Varieties of Empathy and Moral Agency

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Abstract Contemporary literature includes a wide variety of definitions of empathy. At the same time, the revival of sentimentalism has proposed that empathy serves as a necessary criterion of moral agency. The paper explores four common definitions in order to map out which of them best serves such agency. Historical figures are used as the backdrop against which contemporary literature is analysed. David Hume's philosophy is linked to contemporary notions of affective and cognitive empathy, Adam Smith's philosophy to projective empathy, and Max Scheler's account to embodied empathy. Whereas cognitive and projective empathy suffer from detachment and atomism, thereby providing poor support for the type of other-directedness and openness entailed by moral agency, embodied and affective empathy intrinsically facilitate these factors, and hence are viewed as fruitful candidates. However, the theory of affective empathy struggles to explain why the experience of empathy includes more than pure affective mimicry, whilst embodied empathy fails to take into account forms of empathy that do not include contextual, narrative information. In order to navigate through these difficulties, Edith Stein's take on non-primordial experience is used as a base upon which a definition of affective empathy, inclusive of an embodied dimension, and founded on a movement between resonation and response, is sketched. It is argued that, of the four candidates, this new definition best facilitates moral agency.

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1 Introduction

Sentimentalism has made a come-back in the arena of moral theory and particularly moral psychology. It is becoming increasingly common to argue that morality is founded on emotive responses toward the external world (Prinz 2006; McGreer 2008), and/or the capacity to empathise with others (Hoffman 1990; Slote 2007). Often these two suggested factors merge; for instance, Patricia Churchland argues that empathy triggers moral emotions in us, whilst David Hume famously maintained that empathy toward the emotions of others sparks normative concern (Churchland 2011; Hume 1969). Yet, whereas emotions have undergone considerable qualitative exploration, much less scrutiny has been afforded to precisely what type of "empathy" is relevant from the viewpoint of morality and particularly moral agency. Researchers interested in empathy have offered a wide variety of definitions, which are often conflicting or even contradictory (within social psychology alone, at least 10 different definitions have been mapped out—see Decety and Ickes 2009) and this multiplicity has paved the way for considerable ambiguity in empathy literature that concerns moral agency. The question that emerges is: what type of empathy plays a part in moral agency?

To make matters more complicated, not only is empathy defined in a variety of ways, but it is also often presented as a "plural capacity"—i.e. it is thought to involve a host of different capacities, all merged under the umbrella term "empathy". Thus, Frans de Waal has argued that empathy is "the capacity to (a) be affected by and share the

emotional states of another, (b) assess the reasons for the other's state, and (c) identify with the other, adopting his or her perspective" (de Waal 2008). Similarly, Decety and Jackson (2006) argue that empathy is comprised of three components: affective response toward another individual, cognitive capacity to perceive that person's point of view, and emotion regulation. To continue the list, Vignemont and Frith (2008) argue that empathy refers to an affective state which is comparable to the state of its object, which is sparked by observation or imagination, and wherein one knows the other individual to be the source of one's own state. Through such definitions, these authors suggest that empathy is a multifaceted phenomenon which cannot be defined in a singular sense. This multiplicity easily adds to the confusion concerning empathy and its relation to moral agency. Of course, empathy may include many facets, but one must be careful to stipulate precisely which of the different facets have moral import.

The paper at hand seeks to offer a topology of some of the most common definitions of empathy and explore their links to moral agency. "Moral agency" is here understood in the normative sense: the starting premise is that "morality" concerns awareness and avoidance of causing harm to others (rather than, for instance, a culturally constructed collection of norms, or—in the Kantian sense— what a rational, autonomous being would will universally). Therefore, "morality" is defined in the Benthamian fashion, common in contemporary moral psychology. The second starting premise is that "agency" consists of an ability to make and follow "judgments". "Moral agency", then, is taken to mean an ability to form and follow judgments concerning the harm faced by other individuals. The third starting premise is that such agency rests on "other-directedness", wherein one's judgments are motivated by and concern primarily the experiences or other mental states of others rather than one's own needs, wants or desires. The fourth premise is that moral agency also rests on an attitude of *openness* toward other individuals— one becomes exposed to the experiences or other mental states of others, regardless of how these impact one's own needs, wants or desires. As summarized by Shaun Gallagher: "I am open to the experience and the life of the other, in their context, as I can understand it, not in terms of my own narrow experience, but in terms that can be drawn from a diversity of narratives that inform my understanding" (Gallagher 2012, 17). Hence, we not only allow our judgments to be motivated by and concern the mental states of others (other-directedness), but also disallow our preexisting judgments from hampering exposure to these mental states (openness). It is suggested that the first two factors can be enabled by many forms of empathy, but that the latter two factors—other-directedness and openness— are far trickier to facilitate. It is also suggested that these latter factors are necessary for moral agency, and that an empathy with relevance for such agency will promote them. Therefore, in order to map out which forms of empathy best accommodate moral agency, emphasis will be placed on the following question: does the given definition of empathy facilitate other-directedness and openness?

In order to probe the relation between empathy and moral agency, the paper goes back to the point at which the story begins: the philosophy of David Hume, Adam Smith, Max Scheler and Edith Stein. Despite the time that has lapsed since the *Treatise on Human Nature* (Hume 1740/1969), *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Smith 1759/2009), *Nature of Sympathy* (Scheler 1921/1979) and *On the Problem of Empathy* (Stein 1921/1989) were published, all these philosophers' approaches to empathy (or "sympathy", as they—bar Stein—called it) remain strikingly relevant[1] to contemporary discussion.

