Interest in "talking cures" has lost ground in recent years to pharmaceutical intervention in emotional disturbances, but the influence of psychoanalysis over the popular psychological discourse among the educated classes was for decades during the twentieth century more than considerable; arguably it was through the influence of these two towering figures of psychotherapy that the importance of empathy as a dimension of human relationships found new

support in an interpretation of empathy as being an integral support to personal psychological well-being and health.

From the point of view of psychoanalytic theory and practice, Kohut's major contribution was to strongly challenge the earlier Freudian orthodoxy that the Oedipal conflict is central to human motivation and psychological pathology (Wolf, 2000). Working clinically early in his career with a particular subgroup of patients diagnosed as "narcissistically vulnerable", or as having a fragile or disturbed sense of self, Kohut developed the hypothesis that such disturbances were connected with insufficiency of relationships with others that provide experiences necessary for the development, achievement, and maintenance of a strong and cohesive self, what Kohut called "selfobject experiences" (Lang, 1994; Wolf, 2000). Further study of the idea, which grew out of, and was initially intended to complement, classical Freudian theory, led to its extension; Kohut and many like-minded psychoanalysts came to view Kohutian psychoanalysis as superseding classical formulations (Lang, 1994). On a more popular level, Kohut is known as challenging the early psychoanalytic view of the cold and aloof therapist (Sherman, 1998), a reputation which was based on his identification of empathy as the psychoanalyst's definitive faculty, skill, and tool (Lang, 1994). By engaging in a process that he referred to variously as "vicarious introspection", "thinking oneself into another's place" and imagining the experience of another "as if it were our own" (Kohut, 1959; cf. Wispé, 1987), Kohut believed that experiences, feelings, and memories otherwise left obscured using traditional methods became available to the therapist for analysis and interpretation (cf. Lang, 1994, pp. 102–103). In this sense, empathy was for Kohut, the "mode of cognition specifically attuned to the perception of complex psychological configurations" (cf. Kohut, 1971, p. 300, 1980, p. 485; quoted in Wispé, 1987, p. 30) that are the object of clinical analysis (cf. Lang, 1994).

In order to avoid an easy misconception of Kohut's understanding of empathy it is important to underscore, as Kohut did himself repeatedly in his writings, that there is nothing inherently therapeutic about empathy. Similarly, while empathy may be at most a precondition of sympathy and compassion, it is by no means their equivalent. Like the moral sense theorists, Kohut viewed empathy as common human faculty of perception on par with the senses. But unlike the senses which are designed for "extro-spection", experiencing the outer world, empathy is "intro-spective" in that it is directed towards others' inner worlds. Except for its introspective orientation, empathy is for all intents and purposes much the same as the five recognized senses: "the empathic understanding of the experience of other human beings", Kohut wrote, "is as basic an endowment as his vision, hearing, touch, taste and smell" (Kohut, 1977, p. 144; quoted in Wispé, 1987, p. 30). Because of the intangibility of its object, empathy, far more so than the extro-spective faculties, is fallible and empathic competency profits from training, practice, and exercise. Finally, because empathy is simply the faculty that enables human beings to find out about the inner experiences, it is quite a glaring mistake to suppose that empathy would necessarily give rise to feelings of solidarity, compassion, or sympathy. To illustrate the point, Kohut referred more than once in his œuvre to the use of howling sirens during air raids on civilian

populations during the Second World War, an example which illustrates how planners' accurate use of empathy enabled them to find a way to add further terror to the experience of being bombed (cf. Wispé, 1986, p. 319). More mundane examples are those of are charming sociopaths, certain used-car salesmen, and other con men who, on perceiving others' suffering, far from having feelings of solidarity and sympathy well up inside them, use their perspicacity to others' disadvantage (cf. Lang, 1994). In sum, according to Kohut, empathy is first and foremost an "information-gathering activity". He writes:

> Empathy is a value-neutral mode of observation; a mode of observation attuned to the inner life of man, just as extro-spection is a mode of observation attuned to the external world, [...] a mental activity, whether employed in every day life, or in scientific pursuits. [...] As an information-gathering activity, empathy, as I have stressed many times [...], can be right or wrong, in the service of compassion or hostility, pursued slowly and ploddingly or "intuitively", that is, at great speed. In this sense empathy is never by itself supportive or therapeutic. It is, however, a precondition to being successfully supportive and therapeutic. (Kohut, 1984, pp. 84–85; quoted in Lang, 1994, p. 103)

Despite Kohut's insistence on the objectivity of empathy, there was apparently a certain tension with regards to the therapeutic value of empathy built into his system. As Lang (1994) notes, critics and followers alike pointed out that one dimension of healthy "selfobject experiences" seemed to be support and empathy. Under pressure he eventually came to the reluctant admission that "empathy per se, the mere presence of empathy, has also a beneficial, in a broad sense, therapeutic effect—both in the clinical setting and in human life, in general" (Kohut, 1984, p. 85; quoted in Lang, 1994, p. 104). But Kohut never went as far as Rogers in claiming that it is the therapist's empathy that can provide the reparative support needed to heal the damaged self.

