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An Aetiology of Recognition

Empathy, Attachment, and Moral Competence

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1. Introduction

> No father had watched my infant days, no mother had blessed me
> with smiles and caresses; or if they had, all my past life was now a
> blot, a blind vacancy in which I distinguished nothing. From my
> earliest remembrance I had been as I then was…What was I?
>
> The creature (unnamed), in *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*
> (Shelley 1818/1969: 128)

Secure attachment is associated with many traditional moral virtues, and
compromised or absent attachment with various moral vices. What explains the
interactions of attachment and moral development? This chapter explores the
suggestion that early attachment underpins the human capacity for empathy, and
that empathy, in turn, is a condition of moral competence.

I begin with a fictional allegory for attachment, or rather for certain conse-
quences of its absence: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.[1] Shelley's novel relates the
creation, abandonment, development, dissolution, and tragic death of a being
who, by almost any philosophical standard, is a person. Dr Frankenstein's
unnamed, monstrous invention—I shall call him 'Creature'—is far from the
mindless predator of popular imagination: he is a thinking, feeling, self-conscious
being endowed with both reason and affection. Despite these qualities, Creature's
repugnant appearance and fearful physical power provoke his creator to flee in
horror, abandoning his 'newborn'—then still developmentally, if not physically,
an infant. Creature flees into the surrounding woodlands, spending his early years
foraging and fending for physical survival. Later, he finds a kind of home, a hovel
that adjoins the cottage of a close-knit, harmonious family. A crack in the wall
allows Creature secretly to observe and learn the language, the literature, the

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[1] I am indebted to Connie Rosati for recognizing the relevance of Shelley's novel to themes in
moral development. C. Rosati, 'Autonomy & Personal Good: Lessons from Frankenstein's Monster',
unpublished MS.

music, and the domestic intimacy of ordinary humanity. Eventually reading and poring over the classics, he develops an appreciation of human morality, and a susceptibility to moral emotions such as pride, shame, and indignation. Above all, he understands what it is for the cottagers to 'love and sympathise with one another' and yearns to be 'known and loved' in his turn (Shelley 1818/1969). In these ways, Creature comes to understand—from without—the value of love and human connection, and to feel the bitter sorrow of solitude. He admires and envies the cottagers, and eventually makes a bid for acceptance into their family. This bid is met, as was inevitable, with rejection and terror, provoking in Creature a series of impulsive and violent acts of vengeance. As he puts it, 'Evil thenceforth became [his] good', and he begins his course of revenge on Dr Frankenstein, murdering his creator's own close attachments one by one: his brother, his adoptive sister, his closest friend, and his lifelong love and bride. These subsequent rages and rampages, however, are less the expression of an inherently hostile nature than of a desire for revenge against a world—and especially a rejecting 'parent'—which brought him into existence, only to deny him the affection and intimacy which his nearly human nature, like that of any person, required. At the close of the tale, Creature's victory in destroying Frankenstein is worse than hollow: he is not only crushed by grief but by regret, crying out that 'a frightful selfishness hurried me on, while my heart was poisoned with remorse…My heart was fashioned to be susceptible of love and sympathy…' (Shelley 1818/1969).

Frankenstein is a work of phantasy and fiction. But it is also an insightful illustration of an important psychological fact: beings such as us are disposed by our natures to seek intimacy with our human conspecifics, and its absence in our early years threatens not only our happiness, but mastery of our impulses, our emotions, and our moral characters. Attachment theory tells us more specifically that, like Creature, human beings are disposed from birth to seek one particular kind of intimacy: the proximity of a protective caregiver, typically a parent. The proximity sought is more than physical nearness; it is the caregiver's emotional and cognitive responsiveness, reliability, and comfort. In its wider sense, 'attachment' refers to an enduring, intimate emotional bond that develops between two or more persons, normally through sustained personal contact, yielding a felt need for personal contact and conditioning the attached person's sense of security and safety. In the context of child development, 'attachment' refers more particularly to this bond as it holds between an infant or toddler and his primary caregiver—a connection that is instrumental in the child's cognitive, affective, and social development (Bowlby 1969; Ainsworth et al. 1978; Fonagy et al. 1991). Securely attached children manifest behaviours consistent with a trusting, affectionate intimacy with their caregiver; the world of the securely attached child—at least the world within the orbit of that intimate relationship—is a fundamentally safe one in which threats will be diverted, needs will be met, and experiences shared. It is thus unsurprising that secure attachment early in life is longitudinally

associated with a range of characteristics that favour the creation and mainten- ance of intimate, personal relationships: trust, confidence, optimism, receptivity, and openness. The securely attached child learns that, whatever perils the world may hold, his well-being is shielded within the private sphere of personal intimacy.

It is less obvious, however, why secure attachment should also favour recogni- tion of moral obligations, particularly towards those with whom we have no spe- cial standing and share no personal destiny—recognition that the claims of persons *as such* merit our attention and regard. Yet it does: secure attachment is developmentally associated with a wide range of traditional moral virtues such as reciprocity, honesty, and benevolence, where these are extended impersonally to strangers as much as friends, and even granted to our enemies. In short, secure attachment confers a sensitivity not only to the imperatives of personal intimacy, but to the wider imperatives of morality requiring moral recognition of persons generally. Let us call these 'person-regarding' requirements. I will assume without argument that responsiveness to such requirements is a central part (although by no means the whole) of basic moral competence. Why should secure attachment promote sensitivity to requirements of this kind?

One answer to this question looks beyond the fact of secure attachment to a further psychological capacity: our capacity for empathy with our conspecifics. Empathy has been conceived in many ways by many theorists, but nearly all delineate it with reference to a spontaneous sharing of affect, perceptual focus, and motivational direction. These are likewise hallmarks of what attachment the- orists sometimes call the 'reflective function' (or 'mentalizing') dynamic of sensi- tive caregiving, whereby a harmonious, interpersonal synchrony is manifested in the carer's (typically the mother's) verbal and non-verbal interactions with her child. These interactions provide one important foundation for the development of empathy in later life. For instance, successful synchronization and secure attachment strongly predict mature empathic responsiveness (Kestenbaum, Farber and Sroufe 1989), with mother–infant synchrony measures in the first year of infancy being directly associated with empathy levels at ages 6 and 16 (Feldman 2007). Sensitive, caregiver mentalizing is also a powerful predictor of optimal development in respect of a range of other morally relevant capacities, including cooperativeness, self-regulation (including gratification deferral), and the ability to reliably identify, predict, and render intelligible others' cognitive and affective states (Fonagy and Target 1997; Feeney et al. 2008). These same capaci- ties are, in turn, both causally and constitutively related to altruistic motivation, and moral motivation of other kinds. Indeed, in one study directly examining the development of moral conscience it was found that the degree of mutually responsive orientation between an infant and caregiver, especially of positive affective states, was directly correlated *both* with higher empathic resonance at 22 months and with greater guilt awareness at 45 months (Zahn-Waxler et al. 1992; Knafo et al. 2008).

So one reason that secure attachment is associated with person-regarding morality might be this: secure attachment promotes susceptibility to empathy, and an appropriate susceptibility to empathy is a condition of basic moral competence. Put differently, secure attachment may support moral virtue *by way of* promoting empathy as one of its necessary conditions (Baron-Cohen 2009). In what follows, I assess this proposal. I turn first in section 2 to the idea that empathy is necessary for morality, noting some of its history, and narrowing its legitimate scope to one component of basic moral competence—person-regarding (including altruistic) moral norms. Section 3 then explores and distinguishes the different dimensions of empathy. Section 4 presents a sceptical argument against one version of the claim, namely, that empathy plays an essential *synchronic* role in moral judgement. Section 5 examines a developmental, *diachronic* version of the claim, focusing first on the evidence from psychopathology. I then return to attachment theory, proposing that the contributions of empathy to moral competence have their origins in early attachment. It is the dynamic, reciprocal mirroring between caregiver and child, I argue, which initiates our recognition of the reality and value of other persons.

