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Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen

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## Psychopathy as moral blindness: a qualifying exploration of the blindness-analogy in psychopathy theory and research

Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen \*

Department of Philosophy & Forensic Science Program, University of Toronto Mississauga,  
Mississauga, Ontario, Canada

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The term psychopathy refers to a personality disorder associated with callous personality traits and antisocial behaviors. Throughout its research history, psychopathy has frequently been described as a peculiar form of moral blindness, engendering a narrative about a patient stereotype incapable of taking a genuine moral perspective, similar to a blind person who is deprived of proper visual perceptions. However, recent empirical research has shown that clinically diagnosed psychopaths are morally more fit than initially thought, and the blindness-analogy now comes across as largely misleading. In this contribution, the moral-blindness analogy is explored in an attempt to qualify anew its relevance in psychopathy theory and research. It is demonstrated that there are indeed theoretically relevant parallels to be drawn between blindness and psychopathy, parallels that are especially illuminating when accounting for the potential symptomatology, dimensionality, and etiological nature of the disorder.

**Keywords:** psychopathy; amorality; sentimentalism; moral blindness; psychopathic personality; moral psychology

Psychopathy is a broadly recognized personality disorder associated with impairments of moral psychological and behavioral capacities (Hart and Cook 2012). The clinical prototype of a psychopath is an antisocial delinquent with a callous indifference toward other people (for clinical profiles, see Hare 2003; Lilienfeld and Widows 2005; Patrick, Fowles, and Krueger 2009). Accompanying the many prevailing clinical descriptions of psychopathy, one popular analogy is to view the disorder as a peculiar form of *emotional blindness*, as here described by Robert Hare in his 1993 book, *Without Conscience*:

The psychopath is like a color-blind person who sees the world in shades of gray but who has learned how to function in a colored world. He has learned that the light signal for “stop” is at the top of the traffic signal. When the colorblind person tells you he stopped at the red light, he really means he stopped at the top light. He has difficulty in discussing the color of things but may have learned all sorts of ways to compensate for this problem, and in some cases even those who know him well may not know that he cannot see colors. Like the color-blind person, the psychopath lacks an important element of experience – in this case, emotional experience – but may have learned the words that others use to describe or mimic experiences that he cannot really understand. (Hare 1993, 129)

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\*Corresponding author. Email: rosenberg.larsen@utoronto.ca

Many variations of this blindness-analogy have appeared throughout the research history (e.g. Cleckley 1988; Johns and Quay 1962; Lombroso 2006; Maudsley 1874; McCord and McCord 1964; Meloy 1988; Rush 1972), and the analogy still continues to surface in contemporary accounts of psychopathy (e.g. Adshear 2014; Blair et al. 2006; Maibom 2017; Mitchell and Blair 2000; Schramme 2014). The first attempt to form an ambitious scientific theory around the blindness-analogy is usually attributed to one of the founding fathers of modern psychopathy research, Hervey Cleckley, in his five-edition opus, *The Mask of Sanity* (1988 [first edition in 1941]). Here, Cleckley maintained that what seemed to universally and fundamentally define his psychopathic patients was their unusual “emotional poverty” (Cleckley 1988, 349), an abnormality so strenuous that it made them entirely incapable “to see another person from the aspect of major affective experience”; psychopaths were simply “blind to this order of things or blind in this mode of awareness” (Cleckley 1988, 373).

A crucial aspect of Cleckley’s emotion-blindness analogy is the argument that such an emotional incapacity necessarily leads to a drastically impoverished understanding of moral values. That is, emotional-blindness necessarily leads to moral-blindness. Not only are psychopaths clueless to how others feel, they are also genuinely deprived of the values that drive and motivate most human activities:

[The psychopath] is unfamiliar with the primary facts or data of what might be called personal values and is altogether incapable of understanding such matters. It is impossible for him to take even a slight interest in the tragedy or joy or the striving of humanity as presented in serious literature or art. He is also indifferent to all these matters in life itself. Beauty and ugliness, except in a very superficial sense, goodness, evil, love, horror, and humor have no actual meaning, no power to move him. He is, furthermore, lacking in the ability to see that others are moved. It is as though he were colorblind, despite his sharp intelligence, to this aspect of human existence. It cannot be explained to him because there is nothing in his orbit of awareness that can bridge the gap with comparison. He can repeat the words and say glibly that he understands, and there is no way for him to realize that he does not understand. (Cleckley 1988, 59)