The approach to therapy known as "client-centered" and founded by Carl Rogers beginning in the 1950s can arguably be seen as being framed by two core assumptions. First, human beings have a natural propensity towards "self-actualization", a condition that can be understood for present purposes as equivalent to psychological well-being or health. Second, the natural process of growth or development towards this state is thwarted by involvement in social relations, especially in childhood, that encourage feelings of self-depreciation or self-devaluation (cf. Shaffer, 1978). The role of Rogerian therapy, in essence, is to provide an atmosphere which enables the client to himself or herself remove the obstacles to the process of growth towards self-actualization (Rogers, 1977). This "growth-promoting climate" is characterized by three dispositions or attitudes on the part of the therapist: (1) congruence or genuineness; (2) unconditional positive regard for the client or "always being on the client's side"; and (3) empathy (Rogers, 1959, 1961).

Rogers described empathy as "one of the most potent factors" in the therapeutic situation (Rogers, 1975, p. 3; quoted in Wispé, 1987, p. 28). His 1975 description of it is deservedly oft cited. Empathy, Rogers said, means

> entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it. It involves being sensitive [...] to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person. [...] It means temporarily living in his/her life, moving about in it delicately without

> making judgement, sensing meanings of which he/she is scarcely aware. […] It includes communicating your sensings of his/her world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes at elements of which the individual is fearful. It means frequently checking with him/her as to the accuracy of your sensings, and being guided by the responses you receive. […] To be with another in this way means that for the time being you lay aside the views and values you hold for yourself in order to enter another world without prejudice. (Rogers, 1975, p. 4; quoted in Sherman, 1998, p. 92; Wispé, 1987, p. 28; Verducci, 2000, p. 76)

Taken as a *definition* of “empathy”, this could be taken as a textbook example of the irrational technique of persuasion known in critical thinking circles as “persuasive redefinition” (cf., e.g., Hughes, 2000, pp. 276–278). However, it is not a *description* of empathy as much it is a rather impressionistic *prescription* aimed at clinicians and with regards to what it means to adopt an attitude of empathy in the process of therapy. Understood as simply “a term to convey that particular attitude of non-judgementally entering into another’s perceptual world […] regarded as important in psychotherapy” (p. 29), “empathy” is an apt choice, as Wispé (1987) indeed observes. In this sense it is very closely related to Titchener’s early 1915 definition, cited above, in which empathy is conceived as “feeling oneself into a situation”. In another respect, however, Rogers’ conception of empathy departs from both Titchener’s definition and the definition supposed by empathy research in social psychology. Empathic engagement, Rogers insists, implies that the therapist understands the client’s emotions. But the therapist should not for all that *experience* those emotions himself or herself. “The counsellor”, Rogers writes, “is perceiving the hates and hopes and fears of the client through immersion in an empathic process, but without himself, as counsellor, experiencing those hates and hopes and fears” (Rogers, 1951, p. 29; quoted in Sherman, p. 93). To use the term from contemporary pro-social behaviour research, in client-centred therapy empathy not only falls short of involving affective matching but therapists are advised to avoid emotional identification with their clients’ feelings as well. Rogerian empathy departs quite dramatically from Kohutian empathy too in the sense that it is less the therapist’s tool of observation than it is a particular therapeutic style or mode of communication. Empathy informs the attitudinal tenor of the therapist’s remarks. Most importantly, perhaps, an empathic stance frames role in the therapeutic process of “mirroring” wherein the therapist, attuned to what the client is “ready to hear”, relays the clients’ thoughts and feelings back to him or her in his or her own language and elicits feedback from the client vis-à-vis the accuracy of the therapist’s interpretation (cf. Rogers, 1951; Ogden, 1996; Dunn, 1995; and Sherman, 1998).

