Chapter 7
Compassionate Empathy in Professional and Practical Ethics Education

This terminal chapter revisits the conclusions of this work's four substantive studies on the disambiguation of the term "empathy", on compassionate empathy's conceptual and empirical profile, on the question of its moral value, and finally on the place of empathic responding in the process of moral deliberation in order to interpret their significance for practical and professional ethics education. The discussion is loosely framed in terms of the three areas of moral emotion education referred to in Chapter 6 as "imagination", "imitation", and "reappraisal".

7.1 Imagination and the Fallacy of the Golden Rule

John Dewey, in *Art as experience* (1934), advanced this intriguing notion: "the imagination is the great instrument of the good" (p. 344). Dewey was talking about what aesthetic experience and moral experience have in common: evaluation. But more than that, what Dewey seemed to be getting at was that modern intellectual culture has got in wrong in its assumption that the experience of evaluation is one-off, subjective, and personal. Rather, evaluation is something intersubjective and richly so. It is social and shared. Conceiving, perceiving, valuing, observing, speaking, and the other operations that mediate that shared experience, Dewey suggests, are accessible to a person only through the exercise of the imagination.[1]

There is another far more pedestrian sense in which imagination may be considered as an instrument of the good and that is as a route to compassionate empathy and beneficence. In one sense, this is obviously (and perhaps self-evidently) true. Reasoning about a moral problem involves the coordination of different perspectives. Very simply, the coordination of others' perspectives requires that one know what their perspectives are and there is only one way to achieve such insight: by

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[1] See Rethorst (1997) for a discussion of this quote and the question of the relationship between art, imagination, and moral education.

perspective-taking.[2] In another sense, the claim that imagination is an instrument of the good is almost certainly false. The possession of insight into another person's perspective, and in particular the knowledge that he faces some form of undeserved suffering or that other important interests are otherwise unfairly threatened, does not in and of itself issue in feelings of solidarity or sympathy. To turn the idea around, the (false) belief in question is that it is a *lack* of "imagination" that prevents people from understanding and perceiving moral problems and caring about addressing them. For ease of reference, let us call this idea the fallacy of the Golden Rule; loosely speaking the Golden Rule, treat others as you would be treated yourself, is only compelling as a guide for decision-making on the assumption that one *already* takes another's interests as one's own. We have seen in these pages two considerations, one conceptual and the other empirical, which suggest that the fallacy of the Golden Rule is indeed a fallacy.

Chapter 3 saw that, in general terms, compassionate empathy may be satisfyingly characterized as a state of involvement in another person's suffering as something to be relieved or avoided (cf. esp. §3.3). The perception of suffering as being in need of *alleviation* is definitive since it sets compassionate empathy apart from other possible ways of being involved in another's suffering. In *Schadenfreude*, for instance, one takes pleasure in another's suffering and a clinician might view a person's suffering principally as a technical problem or as a matter of intellectual curiosity. "Punch and Judy" shows and similar sadistic entertainments take suffering as cause for amusement. Furthermore, even aversive or unpleasant feelings, directly connected with the perception of another's actual or prospective suffering, are not in and of themselves the solidarity-evoking emotion of compassionate empathy. For example, inarticulate horror at the sight of a wretched, half-naked itinerant lying unconscious and baking in the midday sun is not empathic distress but what Batson (cf., Batson & Coke, 1981, Batson, 1991) calls "personal distress". Compassionate empathy is, again, a state of solidarity and other-directed concern where such aversive feelings are experienced subjectively as feeling *for* or *with* a suffering person.[3] In short, there is no conceptual necessity linking the perception of undeserved suffering with concern and not all distressing feelings based on the belief that another person is suffering can be characterized as concern for that person.

Contrary to the folk psychology view assumed by the Golden Rule, then, compassionate empathy has utterly distinct cognitive and affective dimensions. Triangulating empirical evidence for this notion was considered in Chapter 5. The moral psychology

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[2] In this instance, I am using "perspective-taking" as the faculty of other-directed insight as it tends to be used in social psychology. It was seen in §3.4 that perspective-taking so broadly conceived may be highly imaginative or be mediated by simpler associative cognitive operations and conditioning.

[3] Admittedly, compassionate empathy and personal distress are not invariably distinct phenomena. It is possible and indeed probably not uncommon for personal distress to become empathic distress as when feelings of repulsion at a person's aversive state turn to thoughts for her well-being. In this way, she becomes the object of those feelings and concurrently the object of genuine compassionate empathy. This point is discussed in §3.2.1.

and characteristic patterns of moral functioning associated with the abnormal psychological diagnostic category of psychopathy indicate that psychopaths—those diagnosed with a nosologically controversial psychological disorder characterized by shallow emotional responding and an apparent absence of such "moral emotions" as guilt, remorse, and other-directed concern but not cognitive impairment— are nevertheless fully able to perceive, comprehend, and assess moral problems with no more or less difficulty than those who test in the normal range of emotionality (cf. §5.4). Significantly, in the psychopath we have a paradigmatic case of a person who has excellent perspective-taking abilities yet who is utterly unconcerned with others. In fact, far from being motivated by insight into others' present or perspective woes to "treat others as he would be treated" it is well documented that psychopaths, on the contrary, use their characteristically advanced social perspicacity to manipulate others in pursuit of what they seem to regard as their own narrow self-interest.

An explanation of the enduring appeal of the fallacy of the Golden Rule is not far to seek. A basic empathic disposition, a disposition to care about others' weal and woe, is perfectly normal and commonplace. Hoffman's (2000) pioneering research on empathic development shows that the main achievements of "empathic development", as he calls it, occur prior to adolescence (see pp. 63–77). It is the arrival of tertiary cognitive abilities in late childhood and adolescence, which then begin to work in conjunction with an already established disposition to respond with concern to others' distress, that enables the kind of abstract and complex empathizing characteristic of deliberation over practical moral problems (see Hoffman, 2000, p. 85; and Gibbs, 2003, pp. 88–89). Hoffman's theory, that is, traces a developmental process which occurs and then plateaus at the dawn of a human individual's life; it allows much less room for development across the lifespan than does Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development. Abnormality and stagnation in empathic development, sometimes cited to as aetiological factors in Antisocial Personality Disorder (ASPD) and psychopathy (cf. §5.4), are traced either to grossly inadequate socialization or to some physiological anomaly, congenital or advenient. From this perspective, the reinforcement of children's empathic dispositions through such basic parenting techniques as "induction" (cf. §4.5) is a worthy early educational objective, but by late adolescence and early adulthood any comprehensive deficit in students' affective faculties is probably beyond the reach of a standard educational regime (cf. Gibbs, 2003).

This is why Hoffman (2000) says that, where children have been provided with adequate empathy socialization, empathizing is "a reliable human response" (p. 61). In essence, the many modes of empathic arousal perform the adaptive function of making *not* empathizing with a suffering human being a near impossibility. This occurs in several interrelated ways. First, it makes observers susceptible to a wide variety of cues, enabling them to respond empathically to whatever distress cues happen to be available in a set of circumstances. A personal narrative would trigger language-mediated association, distressed looks or sounds trigger conditioning, a recognizably distressing observed situation cognitive networking, and so on (p. 59). Second, the primitive reactive modes enable human beings with weak or undeveloped

cognitive abilities to respond empathically. Most notably, conditioning, mimicry, and direct association make empathic responding possible among very young children and provide them with a stock of basic empathic experiences that may later be drawn on once the more advanced modes come on line cognitively (p. 59). Third, the reactive processes, operating as they do "instantly, automatically, and outside of conscious awareness" (p. 61) impede what Hoffman calls "empathic avoidance" (p. 61); even if one attempts to avoid exposure to the stimuli that trigger automatic empathy (e.g., by closing one's eyes or focusing one's attention on something else) compassionate empathy might be triggered by some other cue in the situation. Fourth, the introspective processes, especially language-mediated association and perspective-taking, in addition to expanding the number of avenues of empathic stimulation, also broaden the possible range of objects of compassionate empathy to include not just people who are not present but also people in situations that are entirely *imaginary*—characters in fiction of course but also in the hypothetical situations typical in moral deliberation (Hoffman, 2000, pp. 61, 91). In sum, given the fact that typically both the primitive and more cognitively advanced arousal mechanisms come into operation and are mutually supporting in any particular experience of compassionate empathy (see pp. 59–60), in Hoffman's assessment, the multifacetedness of the empathic arousal modes virtually compels a caring response to a person in distress (p. 61).[4]

Hoffman was careful not to depict human beings as "saintly empathic-distress-leads-to-helping machines" (p. 33) and I would not either. Such a portrayal flies in the face of the most superficial experience with the past and present of human association: *l'homme est un loup pour l'homme*. Later, we will go back to the question of at least the cognitive factors, errors of judgement essentially, that are frequently responsible for failures to appropriately empathize. But some of the intuitive implausibility of the claim that an empathic disposition is developmentally normal diminishes when one appreciates two things: first, the intractability of empathic bias and selective empathic attention (cf. §4.4.1); and, second, that the motivations for human behaviour are varied, complex, mutually conflicting, and little understood. Compassionate empathy is only one motivation among many.[5] Seen in this light, the crucial question from the point of view of moral education and moral development is less, "What accounts for individual differences in empathic sensitivity?" than "What accounts for individual differences in the prioritization, *as action incentives*, of concern for others over other values and motivations?".[6]

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[4] These "reactive" and "introspective" processes implicated in experiences of compassionate empathy were described and compared in detail in §3.4.