However, one pressing problem with the moral-blindness analogy is that it has proved difficult to corroborate in empirical research. Where the term *blindness* typically refers to a substantial and global impairment, studies have consistently found that (clinically diagnosed) psychopaths do not have such a full-fledged moral incapacity. Take, for instance, the classic portrayal of psychopaths as *lacking*, or being *deprived of*, empathy (e.g. Blair, Mitchell, and Blair 2005). While some studies have found evidence of small, yet significant empathy-related *differences* in diagnosed psychopaths compared to controls (e.g. Meffert et al. 2013; Mullins-Nelson, Salekin, and Leistico 2006), researchers generally stress that psychopaths’ ability to empathize is not globally deprived (e.g. Decety et al. 2014; Domes et al. 2013; Marsden et al. 2019). As Heidi Maibom (2018, 72) concluded in a review paper, not only are empathy studies presenting “mixed results”, the results appear to undermine the “sweeping statement” that psychopaths lack empathy. Similarly undermining results for the moral-blindness analogy can be found in a recent meta-analysis of 23 moral-psychological studies ( $n = 4376$ ) by Marshall and colleagues (2018), which concluded that while psychopaths exhibit subtle differences in moral judgments and beliefs, the larger thesis that psychopaths possess pronounced moral deficits was not substantiated by the collective research. Psychopaths, so it seems, are not lacking or deprived of emotional processes, let alone blind to the moral fabric of human existence (see also, Borg and Sinnott-Armstrong 2013; Larsen, Jalava, and Griffiths 2020).

Thus, it is perhaps fair to suggest that drawing analogies between psychopathy and blindness (i.e. psychopaths as absolutely deprived of moral capacities) has been empirically demonstrated as a problematic, or perhaps even an indefensible approach. For example, a broadly cited study by Cima and colleagues (2010) has offered an alternative interpretation of the moral psychological data, concluding that psychopathy is rather a problem about behavioral motivation, as opposed to a problem of knowing right from wrong. Psychopaths, they suggest, appear to make “the same kind of moral distinctions as healthy individuals [...] psychopaths know what is right or wrong, but simply don’t care” (2010, 66).

This paper is a renewed attempt to explore and qualify the blindness-analogy, demonstrating how it can inform and guide our perspectives throughout the research process. The paper will conclusively propose that theorizing psychopathy as a form of *moral blindness* can be defended quite literally. While this paper may also be seen as a response to those who oppose the blindness-analogy (e.g. Cima, Tonnaer, and Hauser 2010; Glenn et al. 2009; Maibom 2017), the dialectic aim is moreover to demonstrate how the blindness-analogy, when outlined in sufficient detail, may serve as a sound and novel framework for interpreting current data, as well as forming new avenues for future empirical research.

The argument will proceed as follows: First, the connection between psychopathic emotional poverty and moral psychology is briefly surveyed in order to clarify the scope of this alleged relation. Second, the analogy between vision blindness and psychopathic psychology is presented in support of viewing psychopathy as an instance of moral-emotional blindness, demonstrating how this analogy inspires novel perspectives with regard to orthodox views in the field, such as the hypothesized spectrum, dimensionality, and the etiological nature of psychopathy. Finally, a number of potential objections are addressed with respect to future scientific theoretical explication and empirical research of psychopathy.

### **Psychopathy as a moral psychological abnormality**

According to a cohort of long-standing theories dating back (at least) to Cleckley (for a historic review, see Sass and Felthous [2014]), psychopathy is theorized first and foremost as a disorder of emotion, which ultimately leads to profound difficulties in terms of moral reasoning, judgment, and orientation.<sup>1</sup> Variations of this type of theory are many (e.g. Blair 2017; Lykken 1995; McCord and McCord 1964; Meloy 1988; Schramme 2014), but they all seem to expand on the premise that a diminished capacity to emote in specific ways necessarily leads to a comparatively diminished appreciation of morality. For instance, James Blair (2017) proposes that it is due to a lack of negative emotions that psychopaths exhibit impairments of social and moral learning, since it is primarily negative emotions that teach us what is morally and socially unacceptable. On a similar note, Thomas Schramme (2014) has argued that psychopaths are lacking the capacity to empathize with others, causing a profound inability to care for other people, which, according to Schramme, is the cornerstone of prosocial and moral comportment (see also, Aaltola [2014]).