2.   Empathy: The Indispensability Thesis

Consider again the misfortunes of Frankenstein's Creature. In his early development, his intuitive grasp of moral claims is revealed, in part, by his susceptibility to moral emotions—he recognizes his impulsive wrongdoings as such, and is subject to remorse and shame on their account. At this stage Creature also enjoys a natural and spontaneous empathic responsiveness to others; he is even moved to act altruistically on several occasions—for instance, by gathering wood in the night to aid the adored, hard-labouring family of cottagers. Following his failed bid for their acceptance and friendship, however, he becomes consumed by a reactive rage—an 'insatiable thirst for vengeance'—and embarks on his murderous course (Shelley 1818/1969). Thereafter, he seldom pauses over others' needs and interests; to the contrary, he seems almost wilfully to de-sensitize himself, and is undeterred by the fear and distress of his victims. Insofar as he concerns himself with Dr Frankenstein's desires, for instance, that is only to ensure their bitter disappointment. Creature seems committed to casting aside not only shame and remorse, but his aversion to others' suffering. His susceptibility to empathy appears to be extinguished, and along with it all regulation by moral requirements: when 'evil becomes his good', regard for others' ends (almost) evaporates.

Shelley's tale of Creature's moral dissolution thus echoes a familiar platitude of folk psychology: that empathy plays an important role in moral virtue. This platitude has also enjoyed a long and distinguished history in philosophical theory.

Early British sentimentalists accorded to empathy (or to 'sympathy', as it was then labelled) a central role; Hume's premise that 'the minds of men are mirrors to one another's' lay at the heart of his aetiology of the 'moral distinctions' and their ability to move us to action. (Hume 1739/1978: 365) Adam Smith followed Hume, locating the affective power of moral claims in our natural propensity to reflect one another's behaviours and inner lives (Smith 1759/2002).[2] In the second half of the twentieth century, however, mainstream analytic philosophers largely abandoned empathy and its cognates, notwithstanding its close association with prominent notions such as universalizability, interpersonal cognition/other minds, and internal reasons. With a few notable exceptions, post-war analytic philosophy regarded empathy with suspicion, as an ill-defined, psychological construct that had no place in reasoned moral justification and motivation.

Recent decades have seen a resurgence of interest in the role of empathy in moral motivation. A principal catalyst for this has been Daniel Batson's landmark studies of moral motivation in the 1980s and 1990s (Batson 2011; Batson 2012). These studies put to the test what Batson called the 'egoistic hypothesis'—the claim that the ultimate goal of all human action is to promote the agent's own welfare. The competing hypothesis was that, in certain facilitating conditions, agents' choices and actions can be altruistically motivated—motivated directly by a non-instrumental or ultimate desire to benefit another, even when doing so incurs personal costs. Many candidate conditions might facilitate such motivation, but the one on which Batson chose to focus was empathic concern, which he understood as involving 'vicarious other-focused emotions, including feelings of sympathy, compassion, tenderness and the like' (Batson 1991:113). Batson's studies explored the effect of empathic induction on subjects' preparedness to respond altruistically to others, both in attitude and in action choices, using experimental designs that controlled for egoistic motives of reward seeking, punishment avoidance, and relief from aversive arousal. While his findings have met with many challenges, they are widely regarded as lending support to the 'empathy-altruism' hypothesis—the claim that as 'empathic feeling for a person in need increases, altruistic motivation to have that person's need relieved increases' (Batson 1991: 72). Batson's claim that empathy evokes altruistic motivation harmonizes well with the common assumption that empathy moves us to do the right thing, and is a force for the (moral) good.

Batson's studies also lend support to the familiar intuition that empathy competes against the two forces most hostile to morality: indifference and self-interest. Empathy competes with indifference in its epistemic role, by alerting us to

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[2] Parallel themes were mooted in German moral philosophy and aesthetics in the 1700s, and versions of the empathy construct remained prominent in continental accounts of moral motivation through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Schiller 1794/1967; Schopenhauer 1840/1995; Lipps 1903; Scheler 1923/1954; Husserl 1931/1988).

circumstances that demand moral attention; in its motivational role, it serves as a corrective to our default position of egocentrically pursuing our own ends, and only our own ends. The reasoning behind these claims is straightforward. Other-regarding moral requirements often enjoin actions that require an understanding of others' interests, and those interests often conflict with our concern for our own welfare. If we are to act competently as moral agents, then, indifference must be counteracted by a sound epistemic source, and self-interest must be counteracted by a powerful motivating force. In our species, empathy *both* offers the right sort of informational resource and delivers motivational force. Hence empathy is, in such cases, indispensable to moral competence.

This reasoning is plausible so far as it goes. Nonetheless, any identification of empathy and moral competence *tout court* would clearly be a mistake: countless moral requirements do not directly concern personal welfare at all, and enjoy no direct connection with empathy. Among these empathy-irrelevant norms are various sexual, dietary, and hygiene prohibitions, norms deriving from religious commandments, and norms based on conceptions of social honour and prestige. Perhaps an evolutionary story can be told according to which these require empathic concern for human welfare, but at the level of individual motivation it is neither here nor there. Empathic responsiveness to human weal and woe will not dissuade a man from acts of necrophilia, nor keep him Kosher, nor prompt him patriotically to fall on his sword to honour his nation's flag.

These exceptions acknowledged, considerations of other persons' interests still justify a central and ubiquitous core of moral requirements. Person-regarding norms prescribe actions that are 'prosocial' in the sense that they direct the agent to protect or promote the interests of another person or persons. Among these are certain harm norms (prohibitions against harming persons and their property) as well as norms reflecting Aristotelian and Humean natural virtues, such as friendship, kindness, generosity, compassion, and loyalty. There is good reason to suppose that a *sine qua non* of respecting such norms is a propensity to respect and be moved by other *people*, and that doing this requires susceptibility to empathy.

I will refer to the idea that empathy is a necessary condition of moral competence as the *Empathy Indispensability Thesis* (EIT). The EIT is ambiguous as between two claims. First, it may be taken as a claim about the epistemic and motivational contributions of immediate, occurrent synchronic empathy to token moral judgements. This is the claim that, necessarily, whenever one essays a person-regarding judgement, that judgement is in some way informed by empathic responsiveness. Secondly, it may be read as making a diachronic claim about the developmental contributions of empathy to our basic competence to essay person-regarding moral judgements, such that a susceptibility to empathy is one of its necessary conditions.

Is the EIT true, in either version? Before pursuing that question, let us first step back and consider more carefully the nature and varieties of empathy itself.