[5] For one discussion of this point see Hoffman (2000, pp. 33–35).

[6] As research theme in empirical moral psychology, this problem is studied under the heading of moral motivation and has today coalesced into an agenda investigating the interconnected constructs of moral identity, moral personality, the moral self, and moral exemplarity (cf. esp. Lapsley & Narváez, 2004).

Let us frame these points in terms of the moral emotion educational intervention of "request to imagine" introduced in Chapter 6 and state outright the educational implications of the fact that compassionate empathy constitutes a union of other-directed insight and a psychologically distinct orientation of concerned involvement in the well-being of the object of the imaginative process. Encouraging vicarious introspection as a means of intentionally provoking compassionate empathic involvement with another in a state of adversity only works—and plenty of empirical evidence supports the belief that it does work (cf. §3.4.2)—because people are on the whole already disposed towards concern for others. A triviality this may seem; questioning about education for compassionate empathic responding, however, frequently begins with precisely the opposite assumption, namely that it addresses, either in the context of a perceived socio-moral crisis or as an item on the roster of humanistic upbringing, one dimension of "becoming human" or a "fully functioning person" (cf., Rogers & Freiberg, 1994; Greene, 1995; Noddings, 1998; and Verducci, 1999, 2000). These studies of compassionate empathy have shown this gambit to be developmentally imprecise. There are, however, other treatments of the problem of educating for compassionate empathy which take as foundational from precisely the opposite assumption and the assumption that parallels this work's findings: that people are, on the whole, highly susceptible to empathic distress. Nussbaum (2001) and Warnock (1996) argue, for their parts that it is just wrong to think of children and young people as lacking other-directed sensitivity. The most decisive educational question in their minds is thus not how children *become* caring towards others but how they *broaden out* their natural propensity for compassion towards those whom they know and with whom they identify and come to be appropriately affected by issues that are unfamiliar to them and to respond to the needs of strangers as well.

Of more practical consequence to the use of requests to imagine the context of professional and practical ethics education, perhaps, is the distinction between other-directed and self-directed perspective-taking. Recall from §3.4.2 the presentations of Stotland's (1969) and Batson et al.'s (1997) research which showed that it is not only possible for a person to willingly adopt one viewpoint of empathic engagement or the other but, most importantly, that the two perspectives stimulate empathic engagement of rather different qualities. Self-focused perspective-taking, imagining how one would feel *oneself* in another's aversive situation, and other-focused perspective-taking, imagining how another feels *himself or herself* in an aversive situation, stimulate comparative levels of measurable empathic responding. However, self-focused perspective-taking is associated with a tendency towards to empathic *dis*engagement, a process of "empathic drift" (Hoffman, 2000) where concern for another triggers concern for oneself and, in this way, shifts from being compassionate empathic involvement to a potentially disturbing and distracting state of personal worrying. We already know that the request to imagine is an effective means of stimulating empathic involvement. Without failing to appreciate the multiplicity of forms that the request to imagine might take in the context of professional and practical ethics instruction (case studies, reading, and reflecting on literary fiction or film, as well, but probably rarely, as a direct injunction to imagine), at least from the

instrumental perspective of maximizing compassionate empathic involvement in practical problems, the request to imagine should specifically encourage other-focused perspective-taking and discourage self-focused perspective-taking.

7.2   Imitation and the Use of Literature and Narrative as a Route to Compassionate Empathizing

But what is the educational point of encouraging affective engagement with moral problems? One compelling answer-canvassed briefly in Chapter 1 (§1.2) and revisited in the consideration of compassionate empathizing as an ethical achievement (§4.3) and as foundational to moral perception (§5.3) -was that a moral problem when seen through the lens of concern for others, as a demand, that is, to judiciously negotiate and address competing claims to well-being, comes to seem more pressing and urgent. But beyond casting features of a moral problem in a *different* light, affective engagement also *brings* to light features of a moral problem that one may not otherwise have remarked. Sherman (1990) has expressed the point thus. When the emotions are implicated in moral assessment, she says,

> Not only do we notice, but we notice with a certain intensity or impact that would be absent if emotions weren't engaged. We focus in a way we wouldn't otherwise. And once focussed, we bring to bear further considerations that are relevant; we make inferences that would otherwise not have arisen or be thought of in a compelling way. Sensitivity thus becomes more than a purely perceptual or cognitive matter. (p. 150)

But Sherman stops short of stating the clincher: insofar as such engagement is not sentimental or mawkish—that is, "passionate" to use the term introduced in §4.2 to characterize emotions in their capacity to interfere with and distort normative judgement—but intelligent, judicious, and rational, with "sensitivity", as she calls it, comes a heightened normative awareness, a greater appreciation of relevant considerations, and it triggers (putatively valid) inferences in connection with the moral issue at hand. This is why affective engagement with a moral problem can be seen as a route to viewing it more *truthfully* and the epistemological leverage that affective engagement supplies—and I intend "epistemological" in the most expansive sense—is *the* argument and justification for deliberately attempting to, borrowing the label Scholz and Groarke (1996) pick for their second *Seven principles for better practical ethics*, "engage ethics students in non-intellectual ways" (p. 364). In one sense, this educational concern touches on the dimension of moral emotion education referred to above as "imitation". Imitation, and in particular the moral emotion education intervention that consists in a request to imitate, presented in Chapter 6, supposes what could be loosely referred to as affective obligations—that is, prescriptions to feel a certain way towards a certain object in a certain circumstance and, perhaps, backed by reasons to want to feel. This section looks at one way that requests to imitate are made in professional and applied ethics: through the study of literature and narrative.

Literature and *a fortiori* narrative may be put to use in practical ethics education in different ways and for different purposes. Case-based ethics teaching, for example, proceeds by analysing moral problems that are always presented in narrative form. The stories studied may even on occasion tug at the heart strings. Emotional arousal, however, is anything but their point (cf. §1.5). Using literature and narrative to elicit a certain type of affective response intentionally, by contrast, is well established in practical ethics if somewhat experimental insofar as it does not constitute a standard pedagogical approach to the field of study (cf. §1.5). Scholz and Groarke (1996), for example, report the successful deployment of Brantenberg's anti-utopian novel *Egalia's daughters* (1977/1985) in order to "develop the moral imagination and facilitate the ability of women and men to understand injustice based on gender" (p. 347). In human rights education, personal commitment to social progress, understood specifically in terms of the advancement of human rights, is commonly promoted using a pedagogical procedure whereby articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (or a connate document) are presented and then given a human face in the form of cases, hypothetical or historical, and ranging in their moral content from the unfortunate to the execrable, of human rights abuse and neglect (cf. Starkey, 1991; Reardon, 1995; and Andreopoulos & Claude, 1997). To borrow Britzman's (2003) compelling expression, the "difficult knowledge" of human immorality conveyed in such cases and by way of narrative tends to be regarded as crucial to the construction of the meaning of discrete human rights as a demand for the protection and promotion of specific forms of fundamental human well-being.