Aside from the subtle differences we find in and between these theories, there seems to be an important way in which they fundamentally overlap, namely, they are all committed to the idea that emotions play a necessary and/or sufficient role in moral psychology (e.g. that moral judgments are never deprived of emotional content). Another way to describe this overlap is that they are all committed to, and dependent on, the truth of so-called *moral sentimentalism*, a philosophical and psychological position that portrays morality as an outcome of predominately emotional processes. As such, moral sentimentalism is

contrasted to those theories that hold moral psychology as a fundamentally *rational* process (e.g. Kant 1998; Kohlberg 1984; Turiel 1983). So, in order to detail and qualify the fundamental connection between emotional poverty and moral psychological impairments, outlining the general contours of moral sentimentalism seems to be the way forward.

One general problem with such an analysis, though, is that moral sentimentalism also comes in many different variations, such as the classic versions expanding on moral sense and faculty theory (e.g. Driver 2013; Verplaetse 2009) to the contemporary versions that focus on emotional and affective processes as the basic building blocks of moral psychological content (e.g. Greene 2013; Haidt 2012; Nichols 2004; Prinz 2007). This variation in moral sentimentalist theories makes it impossible to outline a perspective that is not inherently vulnerable to objections, since one will have to necessarily decide on which version of sentimentalism to use as a frame of reference, while being aware that there are other sound, yet conflicting alternatives.

This quarrel notwithstanding, this paper will expand on Jesse Prinz's version of moral sentimentalism, namely, his so-called *constructivist sentimentalism* (2007). One general strength of Prinz's theory is that it is ostensibly less vulnerable to criticism from within moral sentimentalist theories given that it has earned a relatively broad endorsement and appears to have a strong empirical backbone upon which the theory is grounded (e.g. Cameron, Lindquist, and Gray 2015; Prinz 2016). An argumentatively speaking convenient upside of Prinz's theory is also its theoretical clarity insofar that it builds on one of the stronger and more straightforward versions of sentimentalism, namely, that emotions are both *necessary* and *sufficient* for moral judgments (Prinz 2007, 13–14). Not only will such a version facilitate relatively clear-cut predictions about what follows from a condition of diminished emotional dispositions, but it will also serve as a solid starting-point for future sentimentalist discussions of the moral-blindness analogy.

As a result of viewing emotion as necessary and sufficient for moral judgments, Prinz is committed to portraying moral psychological processes as nothing above and beyond associating a certain event with one's emotional reactions of either positive or negative valence. That is, when we are making a moral judgment, this is, according to Prinz, the outcome of a process where we had an emotional reaction to some event. For example, if you hear about a group of local politicians caught up in a political corruption scandal, and you judge that this is morally reprehensible, Prinz will have it that this judgment came about because you had a physical emotional reaction to this story. On the other hand, if it happened that you did not have a negative reaction to the revelation of political corruption, this equals you finding it morally unproblematic (Prinz 2007, 82–84).

It follows from this outline that moral judgments are outcomes of foregoing emotional processes, where your *cognitive awareness* of said emotional processes (i.e. the thinking about the moral judgment) is essentially a *post-hoc* reflection of how you were feeling about the specific event. In this sense, Prinz claims that your moral judgments are *constructions* of emotional reactions. As such, when we hold a moral belief, Prinz wants us to think of this as an emotional disposition – or sentiment, as Prinz refers to them – that functions in a rule-based manner. For instance, if you genuinely hold the moral belief that political corruption is morally wrong, then it will also be the case that you are emoting with negative valence when, in fact, you encounter political corruption. Therefore, Prinz argues that moral judgments are outcomes of the following dispositional structure: “To believe that something is morally wrong (right) is to have a sentiment of disapprobation (approbation) towards it” (Prinz 2006, 33). This setup also explains how we can be wrong about our own moral beliefs, for instance, if we claim that political corruption was wrong, but do not react negatively when experiencing political corruption.