3. Dimensions of Empathy: Mindreading, Resonance, Attunement, Distress, and Concern

Empathy is not an emotion, but a way of identifying and representing emotions and other affective states. I will use the terms 'empathy' and 'affective empathy' interchangeably; when we empathize, affective states are our objects of thought. In attachment theory, the term 'empathy' is often used more broadly, and Peter Fonagy identifies it as one among several functions constituting the more general capacity of 'mentalising'—the impulse to understand and imagine both our own and other people's thoughts (Fonagy et al. 2014). Mentalizing, as Fonagy uses the term, includes exercises in cognitive mindreading or perspective-taking as well as affective responsiveness (Fonagy et al. 2014: 36). However, it is generally recognized that mindreading and affective empathy are distinguishable capacities: a plethora of experimental evidence testifies to this at both the functional and neurophysiological levels (Decety et al. 2013; Blair 2006; Smith 2006).[3] 'Mindreading' refers to a capacity reliably to identify others' action-explaining intentional states—typically their beliefs, desires, and intentions. It is an ability accurately to represent the propositional attitudes that render actions intelligible, and to exercise these representations in explaining and predicting others' behaviour. Affective empathy can also represent propositional attitudes, but it does so by a different mechanism and in a different mode. Jean Decety refers to affective empathy as empathy 'proper', and defines it as 'a construct broadly reflecting a natural capacity to share and understand the affective states of others, comprising emotional, cognitive, and motivational facets' (Decety et al. 2013). This requires that the empathizer not only represent, but also *share* in another's target states: affective empathy is an experiential as well as a representational capacity. When we empathize, we do not only identify and individuate another's affective/motivational states (emotions, sensations, aversions, etc.) but do so by instantiating some of their first-personal experiential character. The distinction between first-personal and other-personal representations of experiential states is key to empathy's motivating force: a solely conceptual or propositional representation of, for instance, another's pain or pleasure, however detailed and accurate, does not constitute affective empathy, and indeed requires no affective or motivational engagement whatever. An empathic representation, by contrast, is what I elsewhere have called a 'subjective conception'—a conception as from the first-personal perspective of the experiencing subject (Denham 2000; Denham 2012).

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[3] This distinction is not only a conceptual one; it is underwritten by the reliance of each on distinct neurological bases. As Luyten and Fonagy note, 'there is increasing evidence that distinct, albeit to some extent overlapping, neurocognitive systems are involved in these capacity....While cognitively oriented mentalization depends on several areas in the prefrontal cortex, affectively oriented mentalizing seems to be particularly dependent on the ventromedial prefrontal cortex'. Luyten and Fonagy 2014: 102)

If one represents another's pain by way of affective empathy, one's own experience must feature some of the target state's phenomenology—its qualitative and motivational characteristics. To some degree, it is itself painful.

So described, affective empathy is not yet a capacity for the solicitous concern that matters to moral motivation. To get there from here, we must progress four different dimensions of affective empathy: empathic resonance, empathic attunement, empathic distress, and empathic concern. I will briefly sketch each in turn.

Empathic Resonance Infants famously mimic the facial musculature of their caregiver's expressions, probably from only a few hours after birth (Hoffman 2000). Such motor mimicry is (a) reflexive and (b) non-referential: the mimicking subject does not exercise voluntary control over his motor state, and nor is he typically consciously aware of its occurrence. Nonetheless, motor empathy arguably plays an important role in the development of affective empathy and interpersonal emotion regulation in the first few months of life; at the neurological level, the causal pathways between motor and affective responses are bidirectional (Hoffman 2008). Motor mimicry persists throughout our lives, and is an early and basic form of what I call 'empathic resonance'—an innate capacity to reflect some features of the behaviour (especially facial expressions) and experiential states (especially the affective states) of others.[4] Empathic resonance is automatic, non-verbal, and, in Fonagy's terms, 'external' in that it is cued by observation of perceptible conditions such as posture and facial expression. Hoffman observes that resonance (or 'emotional contagion') is 'passive, involuntary, and based on surface cues; it requires little cognitive processing or awareness that the source is [someone else]' (Hoffman 2008: 441). Nonetheless, resonance is an important early component of mentalizing, and can be profoundly psychologically efficacious: it is a psychophysical process, its effects often are consciously experienced, and it possesses a first-personal phenomenology. But it is not yet a representational state, save in the attenuated sense of representing the resonating subject's own condition. It serves no interpersonal, referential function.

Empathic attunement Most developmental psychologists, including contemporary attachment theorists, regard empathic resonance as a developmental precursor to a second, cognitively more complex dimension of affective empathy: empathic attunement. Attunement occurs when (a) a subject conceives of (represents in thought) another's experiential state, the conception being typically elicited by observing or remembering or imagining the other; (b) via resonance, the subject's occurrent state reflects (some constituents of) the content and phenomenological character of the target experience (or what he takes that

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[4] Resonance is vividly illustrated by Hume's analogy between our responses to one another's sentiments and the sympathetic vibrating of strings on a violin: when one string is plucked or bowed, it directly causes a vibration in the others (Hume 1739/1978).

experience to be), and (c) the subject regards his reflective states as referring to and informing him of the other's experience (Vignemont and Singer 2006: 435).

This last feature registers that attunement constitutes a first-personal conception of another's emotions and other affective/motivational states *as* belonging to another subject of experience: the agent regards it as representing the content and character of the other's inner life. Attunement is what theorists often mean when they use the word 'empathy'.[5] Attunement is essentially referential, and where the referent states are aversive ones such as fear, sadness, or other kinds of distress, attunement presents the agent with a motive for two further responses: empathic distress or empathic concern.

Empathic distress names a familiar development of empathic attunement. (Batson terms it 'personal distress' (2011)). When empathic attunement is persistent and intense, the empathizer can become 'empathically over-aroused' (Hoffman 2008): his focus of attention and his dominant motivation is then to relieve his own distress. In empathic distress, a subject (a) encounters another's aversive state, typically by directly perceiving or imaginatively engaging with him, (b) empathically attunes to that aversive state, recognizing the other as its source and referent, and (c) incurs a *self-focused* motivation to remove the aversive stimulus (the target subject's distress) from his perceptual and/or cognitive environment—for instance, to abandon the victim or to pursue attentional diversions (Hoffman 2008). Empathic distress is thus an 'egocentric' motivational state in Batson's sense of that term, which sometimes conflicts with our moral convictions—as when we guiltily bin the charity circular with its images of starving children or change the television channel to avoid scenes of desperate refugees.

Empathic concern When attunement is manifested as empathic distress, it is *negatively* correlated with moral motivation—the opposite of the prosocial influence with which empathy is typically associated. Attunement must develop via a different transformation, as empathic concern, if it is to be recruited into the service of morality. Empathic concern is closely allied with Hume's notion of benevolence—a non-instrumental desire to promote the welfare of another. A benevolent desire may, of course, arise by way of various causal trajectories, and not all are empathic; I will discuss one alternative shortly (Nichols 2004). As I (stipulatively) use 'empathic concern' here, it names a species of the genus of concern, namely, concern that is a development from and conceptual elaboration of (empathic, affective) attunement: the former occurs contiguously or concurrently with the latter, and its content is informed by it. Empathic concern is thus distinguished from other modes of concerned attention by having resonance and attunement as *constituents* as well as causal conditions. Resonance and attunement do not just precede empathic concern, but contribute to its content and felt

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[5] Jesse Prinz, for example, says that the 'core idea of empathy' is that it is 'a kind of vicarious emotion: it's feeling what one takes another person to be feeling' (Prinz 2011a: 212).

character, in part determining its valence, intensity, tone, and motivational force. If John responds to Sally's painful toothache with empathic concern, he then is *already* in an internal state that refers to Sally, is aversive and negatively valenced, relatively intense, and has a particular attentional focus and motivational direction.

4.   The Synchronic Empathy Indispensability Thesis

One interpretation of the EIT is that synchronous empathic arousal is necessary for an agent's susceptibility to other-regarding considerations—that the contribution of empathy occurs synchronously in our other-regarding moral judgements. Is the synchronic version of the EIT true? In particular, is synchronous empathy necessary for recognition of the moral claims of persons as such?