2 Hume and Smith: Cognitive, Affective, and Projective Empathy

Hume (1969, 367) is, of course, the most notable forefather of empathy-based moral theory. For him, "sympathy" (used synonymously with many contemporary definitions of empathy) is the most astonishing feature in the human (and animal) mind: "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own". As suggested in this passage, the most readily apparent reason for its import stems from the way it forms a doorway to the experiences of other beings. Hume defines sympathy as a capacity with the help of which one can undergo the experiences of others, as *impressions* (for instance bodily sensations) of those others are transformed into *ideas* (for instance "suffering"), and ultimately into one's own impressions (whereby we feel the suffering of others). In short, external signs in others convey an idea of an emotion to us, which is again "converted into an impression" (Hume 1969, 367–368). In this way, sympathy helps one to experience what would otherwise simply remain an idea or a notion concerning the mental states of

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[1] References to 'sympathy' are very old, and can already be found in Aristotle's philosophy. 'Empathy', on the other hand, arrived as a translation from the German 'Einfühlung' in the early twentieth century (Cole 2001). *Einfühlung* was a common term in German philosophy at the turn of the nineteenth century, and meant 'feeling oneself into'. Theodor Lipps was perhaps the most popular advocate of *Einfühlung*, and used this term in relation to aesthetics (Nilsson 2003) (see footnote 10).

others; it renders the "joy" or "pain" of another into a tangible, self-experienced state. To summarise: "'Tis indeed evident, that when we sympathise with the passions and sentiments of others, these movements appear at first in our mind as mere ideas, and are conceived to belong to another person, as we conceive any other matter of fact. "This also evident, that the ideas of the affections of others are converted into the very impressions they represent" (Hume 1969, 370). Indeed, in sympathy one *resonates* with the emotions of others, since, as Hume explains, minds are "mirrors to one another, not only because they reflect each others' emotions, but also because those rays of passions, sentiments and opinions may be often reverberated" (Hume 1969, 414). This resonation can be so powerful as to nearly match the original state that sparked sympathy into existence; it can have "such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection" (Hume 1969, 367). The emotions of others are so vividly felt that they seem like our own, if slightly weaker.

Another important writer on empathy is Adam Smith. Whereas, for his friend Hume, empathy involves reverberation, for Smith empathy is based on projection (again, it should be pointed out that Smith used the term "sympathy"). We are to project ourselves, with the aid of imagination, into the position of another, and to map out how we would feel, were we to be that other person. Therefore, resonation is replaced with *simulation*. Smith explains: "As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation" (Smith 2009, 13). Sympathy consists of projecting oneself into the position of another individual: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them" (Smith 2009, 14).[2] Importantly, here it is *imagination* rather than the impressions of the other individual that lead the way, for our senses "never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what

are his sensations … it is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy" (Ibid.). Moreover, here the *context* emerges as a key factor, for in order for projection to work, one needs to explore the situation of the other person; Smith explains that "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it" (Smith 2009, 16). Due to this emphasis on context, Smith's model allows for possibilities foreign to Hume's conception. For instance, "conditional sympathy" refers to mapping out the subject's sentiments via reference to her situation, and via keeping in mind a generic first person plural ("we") perspective as an evaluative backdrop (Rick 2007).

Both of these takes are highly relevant for contemporary definitions of empathy. Hume's account gives the grounds for two such definitions. Firstly, there is the transformation of an impression into an idea, which comes close to what is termed *cognitive empathy*. Within cognitive empathy, one has a representation of the mental state of another individual, which again can be based on immediate perception or inference concerning the expressions or behavior of that individual. According to the first of these options, we instantly recognise or perceive, for instance, the facial expressions of others; from this angle, empathy is a form of "translation" (Blair 2005, 702; Book et al. 2006). According to the latter, we conclude—on the basis of evidence—what the mental state of the other individual must be. This option "involves setting aside one's own current perspective, attributing a mental state (or 'attitude') to the other person, and then inferring the likely content of their mental state, given the experience of that person" (Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright 2004, 164). Therefore, we see a smiling face and instantly perceive or infer that the person is happy. It is important to note that cognitive empathy does not include resonation with the affective states of others, but rather concerns a detached comprehension of those states, based on a theory of mind (Blair 2008). That is, we do not feel what they feel, but rather acknowledge what they feel.

Secondly, in Hume's account ideas are communicated into impressions of one's own, which is akin to the contemporary notion of *affective empathy*. Affective empathy includes reverberation with the other, and thus a phenomenal sense of her mental contents. One quite simply feels what the other is feeling—or to be more philosophically precise, feels something akin to her feelings. To reiterate, instead of in a detached manner perceiving or inferring, we feel with the other. This form of empathy is always immediate in the automated sense (for instance, observing the pain of others activates those areas of the brain known to be involved in one's own pain experience), and enables one to "resonate" with the experiences of the other

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[2] Smith refers to both "spectator-partial" and "agent-partial" notions of sympathy (Rick 2007). Within the former, one projects oneself into the *position* of another, and within the latter, one projects oneself into the *perspective* of another, thereby fully identifying with or becoming her. Although Smith underlines this latter notion in the words "I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters", it is the former type that is most central to Smith's stance (indeed, the sentence above may have been written simply in order to critique egoism; see Rick 2007).

individual (Decety and Jackson 2006).[3] Similarly, Decety and Jackson (2006, 54) describe affective empathy as a "capacity to understand and respond to the unique affective experiences of another person", whereby one experiences and shares emotive contents of others.