On the face of it, these and parallel pedagogical uses of narrative to stimulate compassionate empathic involvement may seem to have more to do with the moral emotion education strategy of imagination than with imitation. After all, the request to imagine is the request to vicariously dwell in the perspective of a person facing adversity and this precisely for the sake of eliciting emotions meant to serve moral ends (cf. §§ 4.2 and 6.4.1). This characterization, it is true, fits the use of literature in professional and practical ethics education just invoked to a tee.

Finding issues raised in this work that fall neatly under the heading of imitation is confounded by the very emotion on which it focuses: compassionate empathy. Imagination, it will be recalled from §6.4.1, has as its proper object the special and restricted set of moral emotions. Arguably, compassionate empathy is the most unalloyed of all the emotions that might reasonably be considered to fit into this class (cf. §4.3). This does not imply, of course, that compassionate empathy is not the coherent object of a request to imitate. On the contrary, whereas the objects of imagination are finite, the objects of imitation are in principle limited only by the human capacity to experience emotions that deviate from circumstantially prescribed norms—which must surely mean that, in effect, they have no object limits at all. Requests to feel compassionate empathy may, then, take the form of a direct injunction but this, one suspects, is rare. The belief that imaginative involvement in another's adversity has a way of issuing in feelings of solidarity is pervasive and, as was argued in §7.1, well founded. This state of affairs predicts a preference for imagination over imitation as the educational route to appropriate compassionate

empathizing. Moreover, it is a preference that is strengthened all the more in the present cultural context, described in §6.3, which tends to regard emotional experiences as private and inviolable. Even if the intent in both cases is for all intents and purposes identical, telling someone to perspective-take in hopes of evoking sympathy is not the same thing as telling someone to sympathize. The request to imagine is a way of avoiding the indelicacy of demanding the right emotional reaction but, crucially, it is a way that is available *uniquely* in the case of compassionate empathy and other moral emotions.

By attending to the aspect of the educational use of literature as education for compassionate empathizing which consists in a demand to *experience* compassionate empathy towards particular human beings in particular circumstances—rather than to the aspect which consists in a demand to *vicariously dwell* in another person's experience—one can, perhaps, come to better appreciate how it might also constitute a form of imitation. Educators can easily deceive themselves into thinking they can be disculpated from making an "indoctrinatory" demand for specific and substantive moral responses by using literature in this way. To suppose that students do not realize that they are the subject of just such a request is naïve. To deny that that is precisely the intent is disingenuous. Of course, how individual students respond to narrative is unpredictable; in *éducation sentimentale*, as elsewhere, there can be no algorithm. Doubtless, little is understood about how, whether, and under what conditions people learn moral ideas from encounters with the suffering of others. But when an instructor hands a student such a text and presents it as an *aid* to ethical insight or as an *expression* of ethical understanding the message is clear: that they are intended to sympathize, that they are thought to have good reason to sympathize, that, in sum, they have now become the subject of a request to imitate.

As a foil, then, for investigating this didactic use of literature and narrative in professional and practical ethics, Martha Nussbaum's work on literature as a means of educating for compassionate citizenry is apposite. From the perspective of the present chapter's intention to tease out some educational meaning from these studies' claims about the moral psychology of compassionate empathy, seeing how her treatment of empathizing through literature gets it right, provides an important angle on the problem of educating for compassionate empathic responding in practical ethics education. But seeing where it goes wrong is equally instructive. A proper appreciation of the multifacetedness of empathic responding, I want to argue, exposes literature's limitations as a curricular tool for fostering moral insight via affective engagement.

In *Upheavals of thought* (2001), Nussbaum's argument for using literature in higher education as a route to compassionate empathizing extends and brings together previous work on literature and political education in *Poetic justice* (1995) and her own particular eudaimonistic conception of social obligation as developed, for instance, in *Women and human development* (2000) (cf. also Nussbaum, 1992). Her aim in regard to the latter promises nothing short of a monumental advance for political theory. In essence she wishes to propose an alternative to minimalist and largely negative conceptions of citizenship obligations favoured by liberalism and long on the defensive in face of persistent critical pressure to come clean about its

own clandestine substantive ethical suppositions (cf. esp. Sandel, 1982). Her more substantive alternative outlines basic social entitlements grounded in a conception of fundamental preconditions of a flourishing human life. She formulates these entitlements in terms of a set of ten "central human capabilities". The list includes such familiar items as life and bodily health and integrity but also identifies various sorts of possibilities of attachment to other human beings, concern for the natural world, and even "play", or the ability to "laugh […] and enjoy recreational activities" (Nussbaum, 2001, pp. 416–417).

To arrive at a precise formulation of the role, Nussbaum thinks, compassion plays in the promotion and protection of these ten capabilities requires some extrapolation. It draws on her carefully delineated cognitive view of compassion, which she calls variously "appropriate compassion" and "rational compassion". In general terms, her characterization of compassion, sketched in §4.3, parallels that of Blum (1980a, 1980b) and others (e.g., Nagel, 1970; Wispé, 1986) in picturing compassion as an ethical achievement that consists in viewing the suffering of others as something to be relieved. In two different formulations, Nussbaum characterizes compassion as "valuing another person as part of one's own circle of concern" (2001, p. 336) and as a state of "concern to make the lot of the suffering as good, other things being equal, as it can be—because that person is an object of one's concern" (2001, p. 342). Compassion, on her account, depends further on "empathy and the judgement of similar possibilities" (pp. 425–426), where empathy is the "imaginative exercise of putting oneself in that person's place" (p. 342), or what is commonly known as perspective-taking. For its part, the judgement of similar possibilities is cognisance that the state of suffering is something that could happen to anyone, and especially to oneself (cf. Blum, 1980b; Nussbaum, 2001, p. 342). Having a cognitive core in fallible beliefs, compassion is susceptible to misdirection and inappropriateness. In particular, Nussbaum says, when compassion goes awry it can usually be accounted for in terms of one of three judgements typically connected with compassion. The first is the judgement of "seriousness" or mistaking trivial suffering for serious suffering (p. 415). The second is "non-desert" or the belief that people who are suffering deserve it (p. 419), an idea with obvious parallels to the well-documented just-world hypothesis (cf. Rubin & Peplau, 1975). Finally, she identifies the question of "extended concern", the difficult and controversial issue of the degree of concern people owe to others especially in virtue of the special relationships—as family members, neighbours, co-citizens, co-workers, etc.—that pertain between them (p. 420).[7] Compassion is an important ingredient of good citizenship, for Nussbaum, because compassion towards one's co-citizens is an important ingredient in (if not a precondition of) appreciating the fact that a *lack* of the basic human capacities she identifies constitutes a "tragic predicament" (2001, p. 418) or "catastrophe" for an individual in the sense of seriously hampering

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[7] "The three judgements" are Nussbaum's analogues to the "judgements of compassionate empathy" presented in §3.1.

the possibility of doing well *qua* human being (cf. 2001, p. 453). In other words, compassion plays, first, a *moral-perceptive* role in helping citizens see that there are such basic human goods. But it also seems to play a second *moral-motivational* role of enabling one to appreciate that we owe each other the provision and protection of the conditions of human flourishing. It is these realizations, or something like them, that compassion towards one's co-citizens helps to bring to light in Nussbaum's view. The education of compassion for citizenship implies the cultivation of appropriate judgements, but also support of extension of concern through the strengthening of the "psychological mechanisms" of empathy and the judgement of similar possibilities (pp. 425–426). And it is in its potential for this that the study of literature holds educational pride of place.

The focal point of Nussbaum's pedagogical proposal is the "extension of concern" and it is hard to deny that this is well founded. Her working assumption, consistent with both common sense and contemporary knowledge in empirical psychology (cf. esp. Hoffman's review in 2000, pp. 206–213), is, again, *not* that education for rational compassion is needed as a bulwark against a generalized state of apathy, anomie, or a pandemic of exaggerated self-concern. The danger, instead, is that citizens will fail to extend their natural propensity for compassion towards their kith and kin—those whom they know personally and those with whom they otherwise identify—to the strangers with whom they also share the broader social world. Basically normally functioning people, the assumed subjects of standard education (cf. Reichenbach & Oser, 1995, p. 192), in other words, need no special assistance to recognize and be motivated by the demands that their fellows' needs place on them. The pressing educational question is rather how to encourage similar appreciation for the needs of strangers as well.