Let us first consider the positive evidence delivered by Batson's studies of other-regarding, altruistic judgements. Batson's initial experiments showed that subjects who are primed to empathize with victims are more strongly motivated to help them; 'high empathy' subjects are altruistically motivated even when helping comes at a significant cost to personal interests (Batson 2011). In later studies using the same basic design, Batson found further that empathy priming led subjects to act more altruistically even when (a) the helping was anonymous and offered no personal credit (thus challenging reward incentives), (b) there were good reasons to avoid helping, making helping demanding and not helping justified (challenging anticipated guilt incentives), (c) subjects were advised that they would receive no feedback on their assistance (challenging incentives of praise/victim's gratitude), and (d) when refusing to help promised a positive experience on par with that of helping (challenging anticipated pleasure incentives) (Batson 2011: Appendices B, C, D, F, G). These results are not conclusive, but they strongly suggest that empathy can promote attitudes and behaviour that are *better explained* by altruistic rather than egoistic motivation, at least in a context of heightened, targeted empathy induction. This is encouraging news for the friend of the synchronic EIT, insofar as altruistic judgements may be considered a central instance of person-regarding ones.

Numerous other studies have found strong correlations between empathy and other-regarding actions and attitudes, including 'impersonal' person-regarding recognition. Konrath's and Grynberg's extensive survey of the literature identifies a number of results supporting the claim that empathy promotes prosocial motivation. To mention only a few:

- For both attunement and empathic concern, and regardless of how these were measured (i.e. observer-reports, self-reports, self-reported vicarious emotion, or targeted situational induction), empathy is positively associated

with prosocial behaviours towards strangers (sharing, assisting, giving) (Eisenberg and Miller 1987)

- Empathy induction increases interpersonal cooperation, even in Prisoner's Dilemma games in which the subjects know that their game partner has defected. In one study, situational empathy induction increased cooperation rates from 5 per cent (control) to 45 per cent in a one-time play. (Batson and Ahmad 2001).
- Empathy induction has been shown to improve outcomes in negotiations between parties with competing goals, producing better outcomes on both sides relative to controls (Galinsky et al. 2008)
- Parents who rank high in empathy (on both self-reports and observer reports) have more positive and effective interactions with their children. As Konrath and Grynberg note, this is unsurprising if, as the aforementioned studies suggest, 'empathizing makes people kinder and more cooperative' (Konrath and Grynberg 2013: 2).
- In professional settings, higher empathy ratings by those in helping, 'prosocial' vocations (doctors, nurses, teachers, and therapists) were correlated with better performance and better outcomes for patients and students (Coffman 1981; Waxman 1983).

Surveying the evidence, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that at least *some* dimension of empathy is causally efficacious in driving our recognition of persons as a source of moral claims. Hoffman is even more confident, asserting that there is 'overwhelming evidence that people who feel empathically distressed at another's misfortune are more motivated to help, that empathic distress makes people help more quickly, and that people who are empathically responsive to another's distress feel better when they help than when they don't' (Hoffman 2000: 441). What more could the friend of the EIT require?

To conclude in favour of the EIT on these grounds, however, is too hasty. First, many of the associations noted are merely correlational, and do not establish that empathy is the horse rather than the cart. This is not, in fact, a serious worry in every case: sometimes other considerations such as the order in which stimuli are presented (as in Batson's studies) make the causal claims compelling. But there are other methodological worries as well, including inconsistencies in how 'empathy' is conceptualized. Some conceptualizations, for instance, include personal distress as an indicator of empathy, whereas others exclude it; again, some take perspective-taking or cognitive mindreading as constituents of empathy and others do not. Measurement procedures are also inconsistent. Some studies rely solely on self-report, which is notoriously unreliable for subjects who are independently invested in an empathic self-conception. Others use observer reports, and still others assess autonomic, physiological correlates of affective arousal. Why should we suppose that all of these are measuring the same conditions?

To further complicate matters, some studies target dispositional or trait empathy, while others assess empathy as aroused in a particular situation (situational empathy). Finally, and most problematic of all for the synchronic EIT, even very high positive correlations between empathy and indicators of moral competence can only show, at best, that empathy *facilitates* moral recognition of other persons, not that it is an indispensable condition of it. Moreover, empathy might inform and motivate other-regarding, helping behaviour in 'up close and personal circumstances', while doing nothing to promote our recognition of the moral claims of persons who are more remote in space or time.

For these and other reasons, many have argued that, the experimental evidence notwithstanding, the EIT is a non-starter (Goldie 2011; Maibom 2014; Prinz 2011a, 2011b). Jesse Prinz is perhaps its most vociferous critic. He holds that empathy makes no indispensable (or even desirable) contribution to moral competence, arguing that it is neither constitutively, causally, epistemically, developmentally, nor motivationally necessary. A first objection is that many norms fail even to be candidates for empathic motivation. Sometimes this is because empathic concern directly recommends against them. Empathy—*pace* our usual norms and intuitions–would most likely recommend, for instance, that we steal from the rich to give to the poor, and that we refuse to punish transgressors. Prinz's own list of 'empathy indifferent' norms includes crimes against oneself, offences against groups, victimless transgressions (bestiality, consensual incest), and moral judgements at a high level of abstraction ('Tax evasion violates the obligations of citizenship'). The objection is well taken so far as it goes, but it does not go very far if the EIT concerns only moral judgements directly justified by recognition of persons' interests, expressive of person-directed virtues such as kindness, generosity, compassion, pity, fidelity, and forgivingness. Could we really find such judgements compelling without *any* kind of empathic responsiveness to others' wants and needs?

Prinz insists that we could, arguing that empathic concern fails to provide the best explanation of moral motivation, even in this restricted class. His argument relies on his particular meta-ethical commitments, which are both internalist and sentimentalist. In brief, Prinz holds that moral judgements are intrinsically motivating because they have an emotional basis or 'contain' emotions, as he sometimes puts it. The emotions they contain may be negatively valenced (disapprobative) responses such as anger, disgust, guilt, and shame, or positively valenced (approbative) ones such as gratitude, admiration, or pride. A token moral *judgement* is in part *constituted* by such emotions, and that is why it is intrinsically motivating (Prinz 2011a: 219). This fact, Prinz argues, already delivers everything we need to explain why other-regarding considerations motivate us; empathy is simply surplus to requirements. There is no explanatory gap in the motivational story for it to fill.[6]

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[6] Might not empathy nonetheless be our most effective and reliable source of motivation, even if it is not a necessary one? Against this suggestion, Prinz adduces findings indicating that the emotions

