Joel Smith’s definition of empathy III

Author: Terence Rajivan Edward

Abstract. I present a challenge to Joel Smith’s definition of empathy, concerning different kinds of warmth.


Joel Smith tells us that person $A$ empathizes with $B$ if and only if three conditions are met:

(1) $A$ is consciously aware that $B$ is $\psi$.

(2) $A$ is consciously aware of what being $\psi$ feels like.

(3) On the basis of (1) and (2), $A$ is consciously aware of how $B$ feels.

Here is a worry. Person $A$ has only ever achieved the warmth of fire when cold and person $B$ has only ever experienced the warmth of sexual arousal. Applying the definition, person $A$ is aware that $B$ is warm, is aware of what being warm feels like, and is thereby aware of how $B$ feels. I am not sure about whether this counts as empathy. Various explanations of why, concerning different kinds of warmth and functions. To Joel: “I told you I didn’t want to talk about this stuff and now you have made me.”

Reference