Prinz holds that there are both *intuitive* and *empirical* reasons to think that emotions are both necessary and sufficient for moral judgments. In terms of intuitive reasons, Prinz proposes that people readily agree that they tend to have salient emotional reactions to the things they find morally right/wrong. For example, if you really do believe that political corruption is wrong, perhaps you will also agree that it makes you angry or sad (i.e. negative valence) when you encounter political corruption. Similarly, if you think that helping others through charity is a morally right thing to do, then you may also agree that it makes you feel good (i.e. positive valence) when people come together to do charity work.

In terms of the empirical reasons why we should endorse constructivist sentimentalism, Prinz invokes a suite of different evidence ranging from neuroscience to behavioral psychology. For instance, when test-subjects perform moral judgment and reasoning tasks in neurofunctional studies, Prinz points to data showing that brain regions involved in emotion processing are reliably activated (e.g. Greene and Haidt 2002; Yoder et al. 2015). Of course, this is not compelling evidence on its own, since it could equally mean that the emotions are mere reactions to rational deliberations about moral problems (i.e. the rationalist's view). This ambiguity notwithstanding, Prinz wants us to think that it is the other way around, that it is emotion that makes and guides our (cognitive) moral awareness and judgment (see also, Prinz [2015]).

In addition to this (after all) inadequate evidence, Prinz also highlights findings in behavioral psychology, and especially research that shows that moral agents are rarely capable of rationally grounding or defending their moral judgments. In a series of extensively cited studies by Haidt, Koller, and Dias (1993; 2000; 2001), test-subjects were confronted with a number of predictably vexing moral scenarios pertaining to incest, patriotism, cannibalism, etc. (e.g. is it ok to clean yourself with the national flag after defecation?), and then asked to provide reasons for their moral judgment. Although most participants were able to reliably and swiftly judge the situation as either morally right or wrong, few were able to provide convincing *reasons* for their judgments. And perhaps more interestingly, participants were rarely willing to change their opinion even when it occurred to them that they had no good reasons to support their judgment, often uttering sentences such as "I know it's wrong, but I just can't tell you why". This phenomenon of making moral judgments when aware of having no good reasons to back them up is commonly referred to as *moral dumbfounding* (see also, Uhlmann and Zhu [2014]), and Prinz believes this evidence suggests that emotions are *sufficient* for moral judgments (cf. Royzman, Kwanwoo, and Leeman 2015).

Building on these considerations, the following sections will expand on what might be inferred from a constructivist sentimentalist framework when theorizing about individuals suffering from diminished emotional dispositions (i.e. psychopaths), and how these inferences fit into a general analogy about how we typically think of, and describe, vision blindness.

### **Psychopathy as moral blindness**

Before we delve deeper into the blindness-analogy, we need to be clear about what scientists mean when they speak about vision and actual vision blindness. The human visual system is a complex of organs, cells, neurons, and nerves that function together to encode light stimulus into mental visual representation. Light travels through the eye, an organ that adjusts the stimulus, so a clear image reaches the retina. Photoreceptor cells will then encode the image from the retina into a neural signal, where a network of synapses, neurons, and cells connects the signal to the optic nerve, through which it

travels to the visual cortex in the occipital lobe (for a detailed ontological representation of blindness, see Ray et al. [2016]). Thus, whenever scientific references to blindness are made, what is implicitly conveyed is the *degree* to which this complex process of the visual system has failed to occur, the outcome of which is insufficient visual representations.

Speaking to this observation, then, it should be emphasized that the concept of blindness itself does not refer to a specific *kind* of disorder, nor any specific *ways* in which this process fails – these issues would concern a different approach pertaining to the different etiologies leading to blindness – but instead the concept of blindness denotes a *symptom*, i.e. the actual lack/fading of visual representation. Furthermore, since the visual system is a complex human function, it thus goes without saying that its failure to function can be caused by many disorders, diseases, events, etc., for instance, optic nerve cancer, severe head trauma, cataracts, the loss of both eyeballs, etc. While these are discrete and vastly different conditions, they can still lead to the same symptom, namely, blindness.