Nussbaum's specific curricular prescription consists partly in the promotion of empathizing conceived of as a so-called soft skill but also and unmistakeably in didacticism. First, studying literature develops "empathy": the faculty of what Kohut (1959) called other-directed vicarious introspection and what is usually referred to as perspective-taking, the ability to arrive at a comprehension of another person's experience by imagining oneself in another person's situation. Reading stories in general (cf. 2001, pp. 426–429) and novels in particular, Nussbaum claims, "exercises the muscles of the imagination, making people capable of inhabiting for a time the world of a different person, and seeing the meaning of events in that world from the outsider's viewpoint" (2001, p. 431). The second, more didactic orientation of the approach, begins, she says, by asking what groups student–citizens "are likely to understand easily and what groups might need more mental exercise before empathy can take hold" (p. 430). The answer to this question provides the educator with a criterion for selecting novels which encourage the creation of "bonds of identification and sympathy" (1995, p. 7) with the groups with whom pupils are less likely to empathize. She argues convincingly that the artistic form of the novel, especially in its realist social mode—as exemplified by such classics of the liberal literary canon as Charles Dickens' *Hard times*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible man*, John Steinbeck's *The grapes of wrath*, and Richard Wright's *Native son*—is uniquely significant as a platform for compassionate imagining.

To give a sense of the kind of empathic engagement that novels encourage, Nussbaum explains how a reader of *Hard times* might respond to Dickens' account of the lives of factory workers in nineteenth-century England. The reader, she says, would see that, while the lives of factory workers in his or her own society are less harsh than in the past, in some equally important respects they are very much the same, in particular in respect of "certain very general norms of human flourishing" and a corresponding evaluation of "what is serious damage to a life and what is not" (1995, p. 7). As she summarizes the idea in *Poetic justice* (1995), social realist novels:

> […] present persistent forms of human need and desire realized in specific social situations. These situations frequently, indeed usually, differ a good deal from the reader's own. Novels, recognizing this, in general construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears and general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters. In this way, the very structure of the interaction between the text and its imagined reader invites the reader to see how the mutable features of society and circumstances bear on the realization of shared hopes and desires. (p. 7)

In this way, Nussbaum claims, reading the right books and through the connected exercise of the imagination enables the reader in one sense to become a participant in the protagonists' social struggles. This constitutes the provision of a form of moral perception or insight that the dry didactic learning of "facts about classes, races, nationalities, sexual orientations"—that is, the usual substance of political, social, and economic history (2001, p. 432)—does not so readily afford.

This, in brief, is the "vital political function" (p. 433) that literature plays in Nussbaum's assessment: first, it cultivates the imaginative or empathic abilities central to political life and supports the extension of concern. The bonds of sympathy and identification that reading judiciously selected social realist novels helps to create between otherwise estranged and compassionately detached citizens give substance to the very idea of the obligations of citizenship as Nussbaum conceives them: that our views about human freedom, functioning, and flourishing, ideas that so readily and spontaneously generate demands on us in the case of our kith and kin, make similar demands on us in the case of all citizens (2001, pp. 432–433). No mere recital of facts and statistics can achieve this. Only literature, Nussbaum claims, is up to the task.

Now I think we can appreciate without undue extrapolation that the language of Nussbaum's proposal—that of "capacities", "tragic predicaments", and the "extension of concern"—is consistent with the general portrait of compassionate empathizing that has emerged in these pages and, further, that its structure is readily transferable, *mutatis mutandis*, to the familiar didactic function assigned to literature in professional and practical ethics education and sketched at the beginning of this section. I am willing to go along with Nussbaum that there is no substitute for narrative as a means of communicating the kinds of human experiences as a way to get inside another person's social perspective. And I am willing to accept that reading novels is good for the development of imaginative powers—at any rate, good for the development of the kind of imaginative powers that are needed to appreciate novels.

But I suspect that it takes the influence of a very strong bias towards bookishness to be insensitive to this decisive fact: the world of narrative expression is rich, time is short, and people's abilities and interests are highly variable. What is the particular allure of literature? Why not, say, watch movies, plays, or listen to music instead?

Nussbaum actually has good theoretical reasons to assign to the novel, for the purposes of education for compassionate empathizing, such an elevated stature in the hierarchy of narrative forms. Attending to these grounds is instructive because it reveals how it is that Nussbaum's account succumbs to the bit of folk psychology I called the "perspective-taking/compassionate empathy hypothesis"—that is, that the principal psychological mechanism which mediates experiences of compassion is other-directed vicarious introspection (see §3.4).

Nussbaum, indeed, does not deny that other forms of narrative such as histories, biographies, and films and expressive media such as music, dance, theatre, and poems and even "economic treatises" (1995, p. 4) make a contribution to compassionate citizenry (cf., e.g., 1995, pp. 4–7; 2001, pp. 428, 431–432) but there is no doubting, however, that the realist social novel holds an incomparable pride of place in her schema. The reason for this is plain: none of these other forms of expression have as much potential to develop the ability to perspective-take, or imagine oneself in another person's position. She calls this ability "empathy", as we saw, and considers empathizing in this sense to be part and parcel of experiencing compassion towards another human being. Indeed, Nussbaum remarks that even when literature lacks explicitly political content, it still serves a "vital political function" because it cultivates empathy, this imaginative ability she considers central to political life (p. 433). What makes the realist social novel so attractive for Nussbaum is that it is here, in the *realist social* novel, that the form of the novel, with its rich capacity to draw the reader into the lives and world of its character, converges with narratives of struggles for social justice, making for a powerful educational cocktail indeed (cf. also 1995, especially Ch. 2 and related comments in Nussbaum, 1992). One can see already that this assumption turns on the uncritical acceptance of the perspective-taking/compassion hypothesis. To put the point counterfactually, if compassion did not suppose a process of perspective-taking with a person *qua* object of compassion, as she assumes, the grounds for her prioritization of literature over other narrative expressive forms would be lost. The properly directed stimulation of imaginative development is the royal road to compassionate citizenship only if compassion actually has rich imaginative content.

The limitations of restricting educational attempts to elicit feelings of solidarity and identification through exclusively language-mediated narrative means are apparent. It fails to draw on the full range of psychological mechanisms connected with empathic arousal. In particular, it neglects the potential contribution the reactive mechanisms have to make in compassion-eliciting experiences.[8]

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[8] Owing to this, Nussbaum treats childhood primarily as a period of latency where the principal achievement is the development of the imagination viewed as a "soft skill" in preparation for fully fledged compassion which comes only at a later stage (2001, cf. pp. 426–428). This underestimates children's capacity for compassion and identification for reasons already elaborated upon.

The multidimensionality of compassionate arousal and, again, its reactive dimension in particular (see §§6.3 and 3.4) would suggest that if one was forced to identify *one single* medium of communication that is of outstanding value in its potential to foster the appreciation of certain groups' historico-social situations as "tragic predicaments" à la Nussbaum we might have a more promising candidate in the realist social *film*—films such as *Philadelphia*, *Schindler's list*, *Norma Rae*, and *Dead man walking*—not the realist social novel. That said, the length of novels and the opportunities for character development and rich identification and the opportunity for imaginative development they provide should not be underestimated. The truth of the matter, surely, is that in most groups of human beings a variety of abilities and dispositions are represented. To put the point in terms used in Gardner's (1983) not uncontroversial theory of multiple intelligences, for those with strong linguistic-verbal intelligence, one can reasonably suppose that the most effective avenue to appropriate compassion is the realist social novel. For interpersonally intelligent people, it is likely to be things like service learning and other face to face experiences. For visually spatially oriented minds, it might be the visual and plastic arts, theatre, or the synaesthetic experience of a contemporary feature film. Among those with musical-rhythmic intelligence, much could be said in favour of listening to and even performing music. Finally, and though it might be difficult for the literary-minded to appreciate, the logical or mathematically minded might be most deeply moved by the facts and statistics that populate the pages of textbooks on sociology and economic development. In short, the fact that a broad palette of psychological processes is genetically involved in experiences of compassion, coupled with the fact that human beings, even within the same age and developmental ranges, have widely differing psychological capacities for compassion, speaks in favour of using a rich variety of approaches to the promotion of a compassionate citizenry and strongly against any one-sided diets.