Smith, on the other hand, inclines toward a wholly different take. Here, the two Humean approaches are combined as follows: we share experiences on the basis of inference. That is, inference leads to an affective dimension, with the help of imagination. This *projective empathy* finds support also in contemporary literature, most notably from the simulation theorists, such as Gordon (1995) and Goldman (2009). The often-used simulation model suggests that one projects oneself, with the use of either mirroring or imagination, into the situation of another. Peter Goldie, too, appears to offer some support for this definition when he claims that: "Empathy is a process or procedure by which a person centrally imagines the narrative (the thoughts, feelings and emotions) of another person" (Goldie 2000, 195). To add to the list, Jean Decety maintains that, along with resonance, empathy involves conscious simulation of the other (Decety and Jackson 2004).[4]

Therefore, Hume lays the groundwork for both cognitive and affective empathy: by the former, one perceives or infers the mental states of others (has an "idea" of them), and by the latter, one resonates with those states (has an "impression" of them). Smith, on the other hand, points toward projective empathy, as in his account one is meant to simulate the conditions of others in order to grasp their inner lives.

Thus, the three relevant definitions that emerge for empathy are perception/inference, resonance, or simulation. Cognitive empathy enables us to directly perceive of infer the mental states of others, whereas affective empathy allows one to resonate with those mental states, and projective empathy invites us to simulate the states in question. Do these three alternatives offer a suitable basis for an empathy that can facilitate moral agency?

Let's first have a look at cognitive empathy. It appears to hold much promise, for surely perception and inference concerning others can promote openness and other-directedness; acknowledging the mental state of another is the first step toward paying heed to her. Yet, although it is an important tool for comprehending other minds, cognitive

empathy can, quite worryingly, also be exploited in such a way as to ignore the experiences of others—that is, it can further a distinct lack of other-directedness and openness. This is manifested by the case of psychopathy, since psychopaths can excel in cognitive empathy, but are infamous for their proneness to moral transgression, and indeed for their incapacity to comprehend the meaning of "morality" (Mullins-Nelson et al. 2006; Book et al. 2006). Thus, amorality and high cognitive empathy can coincide, a fact which casts doubt on cognitive empathy's ability to provide a definition of the empathy that can pay heed to the experiences of other individuals. Indeed, studies suggest that cognitive empathy may be utilised to manipulate and control others more effectively. That is, not only can it coincide with amorality; it can actually aid immorality (Day et al. 2010; Smith 2006). Cognitive empathy can make it easier to objectify and manipulate others from afar, and thereby allows for a self-directed stance which does not require one to become open to the influence of the other. In other words, it can feed an atomistic conception of the self as detached from others and capable of manipulating them. This connection between a self-directed, other-detached stance and cognitive empathy is further illustrated by the case of narcissism, since narcissists, in whom self-directedness is inflated, tend to have normal cognitive empathy levels (Ritter et al. 2011). Because of these aspects of cognitive empathy that render it potentially antagonistic toward other-directedness and openness, it serves as a poor candidate for the type of empathy that facilitates moral agency.

Also projective empathy faces difficulties. Although it can be used to inspire concern toward others, and its moral import can therefore be quite strong (Batson et al. 2002), it has been criticised for displaying a detached epistemology. For instance, Shaun Gallagher attacks projective empathy, or more broadly simulation theory, on the ground that it rests on a type of solipsistic stance, which ties one to one's own phenomenality: in simulation, we use our own mental contents to figure out those of another individual. Hence, simulation overlooks the fact that it is the other person who engenders experiences in us, and who therefore is not a detached object, but rather an active participant. Moreover, simulation appears to ignore the original sentiment with which one is to empathise, since the original is replaced with simulation. On these grounds, Gallagher maintains that sheer simulation "seems too restrictive and indeed seems to cheapen morality", because "I only have to simulate the affect rather than really feel it" (Gallagher 2012, 7; see also Blum 1988). Therefore, it is argued that projective empathy (1) feeds atomism and detachment, (2) overlooks the role of the other person as a participant in empathy, and (3) overlooks the original emotion with which one is empathising.

All these points of criticism are based on a particular view of empathy, common within for instance enactivism, which

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[3] A sense of affective empathy is captured also in first generation phenomenology, as Husserl asserts that: "We experience the same things and events, we experience the animals and people there facing us, and we see in them the same inner life … In a certain way, I also experience (and there is a self-givenness here) the others' lived experiences" (Husserl 1989, 208). Thus, empathy allows for experiencing what others experience: "I can experience others, but only through empathy" (Husserl 1989, 210).

[4] It should be noted that simulation may lead to resonation. However, in this paper the two are kept as distinct categories, and "simulation" is understood as a projective rather than a resonating state.

suggests that empathy arises from interaction with others. This view, again, is based on the notion of embodiedness, suggesting, in a manner reminiscent of Merleau-Ponty, that we can know others directly through our mutual, embodied presence. Gallagher summarises: "Our understanding of others and their situations, and hence the possibility of empathizing with them, is not based on attempts to get into their heads in a mentalising fashion, since we already have access to their embodied actions and the rich, worldly contexts within which they act" (Gallagher 2012, 21).

Here Gallagher echoes the claims of Dan Zahavi, who is perhaps the most notable critic of projective empathy, and who has attacked the notion of simulation for its apparent needlessness on the everyday level. Referring to Wittgenstein's famous question "Do you look into yourself in order to recognise the fury in his face?" (*Zettel* 220), he argues that this type of projection is only utilised in the context of prediction or control but does not do justice to the majority of social situations, in which prediction or control is not the underlying motive. Simulation is not only pragmatically superfluous, but also theoretically troubled. First, it "imprisons" one in one's mind, being grounded on the presumption that one can have reliable access only to one's own phenomenality. Second, it needlessly separates the mental from the physical. According to Zahavi, the notion of a mere body, potentially empty of experience, is distinctly odd; yet that is precisely the image which accompanies the presumption that the mental lives of others are hidden from view, only to be found via elaborate inference. If we accept that affective states are intrinsically bodily, and that we can learn about them through bodily behaviors, simulation begins to lose its relevance. Zahavi argues that "expressive movements and behavior is soaked with the meaning of the mind; it reveals the mind to us" (Zahavi 2008, 520), and thus suggests that empathy is based on something much more immediate, embodied and other-directed than simulation. Therefore, all Gallagher's criticisms find support in Zahavi: we ought to view empathy in an embodied, enactive fashion, which resists detachment, acknowledges the role of the individual we empathise with, and ultimately seeks the original rather than a needless simulation.