Despite the many discrete etiologies, blindness must not necessarily be understood as a symptom with obvious scientific delineations. For one, there are many different types of blindness (e.g. general vision blindness, color blindness, flash blindness, etc.), which all relate to different kinds of impairments and deprivation of visual representations. Secondly, and more crucially for the present purpose, the threshold for determining whether or not a person is blind turns out to be a difficult line to draw. Of course, a complete loss of visual representations undeniably suffices as blindness. But this observation is trivial. More intricate are the cases where a person has certain levels of visual representation, yet insufficient representations of the actual light stimulus. The more complicated questions in terms of defining blindness, then, pertain to what levels of vision acuity suffice as *proper vision*, and what levels count as *insufficient vision*. In other words, what is the threshold on the vision acuity spectrum where a person goes from being *not-blind* to being *blind*?

The answer to these questions turns out to be theoretically challenging, since it is not clear that the conceptual threshold, which these questions infer the existence of, is *scientifically discoverable*; that there exists a threshold which is measurable in a binary way, either the threshold is reached or it is not. Examples of such measurable thresholds could be a broken bone or a bacterial infection; in the former case the membranous continuity of the bone is evidently damaged, and in the latter case the presence of a bacterium is measured. With the concept of blindness, the situation is quite different. The reason for this is that the concept denotes a fiat part of a subject-matter that has a dimensional nature, i.e. a fiat part of the spectrum of vision acuity. More accurately, vision is a function that can be realized to a certain degree of acuity, for example, we can say that a person has good vision, another has impaired vision, and one can be blind. But nowhere along this acuity spectrum will it be *discoverable* what degree of function corresponds to our applied concepts (e.g. sufficient vision vs. blindness).

Many concepts are of this kind, denoting a fiat part of a dimensional subject-matter. On these terms the threshold-problem with blindness is far from a unique one. Consider, for instance, the concept of heap. While it might be clear to us that there are many heaps of gravel, sand, dirt, etc. at the local nursery, it is, however, unclear when these heaps stop being heaps as they turn smaller and smaller during the weekend sales. Similar to the concept of blindness, we might ask what quantity of amassed gravel *suffices* as a proper heap, and what quantity is *insufficient* as a heap? It will, perhaps, be clear to us that two pebbles will not amount to a heap, while three tons of gravel will. But the real problem

with delineation in these cases regards finding the threshold where something goes from a *non-heap* to a *heap*.<sup>2</sup>

One way to get around this sort of problem with vagueness in applied (biomedical) science is to settle on a *conventional* threshold. In the case of blindness, for example, the World Health Organization defines blindness as visual acuity under 20/500. The American Medical Association defines blindness as visual acuity under 20/200. The two different standards do not solve the ambiguity of conceptual annotation, but as long as we accept that they are both equally representative as conventional standards, they can thus serve as fixed (yet fiat) semantic thresholds for what the concept of blindness refers to. But more importantly – and perhaps often overlooked – where the vagueness problem might convey some sort of message about the concept itself being vague, it is important to have in mind that as soon as we conventionally decide what the concept refers to, in practical applied contexts this vagueness collapses (e.g. Schulz and Johansson 2007). Arguably, the concept of blindness (and other concepts with vague thresholds) are only vague insofar as their definition is pursued through conceptual analysis, yet it is possible to define them in practice through convention (e.g. Bittner and Smith 2001).

These initial observations about blindness bear some important similarities to the psychopathy research literature. As was noted earlier, psychopathy does not refer to cases where the individual is *fully* deprived of affect and feeling (this is trivially true since humans cannot function without emotions, e.g. Damasio [1994]). Instead, clinically diagnosed psychopaths do have emotions; what seems to be a more reasonable or tangible portrayal of psychopathic personalities is that many have relatively shallow manifestations of emotion (though the data is unclear; for a meta-analysis of the emotion research in psychopaths, see Brook, Brieman, and Kosson [2013]). Where normal healthy people experience a broad spectrum of affect, from low to high arousal, (some) clinically diagnosed psychopaths have been measured to be comparatively on the lower end of such a spectrum. While a normal/average person can evidently feel ecstatically happy in one situation, and mildly content in another; it has been proposed that psychopaths are never really truly excited in the fully aroused sense. At least, this is how some researchers have interpreted the empirical data (e.g. Blair 2017; Maibom 2018; Stratton, Kiehl, and Hanlon 2015; Venables et al. 2015).