Whether or not we find Prinz's alternative account convincing, the synchronic EIT will fare badly in the court of everyday moral experience if our person-regarding judgements are *ever* motivating in the absence of occurrent empathy. And, in fact, this often happens: there are many modes and manifestations of interpersonal concern apart from occurrent *empathic* concern. Consider my standing disposition to help my child—to relieve his distress and to confer benefits such as affection, a secure home, an education. Fortunately for him, this disposition does not depend on my occurrent, empathic attunement; he is fed and comforted even when I am distracted or weary. While I am not then motivated by empathy, I still act from the ultimate goal of promoting his welfare. Similarly, person-regarding attitudes may arise derivatively out of a social role with which one is identified. An overworked nurse suffering from compassion fatigue and long past empathic attunement can continue to be motivated by her commitment to caring for her patients; a committed Humanist may serve the homeless, even when he ceases to be animated by empathy for them. In both cases, their (non-empathic) concern may even see them through occasional episodes of irritation or distaste or revulsion. That gives us no reason to deny that their ultimate goal is to relieve the plight of those in need. No doubt some occurrent regard for others—some standing disposition to promote their welfare and avert their suffering—plays a role in recognizing our moral obligations to them. But this need not be *empathic* concern. That is, it need not be concern that is either caused or informed by empathic attunement of any kind, because alternative routes to moral judgement are available. First, *deontological intuitions* can suffice to put even the most hard-hearted and avaricious shopkeeper—say, Kant's famous shopkeeper—off cheating his customers, and prevent the most cool-headed surgeon from engaging in random organ donation from an innocent patient. No empathy required. Secondly, *Golden Rule considerations* such as those in play behind Rawls's veil of ignorance will suffice to rule slavery and ethnic discrimination off

constitutive of moral judgements are also more powerful motivators than empathy: anger, disgust, happiness, and shame all, he claims, yield stronger effects than empathy (Prinz 2011a: 218–20). For example, he cites one study as showing 'no correlation in children between empathy and pro-social behaviour' (Underwood and Moore 1982), another indicating only a modest correlation in adults between prosocial behaviour and shared sadness (Eisenberg et al. 1989), a meta-analysis showing that empathy is only 'weakly correlated' with prosocial behaviour (Neuberg et al. 1997), and claims that in studies using economic games 'empathy does not motivate moral behavior when there are significant costs' (Fehr and Gachter 2002). This is puzzling data for the punter immersed in the experimental evidence adduced at the beginning of this section. What of Hoffman's 'overwhelming evidence' for the very correlations Prinz denies? The puzzle disappears when one inspects how Prinz conceptualizes empathy: he elucidates it solely in terms of 'shared' or 'vicarious' affect (effectively, just resonance and attunement), excluding empathic *concern*. That is, the handful of studies on which he relies attribute empathy only to subjects who directly evidence affect-sharing *independently* of concern. The Eisenberg study, for instance, distinguished displays of 'concerned attention' (e.g. a child wrinkling her brow) from displays of 'shared emotion' (direct mimicry of the target's sadness); only the latter counts as manifesting empathy. This makes all the difference, for it assumes that subjects' responses of sympathy or concern are *not* empathically driven. But this is almost to assume what Prinz aims to prove. Indeed, as Prinz judiciously acknowledges in a footnote, Batson's 'notion of empathic concern may be immune to many of the worries raised here' (Prinz 2011a: 229).

the moral pitch. Again, no empathy required. Thirdly, old-fashioned *emotional conditioning and habituation* can be enough to elicit our approbation for all manner of moral imperatives—it can prevent a jealous sibling from pinching his baby sister, it can keep a soldier at his post under fire, and it can refocus the wandering eye of a husband trapped in a stale marriage. Token, person-regarding judgements require no here-and-now empathic input; while recognition of and respect for others may be indispensable, these often move us independently of any present empathic engagement. While empathy *may* play a role in motivating recognition of persons' moral claims, it often is surplus to requirements.

Even more worryingly, in everyday experience our empathic responses can be capricious and double-edged, undermining the very sort of impartiality on which recognition of persons depends. The workings of empathy are often difficult to control, unreliable, and fleeting. Primo Levi accuses our empathic impulses of being insensitive to reason, arguing that they 'elude all logic'. There is no proportion, he points out, 'between the pity we feel and the extent of the pain by which the pity is aroused: a single Anne Frank excites more emotion than the myriads who suffered as she did but whose image has remained in the shadows' (Levi 1988: 56). Levi's scepticism about the contributions of empathy to moral conduct is at least partly borne out by its role in countless everyday, moral failings. Empathy may not only fail to move us to the right judgements about the right targets in the right measure and at the right times; it can move us to knowingly transgress. How many of us have lied to a friend about a sensitive issue (when they really needed to hear the truth) because we could not bear to witness their discomfort? What parent has not been tempted to assist his child a bit *too* actively with a challenging homework problem, or arts competition or job application, temporarily relegating considerations of authenticity and fairness to a lower shelf? How often have any of us picked up the pieces and covered for a feckless colleague, who by rights should have been held properly to account for some misdemeanour? Even if one rejects the thought that partiality and morality are incompatible, it is clear that empathy can sometimes deform our moral thought. As Prinz remarks, 'We are grotesquely partial to the near and dear. But that does not confirm the epistemic status of empathy. On the contrary, it shows that we use empathy as an epistemic guide at the risk of profound moral error' (2011a: 224).

There is, moreover, compelling experimental evidence that empathy's force is fickle (ebbing and waning whimsically), irrational (unmodulated by the seriousness or size of its targets), and wildly prejudicial, being subject to in-group biases, to proximity, salience, and cuteness-effects (Konrath and Grynberg 2013). Perhaps worst of all, the allure of its verdicts often persists even when they contradict our considered moral judgements (Navarrete 2012; Batson et al. 1995; Batson et al. 2004).

In sum, both everyday moral experience and a growing body of scientific evidence suggest that basic moral competence need not, and often should not, be

underwritten by occurrent empathy—and that we are often better off without it. The synchronic EIT is false.

5. The Diachronic Empathy Indispensability Thesis

Even if the synchronic EIT fails, empathy may yet connect with basic moral competence in other ways. Indeed, it is difficult to believe that empathy plays *no* significant role in shaping the norms that govern our moral regard for other persons. As Maibom observes, '…without the influence of empathy-related affect, morality might be unrecognizable to us' (Maibom 2014: 38).

Recall the earlier observations that empathy underwrites moral competence by providing an epistemic resource and a motivational force that can compete with, and sometimes defeat, indifference and self-interest. The truth of this observation does not require the truth of the synchronic EIT. Instead, empathy may be *diachronically* necessary for moral competence, playing an indispensable role in the development of our recognition of others' moral claims. This would be plausible, for instance, if empathy were a developmental precondition for (a) concerned attention to others and (b) regulating (restraining or deferring) one's concern for oneself, balancing others' needs against our egocentric ends. Even if occurrent empathy has moved largely off-stage by the time mature moral judgement makes its entrance, it may have played a leading role earlier on in the developmental drama.

One principal source of evidence for the diachronic EIT has been developmental psychopathology; another is attachment theory. These are not entirely independent, for there is good evidence that failed attachment contributes causally to a range of moral disorders.

5.1   Empathic concern and moral psychopathology

Over the last two decades, several psychologists and philosophers have argued that psychopathic personality disorder provides evidence favouring some version of the diachronic EIT (Deigh 1995; Blair 2005; Soderstrom 2003; Denham 2000, 2012). It is widely believed that psychopaths exhibit deficits in affective empathy; indeed, 'lack of empathy' is among the disorder's diagnostic criteria (Hare 2003). This is supported by behavioural observations as well as autonomic measures such as skin-conductance and startle-blink responses. EEG and fMRI data have further indicated that psychopaths are hypo-responsive to others' distress, and especially to fear and sadness (Blair 1995; Blair et al. 2001; Decety et al. 2013; Patrick 1994). Psychopaths are aware of the moral rules holding sway in their communities, but they fail regularly and systematically to be guided by moral

considerations in their practical judgements—they seem to know what morality requires, but are unmoved by it. Moreover, some studies (albeit not all) indicate that they are less sensitive than controls to the special authority of moral as opposed to conventional rules (Blair 1995; Blair 2006). This anomaly is unlikely to be owed to deficits in cognitive mindreading, for most psychopaths typically perform as well as neurotypicals in that respect (Blair 1995).