For these reasons, it is argued that projective empathy, too, rests on an atomistic, detached account of the self, which by its nature is unable to promote openness and other-directedness. As a result, the minds of others become elusive, opaque, and ultimately unreachable. Although projective empathy can be used to invite moral concern for others, it thus fails to convince as a promising candidate for our present purpose. Moral agency cannot risk losing touch with the other individual, by building conceptions of her solely on the basis of self-directed imagination. What is interesting in the critique of projective empathy is the emphasis on embodiment. Projective empathy takes atomism to such an extreme level that the mind is separated from the body, so that the multiple ways in which others can directly express their emotive states via embodied action are ignored. That is, embodiment emerges as a key element in other-directedness and openness—an issue to which we shall come back shortly.

Affective empathy, on the other hand, offers a much more fruitful basis for moral agency. The cases of psychopathy and narcissism act yet again as guides, for whereas psychopaths and narcissists have normal or high cognitive empathy, their affective empathy levels are low or verging on the nonexistent (Blair 2008; Ritter et al. 2011). Moreover, whereas autistic individuals—much more moral than psychopaths or narcissists—struggle with cognitive empathy, it appears that their affective empathy levels may be normal or even exceedingly high (Blair 2008; Dziobek et al. 2007). This fact suggests a link between affective empathy and moral agency. Indeed, whereas cognitive empathy can remain detached and self-directed, affective empathy is intrinsically involved and other-directed; moreover, it is redolent of openness toward others, consists of it. This is quite simply because, in a very tangible fashion, affective empathy opens us to the influence of others by causing us to resonate with their emotive states. Thereby it impels one to become exposed or receptive to the other, i.e. to allow the other to bear an impact on oneself (hence resisting detachment), and to note and pay heed to others' experiences (hence making other-directedness possible). Importantly, affective empathy is often also embodied: the bodily expressions of others spark embodied experiences in oneself, so that no theory, inference, or imagination may be required at all. Thus, affective empathy facilitates embodied immediacy, within which our bodies become open and attuned toward each other and communicate experiences from one individual to another. In view of these factors, affective empathy does meet the criteria of other-directedness and openness, and thereby seems a good candidate for morally relevant empathy.

However, the extent to which empathy consists of sheer resonance with others remains unclear. When I feel empathy toward someone who is afraid, it seems that this state cannot be described simply as a re-enacted, resonated fear—that is, I do not necessarily feel fear myself. Thus, the primacy of resonance requires further scrutiny. In order to probe the issue more deeply, let us have a look at other classic figures who have written about empathy.

3 Scheler and Embodied Empathy

Another important historical name associated with empathy is Max Scheler, who explored the subject (again, termed "sympathy") in his *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*. Scheler questions the view that it is one's own

perspective which is the starting point of enquiry, and that we cannot have direct access to the mental states of others. Firstly, knowledge of one's own mental contents does not arise in isolation from others. Secondly, understanding the mental contents of others is not, of necessity, a process of inference, as though the other were first met as a mechanical creature, in whom we then—via the use of reason—recognise a mind. Both one and the other are embodied creatures, each viewed as a unity of mind and body, with the two existing in an intersubjective relation. Therefore, the understanding of other minds is based on a sense of mutuality with or openness toward other individuals, whereby we grasp our shared embodiment and our constant, co-constitutive interaction. These are the elements on which empathy is grounded. In empathy, one immediately experiences or "perceives" another (Scheler 1979). This perception is sparked by embodied expressiveness: it is born out of the aforementioned intersubjectivity and openness toward the other. As Zahavi (2008, 518) points out, with reference to Scheler (1979, 10), we approach others as *expressive* and this expressiveness, again, can "present us with a direct and non-inferential access to the experiential life of others". Therefore, the perceptive element of empathy is tied to embodiment, for through it we instantly, without inference or projection, see emotional contents in bodily expressions: "It is *in* the blush that we perceive shame, in the laughter joy". The bodily expression *is* the mental content. In this way, Scheler's *embodied empathy* leads us to view empathy as embodied access to the experiences of others, which rests on expressiveness and intersubjectivity, and ultimately allows for immediacy of perception.[5] Both Gallagher and Zahavi are influenced by Scheler. With reference to Scheler, Zahavi speaks of the "expressive unity" of the body and mind, via which we perceive and approach others (Zahavi 2007).[6] In this way, Zahavi offers support for embodied

empathy: "When I experience the facial expressions or meaningful actions of an other, I am experiencing foreign subjectivity, and not merely imagining it, simulating it or theorizing about it" (Zahavi 2008, 520). Similarly, Gallagher argues that: "It seems possible for me to forego simulation and E-imagination, and to simply imagine (or see) *you* in a particular situation and to feel genuine sadness and outrage at the injustice done to you" (Gallagher 2012, 20).