This observation conveys a message about human emotional life residing on a basic spectrum of affective disposition, ranging from low to high emotional conditioning (see Figure 1). That is, some people have relatively attenuated affective dispositions, meaning that they are relatively less likely (and therefore lesser disposed) to emote in a given situation. Others have relatively potentiated affective dispositions, meaning that they are more likely to emote in a given situation. Naturally, as indicated in Figure 1, the entire populace would then be distributed in a (“normal”) Gaussian way between these two poles (where empirical data are needed to give the exact distribution curve). Psychopaths, according to some researchers, would then reside on the lower end of the spectrum, namely, those people who are comparatively emotionally confined with their affective dispositions having a relatively smaller number of trigger conditions (and we might further hypothesize, alongside most modern research, that only few people are so disposed [e.g. Hare 2003]).<sup>3</sup>

It is important to notice that the observation concerning a spectrum of affective disposition corresponds with standard accounts of the affective system, some of which portray emotion as having two types of qualities: arousal and valence, for example, as described in the *Circumplex Model of Emotion* (Posner, Russell, and Peterson 2005). In this model, the term arousal refers to the intensity of the emotion, and valence refers to the experienced



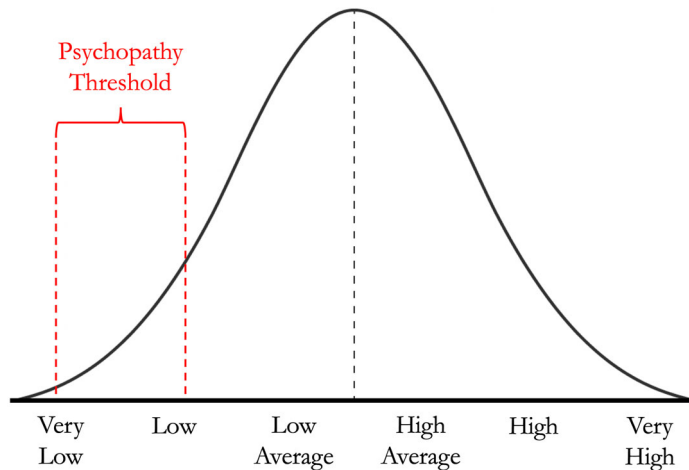


Figure 1. The Spectrum of Affective Disposition: This spectrum annotates how individuals are differently disposed to emote. That is, some people have a very lowly disposed affective system (i.e. few conditions will trigger their affective dispositions) and some people are very highly disposed. The fiat dimension marked as “Psychopathy threshold” denotes a hypothetical convention of what level of affective attenuation suffice as being “psychopathic”, similar to how “blindness” is conventionally marked on the spectrum of vision acuity. The Gaussian curve illustrates a hypothetical distribution of the populace.

value of an emotion (e.g. positive or negative). Thus, the difference between joy and happiness, which are both positive valance emotions, will primarily be related to a difference in degrees of arousal. What the spectrum of affective dispositions in Figure 1 describes, then, is how human beings are differently disposed in terms of their arousal spectrum. Thus, the central assumption concerning psychopaths is that they are – in a global manner – significantly less disposed to emote with elevated degrees of arousal, leading to what we would normally refer to as *shallow emotions*; in other words, attenuated emotion dispositions.

What is suggested by these considerations, then, is that the concept of psychopathy – insofar as the concept denotes a fiat part of the spectrum of affective disposition – must come down to a clinical conventional decision about *what* (lower) levels of affective dispositions actually count as psychopathy, i.e. the fiat area of the spectrum the concept represents, as indicated in Figure 1. The conceptual and theoretical resemblance between blindness and psychopathy should then be obvious. Indeed, conventionally deciding what lower range of the emotional disposition spectrum counts as psychopathy seems identical to conventionally selecting what (lower) range of visual acuity corresponds to insufficient vision. It turns out, then, that the blindness-analogy is directly applicable with respect to understanding and portraying the alleged attenuated emotional capacity of psychopaths.