These findings have suggested to some that the psychopath's moral failings are caused developmentally by a deficit in affective empathy. In normal moral development, affective empathy is thought to generate negative emotions in response to actions yielding distress in others (e.g. physical abuse) and positive emotions in response to actions promoting their well-being (e.g. helping, comforting). On one standard developmental narrative, these action types come regularly to be associated with the elicited emotions; stable patterns of response are thus acquired throughout childhood and early adolescence, later developing into settled dispositions to respond with disapproval to negative elicitors and approval to positive ones. Once this habituation has taken place, synchronic empathic responses are no longer required to motivate token moral judgements; our settled dispositions do the job. While affective empathy may continue to be activated on occasion, its contribution to *moral* development is largely completed by late adolescence. In the case of the psychopath (the hypothesis goes), this process goes awry: because of his empathic deficits, he fails to lay down the requisite associations in the first place, and this explains his failure later to respond to moral transgressions/observances with appropriately valenced motivations.

The EIT finds further support from comparative data on people with autism. Autistic subjects suffer significant mindreading deficits, as well as deficits in emotion recognition. However, their empathic responsiveness—and particularly their responsiveness to others' distress—is largely intact: the affective empathy of high-functioning people with autism is often (although not always) on par with that of neurotypicals, as assessed by variety of measures including expression mimicry, autonomic arousal, and fMRI (Baron-Cohen 1995; Blair 1995; Vignemont 2009). In view of this profile, the diachronic EIT would predict that people with autism are not, on the whole, deficient in moral motivation, and this prediction is largely fulfilled: while they struggle with subtler rules of social interaction, and show developmental delay on false belief and other mindreading tasks (especially in early years), they are not systematically transgressive of other-regarding norms. Taking the evidence from psychopathy and autism together, then, seems to recommend some version of the diachronic EIT: while cognitive mindreading is neither necessary (being impaired in morally compliant people with autism) nor sufficient (being intact in morally unmotivated psychopaths) for other-regarding moral competence, affective empathy is indispensable.

Unfortunately, consideration of the wider evidence delivers a less straightforward picture. For one thing, recent research focusing on the psychopath's cognitive

abilities has suggested that their deficits may not be specific to affective responsiveness as such, but to a failure to integrate affective and cognitive information (Decety 2015). Several other cognitive deficits, too, have been identified, including impairments in semantic processing (Kiehl et al. 2004) and emotion recognition (Wilson, Juodis, and Porter 2011). Secondly—and more worrying for the diachronic EIT—recent studies have challenged the pivotal claim that psychopaths have profound affective empathy deficits at all. Some recent experimental evidence has challenged this long-standing view, including one study indicating that psychopaths 'resonate' with others' distress at a sensorimotor level on par with controls (Maibom 2014: 14–16; Domes et al. 2013; Lishner et al. 2012; Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, and Leistico 2006: 139–40). Scepticism seems also to be justified by Jean Decety's finding that the neural regions in which psychopaths differ from non-psychopaths are *not* those associated with affective resonance (amygdala and anterior insular cortex) but rather those associated with *concern* (ventromedial prefrontal cortex and lateral orbitofrontal cortex) (Decety 2015). If Decety is correct, intact affective resonance can combine with an absence of the most basic regard for other persons' interests, suggesting that moral decency is not borne out of resonance/attunement-based empathic concern, but has some independent source. In that case, the psychopath's particular toolbox of capacities may even offer evidence *against* the diachronic EIT. At the least, it appears to be under-determined by the evidence, opening the door to the possibility of a third *explanans*—some third condition which might independently explain both the psychopath's empathy deficits *and* his lack of moral motivation (Prinz 2011a, 2011b; Maibom 2014).[7]

A simple example of a 'third condition' explanation is Shaun Nichols's account of altruistic motivation. Nichols proposes that altruism (and other-regarding moral responsiveness more generally) in our species is best explained by a 'Concern Mechanism'—a dedicated, independent mechanism motivating us to act in ways that will relieve or reduce conspecifics' distress. Like empathy, the Concern Mechanism plays both an epistemic and motivational role: it alerts the agent to the other's distress, identifying it is *as* the other's distress, and then 'triggers' an independent motivation to act altruistically (Nichols 2001: 444). As Nichols describes the process, 'Altruistic motivation depends on a mechanism that takes as input representations that attribute distress, e.g., *John is experiencing painful shock*, and produces as output affect that *inter alia* motivates altruistic behavior...I'll...call this system the Concern Mechanism' (Nichols 2001: 446). This much is compatible with the diachronic EIT. Nichols's Concern Mechanism,

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[7] Maibom, for instance, observes that psychopaths' general hypo-responsiveness to fear and high pain thresholds might fill that role. Owing to these deficits, 'their understanding of, and ability to feel with and for people who are afraid, would also be impaired...lack of fear may itself cause a number of the deficits associated with psychopathy, including the moral ones' (Maibom 2014: 16).

however, relies on neither empathic attunement nor on more sophisticated perspective-taking skills, such as the ability to imaginatively elaborate the detail of the other's experience, or to grasp its causes and consequences for someone in his position. It operates *independently* of empathic responsiveness, both in signalling to the agent that a conspecific is in distress (in its epistemic role) and triggering his altruistic response (in its motivational role) (Nichols 2001: 245). On this view, responsiveness to persons' interests can float free of empathic resonance and attunement, driven solely by an autonomous, dedicated mechanism, so that 'the representation of the other's distress produces a distinctive emotion of…concern for the other person and this emotion is *not homologous to the emotion of the person* in need' (Nichols 2001: 444, emphasis added).[8]

If it can be demonstrated that person-regarding judgements can be explained by an empathy-independent mechanism of this kind, that would plainly put paid to the diachronic EIT. At most, empathy might then play a modest epistemic role, providing detail of some distress 'inputs', with a functionally and neuro-physiologically discrete concern mechanism producing the altruistic outputs.[9]

How plausible is Nichols's hypothesis? An initial worry is that it does little more than put a label to a hypothetical 'black box', defined in very minimal, functional terms. That might not matter if the psychological and biological sciences offered no other resources to better explain concern-activated behaviour. But surely they do.

Consider, first, that evolutionary adaptations are typically economical: nature rarely replicates functions to no point. Empathic attunement and concern are *already* inherently motivating, with the same attentional focus (a human conspecific) and part of the same motivational direction (aversion to the conspecific's distress or attraction to his/her well-being). Why render empathy redundant with a functionally independent system? It would be more efficient for empathic concern to develop out of and exploit both the information and the motivation inherent in resonance and attunement, perhaps modulated by certain cognitive skills (De Waal 2006, 2008.

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[8] The idea is not a new one: Darwin, for instance, maintained that sympathetic concern for others' welfare constituted a 'separate and distinct emotion', and more recent evidence in its favour derives from studies associating altruistic behaviour with a distinctive facial expression (Darwin 1871: 215; Roberts and Strayer 1996: 456; Eisenberg et al. 1989: 58; Miller et al. 1996: 213).

[9] Nichols also argues that basic altruistic motivation does not require sophisticated mindreading of the kind to which Batson appeals (Batson et al. 1997; Batson 2011; Batson 2012). Nichols adduces three empirical considerations in support of this claim. First, as a matter of chronology, very young children exhibit altruistic behaviour (at between 12 to 18 months) before they have developed sophisticated perspective-taking/mindreading abilities—for instance, the ability to pass False Belief tests and to make relatively fine-grained predictions of beliefs, desires, intentions, and actions. These do not emerge until 32–48 months (Nichols 2001: 447). Secondly, autistics also have restricted mindreading abilities and yet exhibit spontaneous altruistic behaviours (Nichols 2001: 449). Finally, psychopaths provide some negative evidence: as noted above, they are typically competent mindreaders, but exhibit significant deficits in their abilities to feel empathic concern and to behave altruistically towards others (Nichols 2001: 449).