Significantly, Scheler offers an antidote not only to inference and projection, but possibly also to resonation. Why he refutes inference and projection is evident from the above discussion, but what are his grounds for viewing resonation with suspicion as well? The reason is that the other must remain her own distinct individual, who cannot be fully known; thus, empathy is possible even when we cannot fully comprehend what the other is going through. Resonation implies an intimate knowing of the other, whereas Scheler is seeking to acknowledge a certain mystery in the other individual, a certain distance between my own emotions and hers. Hence, for Scheler, empathy is neither a complete succumbing to the other nor a detached analysis; nor does it mean drawing the other into one's own mentation: we do not wholly resonate or infer, or wholly project. Following Scheler, we therefore have even more reason to turn away from cognitive and projective empathy; and in addition, surprisingly, we have reason to review the role played by affective empathy. His embodied empathy is antagonistic toward all three of our candidates, because none of them can quite accommodate *mutuality between* individuals, as opposed to either bringing the other into oneself, or the self into the other.

However, affective empathy ought not to be discarded on the basis of this criticism. This is because it may not, after all, fall afoul of the loss of boundaries between self and other that Scheler warns us of. Here it is crucially important to separate affective empathy from *emotional contagion*, a form of empathic emotion dismissed by Scheler. Emotional contagion refers to an immediate, automatic sharing of the emotive states of another individual; it is a tendency toward mimicry, which leads to "emotional convergence" (Hatfield et al. 1994, 5), and on account of which we "catch" the emotions of others. With emotional contagion, "another person's emotion is not just sensed or understood; it is, to varying degrees, caught and expressed" (Doherty 1997, 149). Now, although emotional contagion can form an important part of affective empathy, and although susceptibility to the former is positively correlated with the latter (Doherty 1997), there are crucial differences between the two. Most importantly, emotional contagion blurs the *experiential boundaries* between oneself and others, whereas affective empathy does not—in the state of emotional contagion one is not, without further

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[5] Indeed, Scheler argues that the term "perception" does apply in this context, and that anyone inclined to argue differently has not taken the phenomenology of embodied awareness seriously (Zahavi 2008). It ought to be underlined that, whereas cognitive empathy depicts this perception as a detached process, here it is strongly phenomenal. Moreover, as kindly pointed out by the editor of this special issue, one could see Hume's definition of cognitive empathy as involving a passive forming of representations, whereas for Scheler the interactive process emerges as central.

[6] Zahavi also refers to Merleau-Ponty: "We must reject the prejudice which makes 'inner realities' out of love, hate or anger, leaving them accessible to one single witness: the person who feels them…. They exist on this face or in those gestures, not hidden behind them" (from *sense and non-sense*), and to Wittgenstein's famous quote: "We do not see facial contortions and make the inference that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We describe the face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features" (from *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*) (Zahavi 2008).

reflection, aware of the origin of one's emotions (we do not know why we suddenly feel giddy or tearful; we do not locate the origins of these states in the experiences of other individuals). In a state of empathy, however, one is constantly aware that it is it the other individual and her experiences which spark resonation. Empathy is linked to agency, which enables one to continuously acknowledge which emotions belong to whom (Decety and Jackson 2006) and arguably the same applies to affective empathy: we know it is the pain of the other that we resonate with.[7] Therefore, empathy includes a clear demarcation of boundaries between "self" and "other"; as noted by Martha Nussbaum, it requires "twofold attention", by which we recognise the experiences of another, but also note that we ourselves, and our experiences, are different from that other (Nussbaum 2001). To reiterate, although affective empathy does depend on immediate access to the other, that other remains a being experientially distinct from oneself.[8] This means that Scheler's warning of collapsing boundaries does not apply to affective empathy.

Yet, what does remain interesting is embodied empathy's possible advantages over affective empathy in its capacity to facilitate moral agency. In order to map out precisely what the former consists of, a look at Gallagher's most recent model is in order. Gallagher has his own stance on empathy, which incorporates three novel suggestions. First of all, empathy involves intentionality, in that we do not feel exactly what the other person is feeling, but rather pay heed to the causes of this feeling. Therefore, when I feel empathy with a frightened person, I do not necessarily feel fear as such, but rather apprehend the causes of fear. Secondly, Gallagher argues that empathy can itself be an emotion. Therefore, "one can understand empathy not as necessarily taking up a secondary affective state … but as being its own primary and irreducible affective state—the state of feeling empathy" (Gallagher 2012, 19). This consists of the "feeling of being with" the other individual (Ibid.). Thirdly, empathy is grounded on narratives, which are important because they help us to grasp how others

make sense of this world.[9] Narratives allow us to see others as creatures with their own histories and goals: they no longer exist in a detached, present moment, but have their own reasons for acting and feeling in a given way. With these considerations in mind, we can sketch embodied empathy as an emotive state which does not mimic the emotion of the other person, but rather takes into account the causes and narratives underlying that emotion. It is based on understanding the background of a given emotion and responding with an appropriate affect—all whilst paying heed to bodily expressiveness and intersubjectivity. My own openness toward the other and my ability to instantly perceive emotions in her coincide with a causal and narrative grasp of her situation, ultimately triggering an affective response of "being with".