In conclusion, when viewed from one perspective the multifacetedness of empathic responding—the fact, in other words, that any given experience of compassionate empathy is mediated by a range of identifiable psychological processes of varying degrees of cognitive sophistication—goes some distance towards explaining empathic bias, in particular the here and now bias or the tendency to identify with others who share experiences of suffering that are meaningful to the empathizer. However, when viewed from another perspective, however, the multifacetedness of empathic responding can be regarded not as a *cause* of unbalanced compassionate empathy but rather as an educational *resource* in the promotion of appropriate compassion. To put the point bluntly, in light compassionate empathy's psychological multifacetedness, the imperative of promoting rational compassion would seem to call for a more varied curricular response than the near-exclusive use of language-mediated communication that is traditional in higher education.[9]

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[9] This section draws heavily on Maxwell (2006) where a more elaborated version of this critique of Nussbaum's curricular proposal is presented.

7.3 Emotions as Appraisal, Judgement as Reappraisal, and Final Appraisal

In a lesser-known paper, Peters (1972/1998) argues that it is only because emotions are rational or, as he put it, because "emotions are basically forms of cognition" (p. 180) that they are or could become coherent objects of educational attention. His claim about the possibility of emotion education turns on what he means by "education". Peters' convictions on the question of the signification of "education" shift in his writings. In earlier work, "education" opposed pragmatically minded "industrial psychology" (cf. Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972) or "human capital" (cf. Walker, 2006) strategies for defining educational aims. From this perspective, curriculum should be vocationally oriented and market-driven and, accordingly, the fundamental notion of "education as preparation for life" is interpreted narrowly, in terms of the skills and knowledge thought to confer to its recipients competitive social and economic advantages. Drawing on a careful analysis of the way "education" is used in ordinary language, Peters argued that this familiar educational ideology amounts to an abuse of language. Employing means which appeal to the basic human capacity of rational and independent thought, "education" transmits knowledge and understanding which is not instrumentally but rather intrinsically worthwhile to those who acquire it (cf. Peters, 1966; cf. White, 2001, pp. 119–120). "Education", he concluded, "suggests the intentional bringing about of a desirable state of mind in a morally unobjectionable manner" (Peters, 1966) and by "desirable state of mind" he meant the acquisition of the "different view" that comes with an "understanding of the world and one's place in it" (Peters, 1964, p. 47). Here in his paper on emotion education, Peters' (1972/1998) ideas about the meaning of "education" seem to cut a wider swathe. "Education" appears now merely as "involving a family of experiences through which knowledge and understanding develop" (p. 179) and an important distinction between activities which contextualize educational processes and the process of education itself is brought to the definitional foreground. Providing conditions favourable to learning, like maintaining a clean and attractive classroom, teaching with a sense of humour, and aiming at the achievement of performance-optimizing levels of stress around evaluations, Peters suggests (op. cit., p. 171), are certainly ethical and undoubtedly ancillary to education but they are not strictly proper to education as such. What remains in the definition, most importantly, is the idea that the very possibility of education utterly depends on the existence of public standards of assessment and that appealing to such standards in the process of building up of understanding and knowledge is the keystone of pedagogical ethics. Emotions involve appraisals and appraisals are evaluative beliefs about the world. These beliefs, in turn, are susceptible to assessment in terms of publicly accessible standards. This is what makes emotions educable or, in Peters' (1972/1998) more cautious phrase, allows from some "scope for educating the emotions" (p. 180).

In the context of moral emotion education, this distinction between educability and scope for educability is especially significant but let us first attend to the fact that what Peters has in mind by "educating the emotions" is coterminous with the moral-education intervention referred to earlier as "requests to reappraise": assessing

the adequacy and relevance of the beliefs which form the cognitive core of an emotional response. Requests to reappraise seem to suppose that emotions are perceptive in that they draw a person's attention to morally salient features of a situation (cf. §6.4.3). More obviously, they also assume that emotions propose action incentives, that they are motivations. It may not be, say, that one feels hard done by *because* one first perceives having been treated unfairly as much as it is that the feeling of being hard done by is *itself* perceptive of unfair treatment. In this case, the feelings also somehow have a hand in letting one know that one has been treated unfairly. In this way, emotions do—or seem to—"reveal value", as Stocker (1996) had it. Most relevant for present purposes, however, is the fact that the request to reappraise supposes that an emotional reaction can simply be wrong: to pursue the example further, one may feel hard done by and one may honestly believe that one has been the victim of mistreatment. But the feeling has a certain inalienable rationale even where the belief to which it is connected is entirely fallacious. Recall that Callahan (1980) thought that professional and practical ethics pedagogy should prioritize over every other educational aim attempts to achieve imaginative and affective involvement with moral problems not because they merely "encourage" or "promote" rich, truthful, and engaging insight into moral problems. Such moral imaginative involvement in moral problems actually irreducibly *constitutes* a form of moral insight for which there is no substitute (cf. §1.2). Callahan, however, was fully alive too to the fact that even if affective responses to a moral problem are always rational—that is, "rational" taken as the contrary of arational, based on no reasons at all—this does not entail that they may not sometimes be irrational—that is, wrapped up with an erroneous belief set. This was what Callahan meant when he said, "imagination and analysis need each other" (1980, p. 65): with the pedagogical imperative to stimulate the moral imagination comes a concomitant imperative to submit spontaneous emotional responses to the regulative constraint of reflective judgement (cf. Callahan, 1980, p. 65 and §1.2 above) that is, to request to reappraise.

Peters (1972/1998) states firmly that the rational scrutiny of spontaneous affective responses is a process which has a claim to being a genuine (and perhaps *the only* genuine) emotion-educating process, in his terms. Observe, however, that there is a subtle but important tension built into this very idea. So construed, emotion education, by focusing necessarily on the cognitive dimension of emotional experience, the dimension susceptible to scrutiny by reference to public standards of assessment, has a weak identity as *éducation sentimentale*. Concisely stated, it attempts at emotional formation not directly but through forms of rational reflection. Now this prima facie banal observation is not meant as a critique of Peters' conception of emotion education; I believe, in fact, that any suggestion to disqualify reappraisal as a variety of emotion education on such grounds would amount to conceptual hair-splitting. Its importance for the purposes of this chapter, which (to repeat) is to consider the implications of the foregoing studies for contemporary practices of professional and practical ethics education, is that it explains and justifies my intentional avoidance of any direct commentary on the theme of the pedagogy of reappraisal. The education paths in the field of the epistemological relation between beliefs and the world and the basics of valid inference are

extensive and well trodden; my intention has not been to speak to concerns that are proper to critical thinking. Three issues which are, however, consistent with these studies' remit and that relate to the cognitive dimension of compassionate empathic responding beg commentary and they will be treated in this chapter's and this work's terminal subsections respectively. First, there is the issue of education for moral sensitivity and whether it constitutes a form of moral emotion education. Second, it is observed that the necessary particularity of compassionate empathic responding implies the necessary particularity of education for rational compassionate empathizing. Third, I claim that the close moral-psychological connection between active concern for others and the ability to grasp the notion of moral bindingness (or normativity) that has been recorded in these pages suggests one way to refresh the standard theoretical content that is now a typical feature of practical and professional ethics.

7.3.1   "Moral Sensitivity": A Misnomer?

Situational moral perception, or "moral sensitivity" as it is sometimes called (cf. Rest, 1986), draws on capacities of empathic response. This claim featured in §1.2 as one of the reasons in favour of bringing empathic development into the fold of top aims in professional and practical ethics education. Moral sensitivity, largely owing to the influence of Rest's four-component model of morality (cf. Rest, 1983, 1984, 1986) is an established, if variously interpreted, construct in research in moral education and moral psychology.[10] According to Rest's (1983, 1984, 1986) account, if moral judgement is the capacity which facilitates the identification of morally right or preferable action choices on the basis of considered reflection (component 2), if moral motivation is synonymous with moral integrity or moral responsibility, the prioritization of moral values over other values and action incentives (component 3), and if moral character corresponds to questions surrounding the determination to pursue moral goals and overcome impediments to the execution of moral acts (component 4), the moral sensitivity component embraces the perception of situations as presenting a moral problem and imagining and predicting the effects of action alternatives on the welfare of potentially affected parties (component 1). Among the outcomes of the scientific investigation of moral sensitivity