There are some limitations to this analogy, however. Notice, for instance, that there are empirical reasons to believe that the lowest part of the spectrum in Figure 1, that is, complete deprivation of emotion – which would equate to complete loss of vision – may not to be included in a theory of psychopathy. The reason being that the complete deprivation of emotional dispositions appears to relate only to extremely rare and distinct clinical phenomena, where patients experience verbal mutism and behavioral paralysis; quite literally, to be without emotion also appears to be without motivational impulses (Damasio and Van Hoesen 1983; Nagaratnam et al. 2004). As it has been repeatedly stated, empirical data suggest that psychopaths are not fully deprived of emotion, but instead they may have

shallow and attenuated emotional dispositions. Currently, there is no evidence in the research literature that suggests that the same etiologies that have been hypothesized (yet not proven) to cause these emotion attenuations in psychopaths can also lead to the extreme cases of complete emotion deprivation. If it turns out that it can, we may find that these extreme cases are simply severe instances of psychopathy. It is, of course, quite expected that a mental disease can cause drastically different symptom profiles depending on the severity of said condition (consider, for instance, early stage Alzheimer vs. fully developed Alzheimer). Therefore, we may theorize that something similar could hold for psychopathy as well.

Now, the larger and perhaps most crucial inference derived from the blindness-analogy is that psychopathy is a condition of diminished moral insight, akin to the dimensional way in which a person can be deprived of visual representations. Although Prinz (in his constructivist sentimentalist framework) does not give any descriptions of how such dimensionality in moral perception could occur, it is nevertheless reasonable to suggest that Prinz's theory (and moral sentimentalism in general) anticipates a possible explanation. Indeed, Prinz's theoretical outline seems to allow for a robust connection between the *degree of arousal* and the *degree of moral appraisal*.<sup>4</sup> That is, similar to the spectrum of emotional arousal (as covered above), so too could there be a spectrum of moral appraisals, where the latter is contingent on the former. At least it seems reasonable to (tentatively) suggest that when people experience some of the most horrendous crimes they could ever imagine, they will thus similarly be extremely aroused; and when experiencing something they merely frown upon, they are comparatively less aroused.

Recall that Prinz's theory proclaims that rightness and wrongness is a matter of sentiment, having a dispositional attitude toward ascribing an emotion of either approbation or disapprobation. To Prinz, this means that a moral evaluation is first of all a binary value judgment, i.e. either something is right or it is wrong; either the emotion is positively or negatively valenced. However, Prinz here seems to anticipate a far more nuanced reality of moral judgments (or at least his theory can account for it), namely, that rightness and wrongness is almost always perceived in a dimensional fashion. We do not *only* say that something is either right or wrong; what lies at the heart of moral judgments is also an evaluation of *how* wrong or *how* right an action is. Presumably, most people agree that murder is more wrong than stealing a piece of candy; and saving a child from drowning is more praiseworthy than returning a lost wallet. Moral judgments range from low to high praiseworthiness, as well as low to high condemnation. And one way of accounting for this actual dimensionality within Prinz's theoretical outline is to posit a contingency between the experienced degrees of rightness and wrongness and the level of emotional arousal. Thus, if we truly find something extremely wrong, e.g. genocide, it would have to follow that we are likewise extremely aroused when we encounter such heinous acts.

If this argument is sound, it would then be the case that moral judgments (of the constructivist sentimentalist kind) have a *two-faceted* value dimension (see [Figure 2](#)). As Prinz would have it, a moral judgment is fundamentally speaking a disposition (i.e. sentiment) toward feeling either approbation or disapprobation. And we have nuanced this view by claiming that the degree of rightness and wrongness is further contingent on the arousal level of said emotion. A consequence of this reasoning is that moral judgments, as a result of them being emotional responses of either negative or positive valence, seems to always be transmitting some sort of categorical base-value, namely, whatever the actual degree of the emotion, it will still be the case that a person knows that the feeling is of the category approbation (moral praise, i.e. positive valence) or disapprobation (moral condemnation, i.e. negative valence). Whether we see a person stealing a piece of candy or

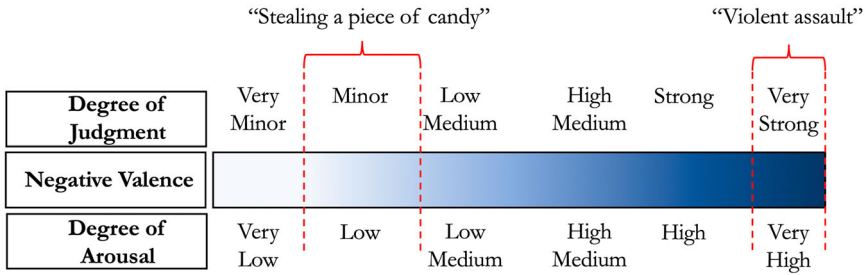


Figure 2. The Two-Faceted Value Dimension: This spectrum denotes the two facets of any moral psychological dimension. For example, a judgment of moral disapprobation is always perceived as (1) fundamentally negative insofar as the emotion is negatively valenced, and (2) as having a degree-specific value contingent on the underlying arousal level of the emotion process.

ferociously assaulting another person, we intuitively know that while these two actions are barely comparable in terms of the degree of wrongness they both fall into the category *wrong/immoral*.