This account solves the aforementioned problem of why we do not necessarily feel exactly the same emotion as the individual we are empathising with; it makes it apparent that empathy with fear does not equal the feeling of fear. Embodied empathy is additionally tempting because its moral relevance seems evident. It calls for the type of openness and other-directedness that morality arguably requires, whilst facilitating—through paying heed to the causes and narratives behind emotions—a grasp of how to respond appropriately. However, despite these benefits, it remains unclear just how relevant for empathy causal and narrative understanding is. After all, we can feel empathy toward a suffering individual, the source of whose suffering remains unknown to us, and whose life story we are not at all familiar with. That is, we can resonate with sheer emotion, exclusive of causal background and narrative. It would appear that these two factors widen the scope of empathy (since, with their help, we can empathise even when we cannot detect obvious emotion), but do not form the necessary criteria for empathy. Indeed, from a moral point of view, it can be argued that often those moments of empathy that lack causal and narrative understanding are the most powerful. When witnessing the bare (bare in the sense that it is not approached with ready-made conceptualisations) yet inexplicable suffering of a stranger, many are thoroughly startled by how strong the hold of resonation is. Indeed, it is here that we find the root of Levinas's famous notion of being "interrupted" by the "other"; for Levinas, it is precisely the *lack* of narrative understanding that invites moral epiphanies (see Levinas 1969). That is, not knowing the causes and narratives behind the suffering of another may facilitate intense resonation, precisely because we cannot categorise and hence explain away her

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[7] On the grounds of this difference, Edith Stein argued that one must be careful not to confuse empathy with emotional contagion (according to her, Lipps with his famous notion of "Einfühlung" was guilty of such a mistake; see Stein 1989).

[8] There are further differences, as noted by Gallagher. Emotional contagion tends to go unrecognised—i.e. one does not note its origin or even presence—whereas empathy and its origin are, often acutely, noted. Second, empathy is other-directed, whereas emotional contagion all too easily remains self-absorbed, in that we only note our own emotions, not those of others (see also Volbrecht et al. 2007). The third difference noted by Gallagher is intentionality: whereas empathy is intentional, emotional contagion is not (we do not care or know why others are yawning or laughing, but rather simply mimic them—that is, the causes do not interest us; Gallagher 2012). As will be seen, there are reasons to doubt the validity of this last point.

[9] It is because of narratives that we can empathise with monsters and aliens, and with people very different and far removed from us—yet they also help to explain why we tend to feel more empathy toward those closely associated with and similar to us (Gallagher 2012).

suffering—the suffering cannot be hidden under layers of conceptualisations—and this again may feed intense concern for the other being. Here, instead of causes and narratives, it is the very experience in its barest form that takes centre stage, and perhaps it is in the context of such bare experience that empathy acquires its most acute form. I see a distressed stranger and am forced to stop, to pay heed, to respond—all because her emotional state has had a deep empathic impact on me, and there are no explanations to use as an excuse for withdrawing from my empathic reaction (such as "it is her own fault", "she is the type of a person who will be fine on her own", etc.). Hence, although a causal and narrative grasp of the situation of another individual can broaden and invite empathy, it is not necessary for the latter's existence; indeed, perhaps empathy attains its most heightened form in the absence of that grasp. This form of empathy may spark concern and ultimately "sympathy" toward others.[10]

Therefore, embodied empathy has the benefit of offering one explanation as to why empathy does not consist of identical affect; yet this explanation does not seem to offer a satisfactory account of what empathy is. In other words, although it offers a way out of identical affect, it also omits something fundamentally important: the possibility of empathising with bare experience.

4 Affective Empathy Revisited: Stein, Non-primordial Experience, and Embodiment

What is suggested here is that the most fruitful solution is to combine the strongest feature of embodied empathy—emphasis on enactive, embodied mutuality between individuals—with affective empathy, and to seek an understanding of the latter which is capable of solving the problem of identical affect. The definition of affective empathy ought to be firmly anchored on intersubjective, bodily immediacy: we resonate with others partly because their bodies are expressive of mental states, and our bodies are capable of responding toward theirs. Resonation does

not take place outside bodily expressiveness and shared understanding of what it is to live in a sensing, physical body. Arguably, our grasp of affective empathy would be greatly heightened if these issues were explored more fully. Resonation does not simply mean that my brain cells related to pain are activated when I see the pain of another. It also means that I approach the other as a physical, sensing being, to whom I can relate on the basis of my own experiences in a physical, sensing body, and whose expressiveness has partly contributed to my whole notion of what it is to have a body, and to be a phenomenal, sensing creature. That is, definitions of affective empathy need to steer clear of sheer reduction to neurological reactions, and instead also take into account embodied, enactive intersubjectivity.

What we are left with, then, is the original question of how to define affective empathy in a manner that avoids the problem of identical affect. What surfaces as the crucial issue is this: what is the experience of empathy formed of, if it is neither exact imitation, nor causal or narrative understanding? What do I experience when I empathise with the suffering of another?

Let's begin by exploring Gallagher's claim that this experience is its own specific type of emotion (the emotion of "being with"), a view which strikes a chord with the broader notion of "fellow-feeling", utilised in phenomenology (see Stein 1989). The suggestion that empathy as an experience does not follow the experiences of others but rather represents its own category is interesting, and even radical. However, despite the novelty of this idea, the danger is that it can reduce empathy to concern or "sympathy". Empathy ignites concern toward others, and this concern generates its own emotion: the feeling of wanting to be there for the other individual. Yet empathy includes something much more basic or primary than this; namely, sheer resonation. Moreover, although empathy consists of "being with", it is not reducible to an *emotion* of being with. In other words, it includes resonation, not the emotion of resonating. On these grounds Edith Stein argued that empathy was something other than fellow-feeling or "joy-with-him" (for her, perhaps wrongly, the latter constituted "sympathy"—see Stein 1989, 14).