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[10] In the early 1980s, James Rest developed the four-component model of morality in order to combine various theoretical perspectives on moral functioning into a single coherent framework (cf. Rest, 1983). Rest perceived that the theories of moral functioning vying for dominance during that period—the cognitive-developmental approach, the psychoanalytic approach, the empathy-based approach, and the socialization approach—made unwarranted claims to comprehensiveness. In his alternative view, each theory was better conceived as highlighting just one of several aspects of moral functioning. These aspects became the basic constructs of his multi-component model. Much as Rest intended it (cf. 1986), the four-component model continues to have taxonomic importance, loosely delineating four branches of moral psychology as a field of empirical research and four corresponding areas of moral educational intervention. You and Bebeau (2005) have recently reviewed the empirical research on the construct of moral sensitivity.

has been, in addition to no less than 20 psychological measures of moral sensitivity at You and Bebeau's (2005) count, a modest body of empirical evidence on the effect of ethics teaching on capacities of moral sensitivity. The result should bring comfort to educators concerned that most professional and practical ethics teaching is not fit for purpose as a device for the development of skills in situational moral perception. You and Bebeau (2005) cite the results of six studies as grounds that moral sensitivity "can be taught and improved through instruction" (p. 11). Methodologically, each study used comparative scores on standard psychological tests of moral sensitivity between an experiment group and a control group and, in all cases except one, the independent variable was participation in what appear from You and Bebeau's (2005) description to be a rather standard subject area-specific ethics course (cf. Ofsthun, 1986; Liebowitz, 1990; Clarkeburn, 2002; Myyry & Helkama, 2002; Sirin et al., 2003).[11] And all these studies observed a modest improvement in situational moral perception abilities.

Professional and practical ethics education, then, would appear to address moral sensitivity in spite of itself.

But is situational moral perception a predominantly *affective* capacity and would the educational promotion of capacities of situational moral perception constitute a form of *éducation sentimentale*? Rest (1986), for one, seemed to think it was. He implies that Hoffman's (1978, 1981, 2000) account of empathic development lends credence to the assumption that moral sensitivity is a centrally affective process in that it presupposes a basic aversive affective response ("distress") to others' actual or prospective distress. Indeed, the term "moral sensitivity" itself is loaded in favour of this interpretation; the very words connote the rallying of affective insight. Scholars in both psychology and ethics who work with the construct have rarely, however, scrutinized this claim, tending instead to apparently assume that moral sensitivity depends on affective capacities of response (e.g., Morton, et al., 2006, p. 390; cf. Rest, 1986; Bebeau, 1994; Pizarro, 2000; Sherman, 1990, p. 150; cf. Murdoch, 1970; Blum, 1980, 1991; Vetlesen, 1996; Callahan, 1980; Combs, 1998) or to diplomatically avoid taking a stand on the question (e.g., Volker, 1984; Hébert et al., 1990, 1992; Herman, 1996; Akabayashi, 2004).

The discussion in §5.4 on the role of affect in moral judgement calls into serious doubt the suggestion that the education of situational moral perception is unambiguously a form of moral emotion education. There, it was reasoned that if the process of moral sensitivity does draw significantly on affective capacities of response, that would predict that *impairment* of moral sensitivity should be characteristic of psychopathy, a diagnostic category in abnormal psychology associated with intact cognitive accompanied affective inertness.

Drawing on evidence concerning the moral functioning of psychopaths it was argued that moral sensitivity does not appear to be a predominantly affective moral

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[11] The unique exception was the study by Ofsthun (1986) which investigated the impact of a novel pedagogical model specifically designed for the purposes of enhancing moral sensitivity and connected processes.

faculty. For psychopaths are indeed morally sensitive in the relevant situational-moral perceptive sense. They have no apparent endemic trouble in "picking out morally salient features of a situation". From this conjecture follows an important and perhaps counterintuitive educational truth. There is no doubt, of course, that setting out in practical and professional ethics education to support the development of capacities of situational moral perception is to target some important aspect of moral functioning. But if one believes that in educationally addressing situational moral perception one is *thereby* addressing the hitherto educationally "neglected" affective dimensions of moral functioning, one seems simply to be mistaken.[12]

7.3.2   Empathic Décalage

The overview in §§3.4 and 4.4, respectively, of the psychological processes which underlie experiences of compassionate empathy and forms of empathic bias was illuminating for at least three reasons. First, a theory of these processes helps to account two widely recognized features of compassionate empathic responding: (1) that compassionate empathic responses are partial to those who are in one's immediate spatial and temporal proximity (i.e., the here and now bias) and with whom one identifies; and, (2) that, among people whose conscience and capacities for advanced situational moral insight are present and generally strong and intact, compassionate empathizing is on the whole a highly reliable and predictable response (cf. also the discussion in §7.1). Second, the fact that compassionate empathizing seems to be mediated by a range of psychological processes calls into serious question the persistent moral-psychological folk belief that one may *only* come to empathize by way of an imaginative process of perspective-taking, through "changing places in fancy with the sufferer" in Smith's (1790/1976) evocative phrase. Third, and most importantly from the present perspective, the fact that experiences of compassionate empathy are associative and conditioned, as we saw, predicts that compassionate empathic responding will display a high degree of individual-specificity given their dependence on conditioning, personal associations with surface cues, or the narrative structure of the situation, and so on. A range of discrete ways that such predispositions could run against the imperative of balanced or rational compassion are well documented, all of which may be considered for our purposes forms of developmental "décalage".

"Décalage", a term borrowed from classical cognitive development theory, refers to inconsistencies in the level of differentiation of cognitive operations across a range of physical or social activities (cf. Reimer, 1989). Viewed from a pedagogical standpoint, the educational problem décalage identifies is akin to the educational

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[12] The finding that moral sensitivity is not dependent on affective capacities of response should not be taken to imply the reductivist thesis that moral sensitivity is therefore "nothing but" a form of moral judgement. Moral sensitivity's status as an analytically distinct component of moral functioning depends in no way on it being predominantly affective.

problem of "transference", or how and whether skills and competencies gained in formally structured or more or less dry didactic contexts (like getting good at Sudoku puzzles or becoming vicariously involved in the life of a character in a novel) improves performance when it comes to other activities which draw on some of the same abilities (like remembering to tie ones shoes or becoming vicariously involved in the lives of actual human beings). In moral development theory, "décalage" describes, for instance, the well-documented phenomenon where adolescent boys show a degree of competence and sophistication in thinking about moral questions related to areas such as law or property which is not available to them in regards to the domain of sexuality (cf. Gilligan et al., 1971).[13]

That addressing compassionate empathic *décalage* must be a central preoccupation of education for compassionate empathy in professional and practical ethics education is, I think, a fairly direct implication of the position arrived at in §7.1 about the reliability of compassionate empathic responding. Worries about wholesale or comprehensive empathic torpidity get education for appropriate compassionate empathic responding off on the wrong foot; it is a starting point that reflects a profound mis-appreciation of empathic responding. It is a fundamental and necessary social capacity. There is, then, the possibly banal claim that psychologically normal adults do not need to be taught basic responsiveness to others' needs. And there is the even more obvious fact that many human beings who would clearly count as normal from the point of view of social functioning are capable of monstrous systematic departures from the ideal of appropriate empathic responding. I posit that the second phenomenon is not so difficult to square with the first when seen as the manifestation of what are almost certainly heavily socially informed varieties of empathic décalage. If empathy is not teachable to adults, what they more plausibly can learn in higher education is the appropriate extension of naturally occurring empathic capacities in three identifiable ways corresponding to three identifiable forms of empathic décalage. First, there are cases where a person has an exaggerated sensitivity or, alternatively, is perceptually very weak faced with harms connected with one or another issue of recurrent moral concern, issues such as punishment, property, law, freedom, and the roles and concerns of authority and affection, life, fairness, truth, to borrow from Kohlberg's (1978, p. 39) rough and ready list of the "ten universal moral values or issues of concern". One may, for

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[13] This phenomenon is sometimes referred to as "moral segmentation" (cf. Rest, 1979). Both moral segmentation and décalage are theoretical postulates which are supposed to account for empirical data on moral judgement which speaks against Kohlberg's Piagetan hypothesis that the stages of moral judgement are "structured wholes" (cf. Colby & Kohlberg, 1987). The long and short of it is that according to classical stage theory an individual should consider any cognitive problem from the perspective of his or her current stage of development but data on moral judgement almost always seems to record a stage preference "spread" over not two but *three* stages; if subjects showed preference for two stages, these data could presumably be accounted for by the hypothesis that they are in transition from one stage to another. Some authors speak of décalage and moral segmentation as two distinct constructs (cf., e.g., Beck et al., 1999) but for our purposes it is sufficient to treat them as interchangeably referring to the assumption that people commonly use different stage principles or, in more common parlance, moral standards in different situations.