Rogers’ influence not just on counselling and psychology but education and the social sciences more generally, though subtle and today often forgotten, was phenomenal in both senses of the word. His work seemed at once to articulate, reflect, and provide a language for the Romantic revival of the second half of the twentieth century. Rogers’ ideas about empathy have undoubtedly filtered down into popular consciousness (cf. Sherman, 1998). But whether or not Rogers’ influence had anything to do with it, what is certain is that it is now scarcely possible, barring the most stipulative of definitions, to describe a person’s use of insight into another’s inner life for harmful, deceitful, or otherwise malicious ends as “empathic”. This, surely, is what makes

Kohut's conception of empathy as a "value-neutral" mode of introspection so vulnerable to misunderstanding, and accounts for Lang's (1994) reports of hostile reaction to her attempts to defend a Kohutian conception of empathy as the most useful one in the context of clinical ethics in medicine. It also helps to explain why Wispé's (1986) otherwise sensible proposal that the research programme in pro-social and helping behaviour in social psychology use "empathy" to refer exclusively to the predominantly cognitive faculty of other-directed insight and "compassion" or "sympathy" to refer exclusively to distressed responses to insight into another's aversive state had to fail. In ordinary language the notion of an "empathic knave" *is* a contradiction in terms because empathy even understood as a faculty of introspection is aimed at understanding and comprehension for the sake of providing support and expressing solidarity. One could call skill in gathering information about other people's inner states "insight", "acumen", or even "perspicacity" but "empathy" rings false.

2.4 Summary and Discussion

The term "empathy" emerged as a term of art in the field of aesthetics in the late nineteenth century and analogous concepts—primarily sympathy, perspective-taking, and role-taking—which make reference to empathy's core idea of vicariously sharing another's experience have recurrently been considered important in understanding moral appraisal and moral judgement. The treatment of empathy as an explicit theoretical construct, however, is almost exclusive to psychology and in particular social, developmental, and counselling psychology. But even here, the basic divide between empathy conceived of in predominantly affective terms, as opposed to the view of empathy as being predominantly a cognitive phenomenon, is clearly perceptible. In contemporary research on pro-social and helping behaviour in social and developmental psychology, "empathy" is meant to capture distressing *feelings* in response to other people's suffering. In social cognition theory, by contrast, "empathy" refers to a grab bag of psychological processes, faculties, and competencies which have in common only that they are instrumental in the way that people gain *insight into* others' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs. Similarly, in Rogerian and Kohutian conceptions of counselling therapy, empathy is singled out as the psychotherapist's core competency precisely because it is through empathy that the therapist becomes acquainted with the intricate workings of his client's inner world. The distinction between cognitive and affective conceptions of empathy, however, should not distract one from the fact that affective empathy and cognitive empathy are not wholly discrete. The operation of the latter is a precondition of experiencing the former in that one can hardly have aversive feelings *about* other people's suffering unless one is first aware that they *are* suffering. This conceptual overlap occurring, as it does, in an aggravating linguistic environment where empathy in both its cognitive and the affective senses have multiple synonyms, helps to explain why this basic distinction is only occasionally explicitly recognized even in specialist literatures. Involvement in another person's suffering as something to be

alleviated is referred to in both ordinary language and in the philosophical literature as "sympathy" and "compassion". Most empirical research on pro-social and helping behaviour and altruism refers to their focal construct as "empathy" but Hoffman often employs the term "empathic distress". For its part, insight into other's states without an affective component—Kohut's "other-directed introspection"—is referred to variously as "mental simulation", "empathic accuracy", "social perspective-taking", or simply "perspective-taking" as well as "role-taking". When it comes to "empathy", the waters of terminological confusion run deep indeed (see Fig. 2.1).

These observations about the meaning of "empathy" would seem to suggest strongly that, if it is clarity that one is after, the use of "empathy" calls for careful stipulation. The formulation is over-used but we have here one case where it truly fits: what "empathy" means depends on what one means by "empathy". In this light, and returning to this study's original question of whether "empathy" is an appropriate term to capture the idea of imaginative sensitivity to others' well-being regarded as being integral to moral functioning, it might seem to go without saying that the adoption of an alternative might be well advised, should a suitable candidate be available. Indeed, as luck would have it, and as a moment spent with any dictionary will confirm, English is comfortably furnished with not one but two words, "sympathy" and "compassion", both of which express much of what is intended. Why, then, not use one of them instead? The decision calls for delicate semantic judgement but there are good reasons to believe that neither term would be preferable to "empathy", at least in the present context and without modification.