What is left? In order to investigate further, it will be beneficial to take a closer look at Stein's philosophy.[11] Like Scheler, Stein criticised the perspective according to which others are detached from oneself, and the mind is detached from the body. She asserted that "If we take the self as a

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[10] It is commonly argued that empathy refers to understanding the viewpoint of another, whereas sympathy refers to feeling care for that viewpoint. In other words, sympathy consists of feeling *for* someone, and empathy of feeling *with* someone (see Goldie 2000). Therefore, sympathy includes the element of externality: we view the other without internalising her mental states. Next to externality, sympathy has been argued to differ from empathy in respect to intentionality (as a form of grasping causes): we can feel sad for someone, even if we think she is mistaken about the presumed injustice that is making her sad. Following suit, Gallagher maintains that in empathy one "feels sad *about the injustice done* to B", whereas in sympathy, one "feels sad *for* B, who is sad about an injustice". (Gallagher 2012, 6) However, the type of definition brought forward in this paper questions the latter difference.

[11] Her teacher Edmund Husserl had mapped out connections between empathy, emotion, and value, and Stein (1989, 116) also was keen to draw links between empathy and morality. Empathy with others helps us to understand and evaluate ourselves, and our own values: "Every comprehension of different persons can become the basis of an understanding of value".

standard, we lock ourselves into the prison of our individuality. Others become riddles for us …" (Stein 1989, 116), and carries on to suggest that: "This individual is not given as a physical body, but as a sensitive, living body belonging to an 'I', an 'I' that senses, thinks, feels and wills. The living body of this 'I' not only fits into my phenomenal world but is itself the centre of orientation of such phenomenal world. It faces this world and communicates with me" (Stein 1989, 5).[12] Yet Stein criticises Scheler's notion of "perception", for, according to her, it does not do justice to the non-primordial nature of empathy. Perception is rooted in clear givenness; it has a visible object, whereas empathy relies on non-primordiality (Stein 1989). Therefore, whereas Scheler, together with Gallagher and Zahavi, asserts that empathy has to do with the original feeling, not a copy or an imitation, Stein suggests that originality does not apply. Although empathy involves experience ("Empathy is a kind of act of perceiving sui generis … Empathy … is the experience of foreign consciousness in general"—see Stein 1989, 11),[13] this experience is a non-primordial one, closely related to the experience we have when remembering past events: "While I am living in the other's joy, I do not feel primordial joy" (Stein 1989, 11). Therefore, it is neither an original, nor a copy, but something altogether different—and it may be by going in this direction that we can discover why empathy with fear does not simply constitute fear.

Some contemporary authors have argued that empathic emotions are "off-line". Off-line emotions are simulations of the mental states of others which are not experienced, but which help to predict and comprehend others' behavior. Here, we perceive or imagine what others are experiencing, without sharing those experiences (Gordon 1995).[14] Stein appears to have supported the off-line model, as she maintained that empathy is representational, not "primordial". In this sense it is like memory or fantasy, free of raw emotive content. Yet, since Stein was also critical of the simulation model,[15] her take on off-line empathy appears rather different from that of contemporary authors. In order to explore what non-primordial experience was for Stein, it is important to note that, according to her, empathy consists of a movement between oneself and the other, attaining its most momentous stage when one moves toward the inner world of the other being, before again withdrawing into one's own perspective (Stein 1989). It appears that the non-primordial experience finds its home in this movement: we do not stay with the other and experience what she experiences, but withdraw into our own perspective, holding in our hands representations or sketches of her emotive life, which go on to constitute new, fresh experiences.

This account provides the starting point for our own notion of empathy. One way to depict affective empathy is to use Stein's momentous stage as its birthplace, within which we first begin to reverberate or resonate with the other, and from which we then move away toward a meta-level. On this meta-level, we step away from the first order sensation of "what it is like", based on pure resonation, and position this "what it is like" in relation to other experiences, emotions, or ideas. To use the example of fear, what was initially resonation with the other being's fear now becomes colored with, for instance, a sense of melancholy or rage: the bare, first-order emotion is met with a second-order, meta-level response. To offer another example, when witnessing an animal screaming in pain, we can first, on a very immediate level, feel the pang of its pain and fear in our very core, and then move away from this experience, anchored on sheer resonation with the other, toward a meta-level that is no longer a pang, but rather an emotive response toward that pang. It is in this movement toward the meta-level that resonation becomes less distinct, like waves reaching a distant beach. That is, resonation changes in intensity: when we first encounter the perspective of the other, we resonate with full intensity, and when we withdraw, the waves of resonation become weaker. Yet, importantly, it does not fade completely, but lurks beneath, as the anchor to which our responses are tied. In this way, empathy is movement: first, movement with the other (resonation), and then movement toward the other (response). Whereas the first movement includes primordial feeling, the latter involves only an echo of this primordiality, colored with one's own experiential response. Hence, what was a flash of fear becomes sorrow sketched on top of the faint remnants of fear.

Now, significantly, instead of the computational metaphor "off-line", it is wiser to use the term "meta-experience" in this context. We are not disconnected or cut off from the experiences of the other, as the term "off-line" literally implies, but rather step from the first-order onto the second-order level, from resonating with another individual's primordial experience to a motivational state of responding to this resonation with further experiential, emotive or conceptual content—with resonation persisting all the while, even if more dimly. Therefore, this definition of empathy is far removed from the off-line concept. Moreover, even though it takes Stein's approach as its backdrop, the definition differs also from Stein's notion of non-primordial experience: here resonation

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[12] Stein argues that through the lens of "inference of analogy", "we see nothing around us but physical soulless and lifeless bodies" (Stein 1989, 26). For her, this is, in fact, "odium of complete absurdity" (Ibid.).

[13] Indeed, Stein maintains that "through empathizing do we experience others" (Stein 1989, 18).

[14] As commonly suggested, these off-line simulations do, however, have a tendency to become "on-line", in which case one does experience real emotions, albeit still clearly originating in someone else, and thus second-hand.