Secondly, the developmental chronology of empathic resonance, attunement, and person-regarding concern tells against their independence. Ontogenetically, resonance is followed by attunement, which is in turn followed by concern (Preston and de Waal 2002). Phylogenetically, too, the neurological states realizing resonance and attunement (such as the amygdala, anterior insula, and anterior cingulate cortex) antedate those associated with concern (the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and lateral orbitofrontal cortex) (Decety and Cowell 2014; Parsons et al. 2013).

Finally, the chronology of the ontogenetic development of other-regarding judgements suggests that empathic resonance paves the way for higher-level cognitive awareness of our own and others' inner lives. As a child acquires a more sophisticated conceptual repertoire, his exposure to such resonance modulates his ability to mark a self–other distinction, his awareness of his powers as a discrete agent, and his recognition of others as independent loci of affective experience (Hoffman 2008; Decety and Svetlova 2012).

Taken together, these considerations suggest that Nichols's postulation of a discrete concern mechanism, functionally independent of the other natural dispositions and abilities subserving interpersonal responsiveness, is ad hoc to the point of arbitrariness. They also suggest that any credible account of our capacity for recognizing the claims of persons as such—of our responsiveness to person-regarding moral requirements—would do well to take into account what we know of its genealogy. Specifically, a credible account will follow attachment theory in considering the ontogenetic, developmental origins of interpersonal responsiveness as it emerges in concert with the complex tapestry of other affective and cognitive characteristics.

6.   Mentalizing, Attachment, and Moral Recognition

It would be gratifying if, at this point in my narrative, I could point the reader to a compelling, evidence-based explanatory account elucidating the distinctive contributions of empathy to attachment and, in turn, the contributions of secure attachment to person-regarding moral competence. I have no such account to offer. What attachment research (and especially mentalization-based attachment theory) does offer, however, is a promising and appropriately nuanced road-map—a set of investigative directions, as it were—for tracing a route from our very first intimate and empathic engagements with our caregivers in infancy, through the increasingly complex dynamics of our interpersonal (and especially intersubjective) engagement with them in early childhood, to our eventual development as inherently social beings, disposed to recognize ourselves and others as a source of moral claims. I cannot lay out the detail of that road-map here; I shall only call attention to some of the principal signposts illuminated by the findings

of attachment research. In the case of secure attachment, these signposts point (perhaps by indefinitely many individual routes) to several candidate foundations of moral competence—including empathy. In the case of insecure or disorganized attachment, they signal turns at which an individual's development can falter, and they help to explain the losses this incurs.

Consider again the fictional tale with which I began: Frankenstein's monstrous Creature, deprived from birth of sensitive caregiving, or indeed any caregiving at all, destined to a life bereft of love or respect, to a dysregulated character marked by violence, impulsiveness, self-loathing, anger, and alienation, and culminating in a solitary and sorrowful death. Creature's life was not a well-lived one; on the contrary, it serves almost as a summary profile of the key liabilities associated, within attachment theory, with bad beginnings and their inexorable progress to bad ends. Recall that the attachment system has evolved (the theory says) to regulate an individual's internal conditions (his stress and fear responses) in ways appropriate to his external conditions, especially those associated with threats to his survival; this is its adaptive function. Fonagy neatly describes what it is for this process to unfold successfully: Perceived sources of distress trigger an attachment signal from the infant, who seeks protection from that threat by 'evoking proximity and a matching regulating protective response from a caretaker disposed to reciprocate, form emotional bonds, mentalise and teach'. These caretaker responses are, as Fonagy conceives them, different aspects of a global *mirroring* on the part of the caretaker, forming the foundation of mentalization as 'one of humanity's most pervasive and powerful characteristics—the impulse to understand and imagine both our own and other people's thoughts' (Fonagy et al. 2014: 36). When optimal, this mirroring will be 'contingent' (accurately targeting specific and variable threats), attuned (accurately guided by the child's inner experience), and marked (signalled back to the child in recognizable ways). None of this, of course, was available to Creature following his rejection and abandonment by Dr Frankenstein. The deprivations subsequently borne by Creature in his early development illustrate many of the ways in which compromised attachment can compromise optimal development—several of which specifically involve failures of empathic mirroring.

- At the level of *empathic resonance*, newborns are biologically pre-wired to envision and encode human mental states, and caregivers to reflect those of the child; this is an automatic, pre-verbal, reciprocal sensitivity to emotional signposts—a natural capacity for intersubjective reflection. When a caregiver is unavailable—either through emotional or, as in Creature's case, physical—absence, the child is deprived not only of protection, but of the emotional displays of human presence which he is naturally motivated to seek out, and which signal to him his key source of protection. This leads to high levels of physiological stress, correlated with both deactivation and

hyperactivation of the attachment system itself. (Bowlby, for instance, held that fear, and in particular fear of the loss of the attachment figure, was the primary activator of the attachment system (Bowlby 1969)). The extent to which a child's subjective experience is adequately mirrored by attachment figures is thus crucial both to the quality of his attachment relationship and to a global sense of emotional security.

- At the level of *empathic attunement*, the caregiver is the principal source by which a child learns to identify, individuate, and represent his own and others' internal mental states. Deprived of the opportunity to observe the perceptible manifestations of a caregiver (e.g. in his/her facial expressions, modulated vocalizations, modulated tactile contact, physical posture, etc.) the child loses not only his signposts for the subjective presence (the psychological reality) of the caregiver, but an understanding of how to navigate the opacity of others' mental states. Empathic, attuned mirroring also plays a role in developing the child's ability to differentiate himself from others, allowing him to inhibit tendencies to conflate the experience of the others with his own. Deficits in such inhibition are a risk to the integrity and independence of the self, which requires a stable sense of the distinction between self and other; such deficits are common in borderline personality disordered patients, for instances, who often feel their agency overwhelmed when confronted with the wishes of others.

- Again at the level of emotional attunement, caregiver mirroring plays a critical role in the child's developing ability to meta-cognitively represent his *own* internal states (in part through the caregiver's perceptible reflective marking of these). Meta-cognitive self-awareness in turn is essential to effective self-regulation of many kinds: emotion regulation, attentional focus, and behavioural impulse control. Notoriously, one cannot regulate and control what one is unable to detect, identify, and monitor: it is unsurprising that so many contemporary recognized disorders (including ADHD, BPD, ASPD, and ASD) are strongly associated with meta-cognitive dysfunction.

- The meta-cognitive capacities developed via attuned caregiver mirroring are also essential to the child's recognition of his own agency in relation to others—his appreciation that his own thoughts and feelings, behaviourally manifested, can influence not only the physical environment but the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others. The child's developing sense of agency is, in turn, not only essential to his concept of himself as empowered to influence other persons, but as bearing causal responsibility for certain of their experiences. Failure to recognize personal agency of this kind is, again unsurprisingly, associated in maturity with a range of morally relevant pathologies, including psychopathy.