instance, be keenly attuned to unfairness or injustice but be quite callous towards, say, the kind of suffering caused by disappointment in fair competition or towards physical or psychological discomfort or pain (cf. Blum, 1991, p. 716). Second, an individual's moral sensitivity may be inconsistent across what Nunner-Winkler (1994) refers to as "moral objects" and what Taylor (cf. 1989) discusses under the heading of "moral ontology": who is considered to be the appropriate recipient of moral attention. Again, basically normal moral agents would recognize some moral objects but they might lack appropriate unity by being more or less (or in extreme cases only) sensitive to the suffering of one or another category of moral being, if you will. Typical categories of this sort would be, of course, people of a certain identifiable ethnicity or social class, adults or children but could also be manifest in greater moral sensitivity towards animals or nature as a whole against people (cf. Blum, 1991, p. 716). Third, just as the same moral agent can display strong *moral reasoning* competencies in some theme area (e.g., bioethics or the environment) but weak in others (e.g., sexuality) so too might one expect there to be variations in *moral sensitivity* across different moral theme areas. One who, say, is numb at the prospect of committing egregious harms to others in the course of their business or financial dealings may well be affronted by, say, the prospect of stem cell research or assisted suicide. These forms of empathic décalage may overlap and such overlaps may be worth exploring but even this admittedly unrefined account has significant heuristic value. Again, it eases the tension between the psychological normality of intact capacities of empathic response to suffering with the fact of selective human callousness, but it also maps out the specific areas where one can begin to educationally address forms of empathic décalage (i.e., vis-à-vis recurrent moral issues, categories of moral being, and moral theme areas). Finally it shows how addressing compassionate empathy in practical ethics education is not singular and monolithic but as particularist as empathic responding is itself. In Blum's words, cultivating compassionate empathy "will involve nurturing or developing some distinct sensitivities and will involve different tasks and processes for different persons with respect to different objects of sympathy or empathy" (1991, p. 717).

Compassionate-empathic décalage as a challenge of ethics teaching in higher education takes us right back, of course, to a concern that lies at the heart of Nussbaum's justification of literary study as a form of education for compassionate citizenry in particular and, in general, the use of literature in professional and practical ethics education as a "request to imitate" as we had it in §7.2, to evoke a sense of solidarity and compassion with certain people or groups in certain aversive circumstances. A tragic predicament for one—a woman, a disabled, social excluded or vulnerable person, a migrant, perhaps an animal as a sentient being—is a tragic predicament for all. It is clear that, for that purpose, the right books to read are the ones that assist in overcoming ontological décalage—or, in Nussbaum's language, "extending concern"—by encouraging identification with social groups or other categories of moral identity with whom students are liable to *resist* identifying. This feature of Nussbaum's proposal underscores, again, the strong and necessary particularism of education for appropriate compassionate empathic responding; there can be guidelines but no recipes. What is certain, though, is that in order for an

educator to be in a position to choose educational material appropriate for the purposes of countering empathic décalage he must know his students well and have an accurate reading of their states of empathic segmentation.

When considering the source of empathic décalage, informal socialization and, in particular, the influence of families, friends, the media, and the like naturally come first to mind. But empathic segmentation can occur as a result of socialization within the context of academic and especially professional formation in higher education itself. Although interventions designed to target such dispositions could at best cover up the symptoms but, as it were, not cure the disease itself, it is not difficult to imagine how specific pedagogical initiatives could be devised to counter precisely this influence. There is no doubt that such a process of, if you will, demoralization occurs to varying degrees in programmes of professional preparation other than in medicine but here the phenomenon seems more pronounced; while its causes are still poorly understood, the phenomenon itself is well documented and so it will serve as our example.

The results of empirical research into the moral development of medical students paints an unsettling picture: when compared with their peers in other programmes of study, medical students tend to start their studies with atypically high "moral ideals" and then gradually to lose them, and frequently lose them quite dramatically, as they progress through their studies (cf., e.g., Feudtner et al., 1994; Coulehan & Williams, 2001). Comparative stagnation of cognitive moral development is also endemic to this group (cf. reviews in Self & Baldwin, 1994; and in Rest et al., 1999). The so-called hidden curriculum, the personality profile of candidates attracted to medical studies, and the competitive, hierarchical, and stressful context of professional medical training are consistently conjectured as contributing factors (cf., e.g., Boon & Turner, 2004; Coulehan & Williams, 2001; Kelly & Verghese, 1997; Hafferty & Franks, 1994).

From the present perspective, however, the most important observed tendency among medical students is that over the course of their studies they seem to become more *dis*passionateness and less *com*passionate towards patients. Recorded among medical students is increasing cynicism about their helping role and fiduciary responsibility, and the use of embarrassingly pejorative terms to describe patients; some commentators regard these attitudes and behaviours as symptomatic of the socialization of medical students into a medical culture which dehumanizes patients (cf., e.g., Hafferty & Franks, 1994; Mizrahi, 1986; Liederman & Grisso, 1985).[14] Whatever one may think of the focus of medical training to instruct in the curing of disease rather than the healing of the person and especially its effects in terms of medical socialization—a controversial issue even among medical educators themselves—few could fail to appreciate that the kind of continual confrontation with suffering, disease, and death that is typical in the first years of clinical work is enough to traumatize any young person. Indeed, Kelly and Verghese (1997) speculate, not

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[14] The phenomenon of patient dehumanization in medical culture was brought to widespread public attention by Shem's novel, *The house of God* (1986) and Konner's anecdotal non-fictional work, *Becoming a doctor* (1987).

implausibly, that weak empathizing and patient dehumanization on the part of medical students might very well be saddening attempts at psychological self-defence.

Irrespective of its causes, one can well imagine a medical educator familiar with the research on this phenomenon to view his or her students as being at risk of developing precisely a form of empathic décalage consisting of inappropriate weak empathizing with patients as a group and, especially considering the centrality of empathy and compassion to medical role morality,[15] resolve to use curricular time to address it. Barnbaum (2001) has developed a pedagogical tool that such an educator might seriously consider adopting. Her proposal was not explicitly intended with the dehumanization phenomenon in mind but one can see immediately its applicability. Very briefly, Barnbaum's strategy tries to provide support for identification with patients and teach pathology at the same time by using what she calls "lottery assignments". At the beginning of the semester, each student is randomly assigned a disease that they "get". Throughout the semester, the students are invited to place themselves vicariously in the patient's position by preparing and presenting periodic reports on the disease's progress from birth to death. An explicit requirement of the learning activity is to report on the effects of the disease on the personal and private aspects of the sufferer's life. In our terms, this multistage learning activity is, if you will, a protracted request to imagine: to engage in other- rather than self-focused perspective-taking, the more empathically evocative of the two primary sub-forms of perspective-taking (cf. §§6.3 and 3.4.2).

7.3.3   Consideration for Others and Teaching the Theory of Moral Judgement

Courses in practical ethics traditionally begin with a unit which overviews "approaches to ethics".[16] Until only about a decade ago, this duty required the presentation of only deontologism and consequentialism but it has, in response to significant recent developments in normative ethics, been latterly extended to virtue ethics. The educational utility of this exercise depends to some degree on the kind of course that is to follow. In academic courses, courses which proceed by studying a selection of philosophical essays which develop and defend a policy position vis-à-vis one or another morally controversial practice (self-regarding suicide, capital punishment, vivisection, and so on), the theoretical introduction can provide an analytical framework in reference to which the argumentative essays' justificatory appeals may be categorized and comprehended on an abstract level. In case-based courses, the theory of moral reasoning may operate as a set of guidelines describing

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[15] See the discussion of this point in §1.2.