The disadvantages of "empathy" have already been suggested and will not be belaboured. The sort of moral responsiveness to others' well-being in question falls under the rubric of affective conceptions of empathy but "empathy" *tout court* is at permanent risk of being conflated with "empathy" in the cognitive sense. To make matters worse, some commentators, as we have seen, refuse even to acknowledge the affective

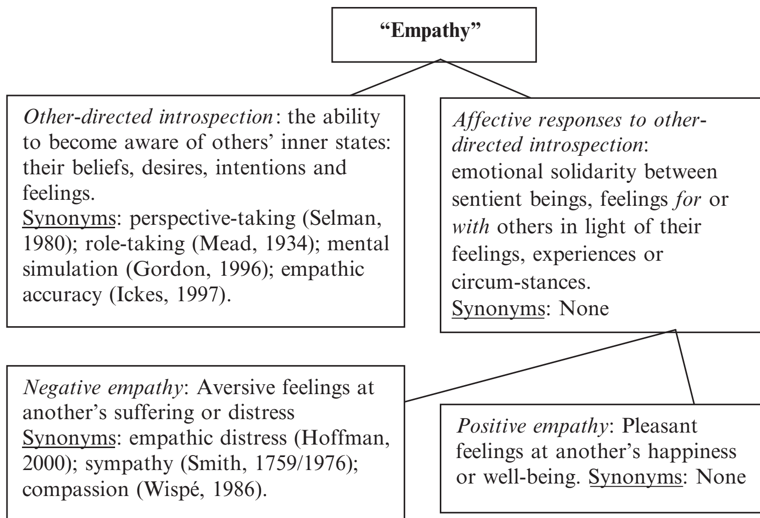

Fig. 2.1 Multiple meanings of the word "empathy"

sense of empathy and suggest that it is nothing other than a *misnomer* to regard "empathy" as synonymous with "sympathy" and "compassion" (cf. Wispé, 1986; Cole, 1994; Kohut, 1959). "Empathy", however, has decisive advantage of carrying highly pertinent connotations that both "sympathy" and "compassion" lack. Well aware that this argument takes us out onto the thin ice of subtle linguistic associations, which are susceptible to variance from person to person, "empathy", first, *clearly* connotes imaginative involvement. It is, of course, *possible* for imaginative involvement to mediate feelings of sympathy or compassion but it seems more typical to refer to reactive and unreflective responses to situations whose injurious features require no great psychological acumen to appreciate—a poor wretch on the gallows, a young woman dying of disease, a victim of crushing poverty or gross physical injury, and the like—as instances of compassion and sympathy. The word "empathy", however, seems to suggest a response to situations whose aversive features are more subtle, imperceptible, ambiguous, complex, and therefore requiring skills of discernment and possibly imaginative dwelling in order to perceive and appreciate—precisely the sorts of harms and injustices that are, of course, typically at stake in moral *problems*. Perhaps it is this difference between sympathy and compassion, on one hand, and empathy, on the other—the difference being that empathy is a *skilled* response while compassion and sympathy are *reactive* responses—which accounts for why the idea of developing, educating, or cultivating empathy makes a fair bit of intuitive sense, whereas the idea of developing, educating, or cultivating sympathy and compassion has a comparatively odd ring to it. As Wispé (1986) put it—correctly I think—in connection with becoming sympathetic, compassionate, or empathic, the problem for sympathy is "how does one open oneself to the immediate reality of another's subjective experiences?" (p. 318). The problem for empathy (by which he means cognitive empathy in no uncertain terms) is how to correctly appraise another's situation, of "empathic accuracy" in his wording (Wispé, 1986, p. 318). But, it seems, the capacities of moral sensitivity which are of present concern involve *both* "opening oneself" to others' subjective experiences *and getting judgements about other's subjective experiences right*. A term of art, then, is proposed: "compassionate empathy"—"empathy" in order to capitalize on the word's reflective and imaginative connotations. The modifier "compassionate" has a double advantage in that its use minimizes the risk of confusing the construct with the perceptive faculty of other-directed introspection and makes the fact that we are concerned with empathy in the "negative" sense (i.e., feeling distress in solidarity with or for a person in a situation of adversity) but not empathy in its "positive" sense (i.e., pleasant feelings with or for another's happiness or well-being) unmistakeable.[3]

[3] One may raise the point that two viable alternatives have been overlooked: "moral perception" and "moral sensitivity". Both these terms are unattractive in the present context. "Moral perception" simply lacks the required affective connotations. In another world, "moral sensitivity" might be the ideal choice but unfortunately it is already widely used in moral psychology and has there a narrow technical definition: the place-holder for the first dimension of Rest's (1986) four dimension model of morality. Even if it turns out that "compassionate empathy" is for all intents and purposes coextensive with Rest's idea of "moral sensitivity" it would seem advisable to adopt a more expansive term so as not to beg questions about the meaning and significance of the concept for moral functioning.