[15] Stein maintains that simulation can act as a "surrogate" for empathy, but that it does not constitute empathy in itself.

with the experience of others is possible, and the meta-experiences that follow are quite primordial. What remains, however, is the sense that one becomes increasingly removed from the first-order level, on which the experiences of the other are bare and tangible, and adds to them something new: an affective sketch of one's own.

Importantly, "responding" entails not only movement outward, toward the other, but also movement inward, toward one's own affective landscape. Empathy indeed has interruptive power, which forces one to change in the face of what one witnesses, to become (at least momentarily) fluid through responding to the experiences of others. Thereby, one is exposed to the fear, suffering or joy of the other individual, together with one's own response (such as grief) to these states; and this exposure incorporates the possibility that one may have to re-examine one's own approach to the world, and one's very constitution. When I witness suffering and respond to this suffering with dread, it places a mark on me, perhaps effecting a permanent, deeply cutting change. It may be precisely this that renders empathy such a powerful experience: the utter sadness or elevation that resonation invites may further inspire a wholesale re-examination of, and even an instant, foundational epiphany concerning, one's chosen stance toward others.[16]

Therefore, affective empathy consists not only of resonation, but also of embodiment and movement. We resonate with the other, and the definition of affective empathy must pay heed to the way this resonation is grounded on embodied mutuality: it springs from expressive intersubjectivity, which sparks immediate, direct glimpses into "what it is like" for the other individual. The definition must further acknowledge that resonation becomes less intense as we move from the first-order level onto the level of responding and meta-experience. This responding is directed not only toward the other, but also toward ourselves, as we become exposed not only to the mental states of the other individual, but also to our own response to them. It is precisely this latter aspect of affective empathy that holds the most normative power: the other with her experiences, together with our own response to those experiences, has the capacity to interrupt and alter our own constitution. Here, the embodiment of affective empathy becomes especially obvious. We feel the suffering of the other and our response to this suffering in our own body, even if only as a flash of pain followed by literally heartfelt sorrow. Therefore, it is here suggested that affective empathy be defined as following: Affective empathy consists of embodied resonation with the mental states of other individuals, wherein one instantaneously grasps those states from the

physical gestures and movements of others and undergoes similar states in oneself, and wherein one situates these mental states in relation to pre-existing experiences or beliefs, thus gradually moving further away from the initial moment of resonation and forming responses to that moment, the other individual, and even one's own attitudes. What renders affective empathy a uniform experience is resonation, which—despite becoming fainter—remains an underlying factor.

Above, it was suggested that affective empathy forms the most fruitful basis for moral agency, due to the way it facilitates both openness and other-directedness. To reiterate, resonation makes one exposed and receptive to the experiences of others, and in a very tangible fashion forces one to pay notice to them: as the echoes of the experiences of others enter one's own mentation, one cannot help but become open to and directed toward them. In effect, affective empathy does not only *possibly* facilitate openness and other-directedness: it by *necessity* sparks these ways of perceiving others, even consists of them. Whereas cognitive empathy and projective empathy may avoid all openness and other-directedness, and whereas embodied empathy does not go far enough in explaining how it is linked to these factors, affective empathy shines as the definition of empathy that is integrally entwined with them. The advanced definition offered here renders the links between moral agency and affective empathy even more manifest. As pointed out above, it is particularly the movement between oneself and the other that allows for deeper moral awareness to arise: one is sparked to re-evaluate one's own preconceptions concerning the world, other individuals and one-self, and to ultimately reconsider one's normative beliefs. This room for alteration and change renders openness and other-directedness ever more potent, as one is willing to adjust one's beliefs in response to the other; that is, one becomes open and other-directed also on the level of "meta-experience".

The moral impact of other types of empathy may be transient and superficial, for they require no alteration in the empathizing subject, and hence leave no mark on her—she merely visits the experiences of others and then lets go of them, with no permanent effect. Affective empathy, on the other hand, holds the potential for altering our moral horizons by effecting a change in our underlying beliefs. When this is combined with openness and directedness toward other individuals, the links between affective empathy and moral agency emerge as cogent.

5 Conclusion

It is proposed in this paper that empathy consists of movement between resonation and responding, between the first-order level and the meta-level: we resonate with the other, and then respond by positioning this sense of resonation within the

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[16] At the same time, it should be noted that, at best, this response leads to concern; but it might not do so. Instead, one may become overwhelmed with one's own emotions and succumb to "compassion fatigue" or even denial, or one may, after the strongest tide of resonation has subsided, seek to rationalise and ultimately ignore the situation.

wider horizon of experiences, emotions, and ideas. Affective empathy understood in this broader sense combines Humean reverberation with Stein's non-primordial experience and movement between perspectives, together with a hint of Scheler's embodiment. It escapes the problems faced by cognitive, projective and embodied empathy; it resists detachment from the other, and explains why we can feel empathy even when we know nothing of the causes or narratives behind the experience with which we are empathising. This definition also explains why empathy does not consist of pure imitation, but is nonetheless strongly anchored on resonation: resonation ignites further responses, which may turn the initial sense of suffering with the other into a combination of dim resonation spiced with anger, melancholy or even existential gloom. Moreover, it explains the phenomenal feel of empathy, which often seems to begin with a vivid, forceful interruption and to quickly metamorphose into a responsive emotional state. Most importantly, this definition also takes embodiment into account: it is embodied intersubjectivity that sparks resonation and responding.

The task of this paper was to find a definition of empathy that best serves moral agency and—as features of such agency—other-directedness and openness toward others. Resonation renders affective empathy remarkably and intrinsically directed and open toward other individuals; moreover, affective empathy escapes the problems faced by cognitive, projective, and embodied empathy. Hence, it emerges as the best candidate.

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