[16] Extensive critical discussions of the three general theories of normative ethics can be found in Baron et al. (1997).

basically correct if possibly incompatible procedures which may be used to generate a justified position vis-à-vis the particular moral problem a case presents.[17]

Owing to the fact that contemporary practical ethics' pedigree lies in realist conceptions of moral philosophy rather than moral psychology (cf. §1.1), the theory of cognitive moral development is rarely treated in such theoretical introductions. The inclusion of such a unit, say, on Kohlberg's theory is, of course, not inconceivable and possibly justified.[18] My intention in raising this possibility, however, is not to recommend its ascension to the cannon of theoretical ideas about moral reasoning traditionally introduced in courses in practical ethics as much as it is to draw attention to some empirical research that speaks to the general significance of moral theory in the context of professional and practical ethics education. Research into the effects of the direct teaching of Kohlberg's theory on cognitive-moral development modestly supports the tradition of a theoretical introduction in practical ethics. In an ageing but still widely cited meta-analysis of moral education intervention studies using the Defining Issues Test (DIT), Schläfli et al. (1985) found that study participants who were *not* asked to learn about Kohlberg's theory typically made about half the gain in terms of a positive effect on moral reasoning as did those to whom the theory was taught. The gains recorded were modest but it is nevertheless an interesting result; from it I take nothing more than, again, that there might indeed be a kernel of wisdom in the habit of including some relevant aspects of moral theory as part of the content of practical ethics courses.

This inference, however, seems open to two objections. First, and against the evidence that learning about Kohlberg's theory improves DIT scores itself, *obviously*, one might claim, far from being indicative of any structural-cognitive changes, the teacher has simply "taught to the test". In effect, by introducing the students to Kohlberg's theory she just gave the students the right answers to the DIT. This objection loses much of its force, however, when one considers that it has become part of the standard explanation for why higher stages of moral development are not just different but "better" than lower stages to point out that while it is easy for anyone to identify considerations that represent stages of moral judgement lower than one's own stage—that is to say, to "fake down"—efforts to "fake up" almost invariably fail (cf. Rest et al. 1969; McGeorge, 1975; and Rest, 1994). But, one could object further, even if we accept that registered increases in post-test scores in these cases is not the result of clever manipulation on the part of the test subjects but a true indication of development; what is true of the theory of cognitive developmentalism might not be true of the theory of normative ethics. Consequentialism and deontologism are typically categorized as post-conventional or Level III modes of moral thinking (Rest et al., 1997). According to the Blatt effect, people are generally unable to recognize the strategic advantage of modes of reasoning beyond one stage above their own (cf. discussions in Schrader, 1993; and Reimer, 1989) and so the theoretical

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[17] The standard pedagogical approaches to teaching practical ethics and the theory-based/case-based teaching distinction is discussed in more detail in §1.5.

[18] See Schrader (1993) for an example of a model of ethics education for professionals in education based on Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development.

discussion of these approaches would be all but incomprehensible to every student except those who would score on the upper conventional range of Level II. To the rest it would be of little educational value from the point of view of cognitive moral development. Lucky thing for teachers of practical ethics in higher education, then, that demographically speaking the achievement of stage 4 happens not to be atypical of their constituency (cf. Rest & Narváez, 1994).[19]

Undaunted by these objections, I thus repeat that the results recorded in Schläfli et al. (1985) provide some modest confirmation of what I think most instructors suspect: that the standard theoretical introduction to practical ethics courses not only improves general philosophical culture, it also contributes in a meaningful way to the development of practical wisdom. These considerations suggest to me that, *mutatis mutandis*, a similar benefit may be derived from a theoretical introduction to consideration for others as an aspect of moral experience. But what kind of benefit should one expect from insight into the apparent fact that morality is a product of a human tendency towards consideration for others in this sense?

In light of the foregoing discussion of the role of compassionate empathy in moral judgement, it seems to me that one should emphatically not expect direct measurable preference for higher quality moral reasons or consistent spontaneous generation thereof in the manner of Kohlberg's theory of cognitive moral development.[20] Nor, presumably, should one expect greater competency in generating convincing arguments in favour of one action alternative or another in the face of a moral problem. Moral maturity, in this sense, seems to suppose at most the *cognitive mastery* of various and in all likelihood incommensurable categories of harm (e.g., pain, embarrassment, tragedy, humiliation, injustice, death, destitution, disappointment, etc.) and well-being (e.g., dignity, happiness, fairness, flourishing, care, respect, life, freedom) but it does not seem to imply *caring about* avoiding them or promoting them among human beings (cf. discussion of Herman, 1996 and in §§6.3 and 5.4). What one can realistically hope that such insight would provide is greater lucidity about the normativity of moral judgements—that is, the reason why moral

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[19] It is worth noting that the notion that learning about the theory of cognitive developmentalism is favourable to cognitive moral development, by contrast, is not open to this objection but one should not lose sight of the fact that those exposed to the theory probably benefit not from learning about the theory *as a whole* but from the explication of the stages of moral reasoning one step above their own and, connectedly, the inadequacies of their own current level of moral development and those levels below it. To my knowledge, the hypothesis that the traditional introductory unit on approaches to normative ethics in practical ethics courses is beneficial to the development of moral reasoning competencies has never been the subject of empirical investigation.

[20] There seems to be a state of theoretical stalemate over whether the correct conceptualization of "being in" a particular stage of moral development is best characterized as a "preference" for or "consistent acceptability-rating" of certain types of justificatory reasons corresponding to Kohlberg's basic 6-stage schema. The Defining Issues Test, a standard psychological measure in North America supposes "stage-preference" whereas Lind's upstart Moral Judgement Test, widely used in Europe, is constructed on the "stage-consistency" approach (cf. Rest et al., 1997; Lind, 2002). The admittedly awkward formulation attempts to recognize both approaches without taking a position on the question.

reasons *should* be motivationally compelling or what it actually *means* to act in accordance with a moral reason.

A common tendency can perhaps be detected, as clear as it is apparently misguided, to view the problem of moral motivation as a problem of self-mastery or self-control. A choice to act in accordance with one's best moral judgement, in other words, is widely thought to be *controlled by* rather than *imbued with* reason. This gives the false impression that the decision to act in a way that one has come to regard, possibly after a period of rational reflection, as morally best is an internal matter or an entirely personal affair. However, when faced with the choice, in a particular set of circumstances, of acting either the way one regards as being morally best or according to one or another countervailing hypothetical motivation like material interest, fear of social sanction, or the promotion of a particular social ethos, a person who conceives of what is at stake in a moral problem as being human weal and woe at least has a clear-sighted comprehension what the choice is *between*: that is to say, and to adopt Vetlesen's (1994) formulation, the decision is over whether or not to support the social institution of morality and its constitutional aim of protecting individuals in their natural vulnerability (cf., e.g., pp. 312–315). From this perspective, the problem of moral motivation appears as an *inter-* but not as an *intra*-subjective problem—that is, an evaluative question of the quality of one's relations with one's co-subjects. It is a (probably untestable) empirical question and remains to be seen whether people who *interpret* moral problems as problems of how to best further well-being and avoid harm—as opposed, say, to interpreting moral problems as turning on the ethical–existential question of "What kind of person am I?" (Walker & Henning, 2004; and various texts in Lapsley & Narváez, 2004; cf. also n. 6 above) or the practical–rational problem of determining whether the moral reasons relevant to a particular problem are sufficiently compelling to be will-determining in the face of countervailing hypothetical reasons (Habermas, 1993b)—tend towards greater consistency between moral judgement and moral motivation. The moral psychology of consideration for others, or empathy, seem to suggest that they just might: there is an internal conceptual connection between consideration for others and motivation in that empathy just is an emotion characterized as a regard for others present or perspective suffering as something to be alleviated or avoided (cf. Blum, 1980b). Moreover, 30 years of research in social psychology on empathy and pro-social and helping behaviour bears the connection out (see discussions in §§2.2.2. and 3.3). If bothering about morality is of a piece with something like responding to the recognition of others' vulnerability with concern for their weal and woe, to this extent, moral wisdom necessarily draws on insight into others' perspectives, assessing their demands, and taking those demands seriously. Some of the blame for the fact that this is almost never brought to the attention of students of professional and practical ethics can be laid at the door of the persistently dualistic thinking about reason and emotion in popular ethical culture and a symptom of this dualism in practical ethics education is the tendency for students, not infrequently following the example of their instructors, to view approaching a moral problem with sublime disinterestedness as a sign of intellectual sophistication rather than philistine insensitivity. If a

compassionate empathic disposition is the backdrop for the operations of moral perception, moral reasoning, and moral integrity, making this apparent fact of moral life explicit may well be the most important and least considered thing that teachers of practical ethics can do to advance the cause of appropriate compassionate empathizing in professional and practical ethics education.