- Finally, caregiver mirroring and mentalization manifested as *empathic concern* matters profoundly to the child's perception of others as collaborative

beings, with shared interests and a common agenda of promoting well-being and averting distress and harm. The caregiver's capacity to respond reliably with empathic concern provides the foundational data for the child's 'internal working model' of other persons and, more generally, his connectedness to the human social world. 'The first minds that small children are presented with', observe Fonagy and his co-authors, 'to wonder about and interpret…[provide] the earliest formative lessons in other people's thinking and also, through these people's reactions, for learning about how our thoughts are perceived: who we are imagined to be by others' (Fonagy et al. 2014: 36). This lesson is writ large in Shelley's narrative of Creature: he sees himself (accurately) as a monster, deformed and repellent, and this was indeed the motive for his abandonment by Frankenstein. This image of who he is, what value (or disvalue) he possesses, and how he is perceived by others shapes every aspect of his later personal relationships. Shelley's account of Creature's fictional woes in this respect fit with contemporary evidence: threatening or hostile attachment figures are well-known predictors of a disorganized attachment style and, as learned through studies of emotionally neglected (although often physically nurtured) orphans, the simple absence of a candidate attachment figure can inflict more serious and persisting effects on cognitive development than an abusive one.

I hope that this brief survey serves to indicate the merits of mentalization-based attachment theory. It not only offers a rich and nuanced approach to the function and significance of the empathic interactions between caregiver and child, but points to the plethora of ways in which empathic mirroring is indispensable to optimal psychological development.[10] It also suggests, if not an answer to the question with which I began, then a direction in which to look for one. To rehearse: why and how does secure attachment promote our respect for person-regarding moral requirements—our ability to recognize in our practical reasoning the moral claims of persons as such?

Mentalization theory's mirroring or 'reflective functioning', I have proposed, exploits our natural susceptibility to empathic resonance, attunement, and concern. In doing so, moreover, the child is not merely encouraged but compelled to experience and to track, first-personally, his caregiver's subjective states and to calibrate to them his own experience. This spontaneous, unbidden responsiveness to the caregiver's reality is non-optional, not only in the sense that the child's survival depends on it, but because his nature does not permit him to resist it,

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[10] Interestingly, a series of studies found that sensitive caregiver (and specifically maternal) mentalizing—her engagement with and representation of the child's mental states—is a better predictor of a secure mother–child relationship even than her global sensitivity (reliability and responsiveness to needs). (Meins et al. 2001).

disposing him as it does to maintain not only physical proximity but psychological intimacy. As the child develops, this early responsiveness must—if intimacy is to be maintained—give way to a recognition of the caregiver's cognitive and affective independence, whilst remaining attuned to its reality and significance. Early solipsistic engagement, as it were, must give way to recognition of an independent locus of experience, without losing sight of its significance and value. Again, this is a transformation which the child is powerless to resist. He does not choose to acknowledge the reality and importance of his caregiver's feelings, thoughts, and intentions: the attachment system leaves him no alternative. In this way the child, and especially the securely attached child, gains a disposition to recognize the reality and significance of other persons which, in later maturity, he remains unable to deny. Other persons can't but matter. Recognition of the claims of others is not only morally, but psychologically obligatory.

The suggestion that we are obliged by our natural constitutions to take the reality and value of others into account is not new to moral theory, although the connection I am proposing to attachment theory may be. One of its most recent defenders is Christine Korsgaard. 'What makes you take my reasons into account or bridges the gap between your reasons and mine?', she asks. The answer, she observes, is that there is no gap to bridge:

> Suppose that we are strangers and that you are tormenting me, and suppose that I call upon you to *stop*. I say: 'How would you like it if someone did that to you?' And now you cannot proceed as you did before. Oh, you can proceed all right, but not just as you did before. For I have obligated you to stop...How does the obligation come about?...[T]he argument would not go through if you failed to see yourself, to identify yourself, as just someone, a person, one person among others who are equally real. The argument invites you to change places with the other, and you could not do that if you failed to see what you and the other have in common...In hearing your words as *words*, I acknowledge that you are *someone*. If I listen to the argument at all, I have already admitted that each of us is *someone*.   (Korsgaard 1996: 143).

Korsgaard's key idea here is that our recognition of the reality and claims of other persons is non-optional: we are constitutionally unable to resist seeing ourselves as bound to them, and they to us—independent, yet capable of permeating our thoughts, our emotions, and our motivations as we calibrate our inner lives with theirs. As attachment theory predicts, this calibration of self to other, and the expectation of others' calibration to ourselves—first encountered in the empathic reflection of our caregivers—is not, in maturity, a disposition we are at liberty to discard. Our personal psychologies are imbued from the outset with the powerful presence of others' subjectivities: of their affections, motivations, wants, and needs. Far from requiring a reason to take others into account, we need a reason

not to take them into account. Such reasons can and do arise, of course, often as a malign intrusion into our natural development. That is what happened to Dr Frankenstein's Creature, as he knew too well himself. Reading in books about the lives and relations of human beings, he laments,

> As I read…I applied much personally to my own feelings and condition. I found myself similar, yet at the same time strangely unlike to the being concerning whom I read, and to whose conversation I was a listener. I sympathized with, and partly understood them, but I was…dependent on none, and related to none…My person was hideous…What did this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come?   (Shelley 1969: 128).

These questions press Creature precisely because he recognizes that he fails to be attached and bound in some essential way to humanity. Of course, similar questions sometimes press us all, if for different reasons. Moreover, what happened to Creature, in failing to develop into a fully moral being, happens to many in varying degrees—sometimes to a degree which obliterates their humanity altogether: countless tyrants, tormentors, and madmen have populated human history, often with natures even more deformed than Shelley's tragic monster. But what develops in the optimal trajectory—the developmental trajectory of either the securely (or not-hopelessly insecurely) attached child—is that his or her *first* reality is one permeated by the intimate presence of others' inner lives. We have evolved in such a way that we arrive prepared for empathically attuned intimacy, and (barring misfortune) this preparation leads us to naturally calibrate our experience with that of others in ways which we are powerless to resist. For this reason, recognition and regard for other persons is, in maturity, our default position: we are, as Korsgaard observes, unable *not* to hear others call out, make demands, laugh and weep. We begin with the reality of persons who can't but be heard when they speak to us, and whose concerns we can't but register. 'You could say that it is because we want to be cooperative', says Korsgaard, 'but that is like saying that you understand my words because you want to be cooperative. It ignores the same essential point, which is that it is so hard not to' (Korsgaard 1996: 141).

7. Conclusion

I began with the question of why secure attachment is positively associated with what I call *person-regarding* moral concern—a capacity not merely to guide one's actions by other-regarding moral norms, but to recognize that such actions are owed to other persons as such, so that we are obliged to take their claims into account in our practical reasoning. This capacity is central to any credible account of basic moral competence. I then set out to assess the claims of empathy—a

capacity significantly correlated with secure attachment—as a condition of such competence. We saw that synchronous empathic concern was neither necessary nor sufficient to ensure it; if empathy contributes to our recognition of others, it does so diachronically, by a more complicated and less direct, developmental route. I surveyed the evidence from psychopathology favouring this thesis; while suggestive, it proved far from conclusive, and offered no coherent developmental narrative. Looking instead to mentalization-based attachment theory, I proposed, allows us to better understand how empathic mirroring enters into our earliest intimate interactions with other persons, securing our default commitment, as it were, to recognizing their reality as bound up with our own. In this way, empathy constitutes one of the natural foundations on which the more complex architecture of moral experience is constructed. It is not, of course, the only foundation: other correlates of secure attachment—self-regulation, a capacity for the moral emotions, theory of mind and perspective-taking—all are part of the groundwork of mature moral development. Nonetheless, attachment theory helps us better to understand the indispensable role empathy plays at the beginning of the circuitous road to virtue.

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