If we pause here for a moment, another analogy to blindness can be considered. The way even weak emotional sensation can carry valence – and thus hypothetically inform us whether our emotion was approbation or disapprobation – could be, analogously speaking, similar to the way blind individuals with vision acuity between, say, 20/200 and 20/500, can still detect the difference between light and darkness. Only in the case of complete blindness will a person have lost the ability to detect light stimulus, and therefore also the ability to categorically tell the difference between lightness and darkness. Analogously, a person who is fully deprived of emotion is not making any value distinctions/judgments.

This theoretical assertion is particularly important in relation to psychopathy theory, because it seems to be here that the blindness-analogy begins to lose its appeal among researchers – since it no longer regards absolute blindness – but instead, it is exactly here the blindness-analogy should be endorsed. Indeed, and as mentioned earlier, the view that psychopaths are substantially deprived of moral insight has so far been difficult to square with the aggregate of empirical research, which has consistently found that psychopaths are sufficiently equipped in terms of moral judgment and knowledge. For example, when asked about hypothetical moral situations (e.g. classic moral dilemmas, such as the so-called *trolley problem*), no statistically significant deviation is reliably found between the answer provided by psychopaths compared to controls (Marshall, Watts, and Lilienfeld 2018). Quite literally, evidence strongly suggests that diagnosed psychopaths understand and relate to moral questions equally well as randomly selected individuals (see also, Cima, Tonnaer, and Hauser [2010]; Marshall, Watts, Frankel, and Lilienfeld [2017]). On the other hand, what some psychopaths appear to have problems with is pointing out the subtle, implicit nuances, and complexities in moral situations (e.g. Borg and Sinnott-Armstrong 2013; Maibom 2018). Like a vision-blind person, who can detect fundamental distinctions in light stimulus (e.g. dark vs. light), the morally blind person would similarly be able to comprehend fundamental distinctions in moral values (e.g. right vs. wrong).

Thus, the theoretical considerations just sketched seem to be able to account for these discrepant findings in the research record, while also pointing to aspects that need further exploration. According to the moral-blindness analogy, psychopaths would theoretically not be expected to have any problems with judging whether some action or situation is

either categorically right or wrong (i.e. denoting the base valence of one's emotion). Since evidence suggests that psychopaths are disposed to feel basic levels of affect, they must, therefore, also be assumed to be able to detect whether something feels right or wrong to some significant degree. What can instead be theorized is that there must be detectable differences between controls and psychopaths in terms of their reporting of perceived degree of moral wrongness/rightness. Where a regular person will have a much wider spectrum of degrees of moral judgments, a psychopath is here hypothesized to have a much narrower spectrum. For example, such a difference could be manifested in the psychopath being incapable of distinguishing properly *how* right or *how* wrong a given scenario is compared to another, perhaps also revealed in *how* much they care about, or feel for a particular moral situation. While these types of subtle anomalies are at least suggested by numerous empirical studies (e.g. Blair 2017; Cima, Tonnaer, and Hauser 2010; Glenn et al. 2009; Maibom 2017, 2018; Pletti et al. 2017; Yoder et al. 2015), they have yet to be actively and thoroughly explored by researchers.

What has been elaborated to this point is a perspective about how to understand the psychopathy research data with an analogy to blindness. But this elaboration also constitutes a commitment to a type of moral psychological theory, which first of all asserts a robust connection between emotion and morality, and secondly demonstrates how an attenuation of the affective system (hypothetically) may lead to a gradual loss of moral perception and orientation. Psychopathy, or better, having a psychopathic psychology, will thus be theoretically defined as having an attenuation of the affective system *below a certain threshold*; similar to how blindness is defined as a vision acuity below a conventional threshold. The latter observation, that such a threshold must be conventional, does not mean that this threshold could be set anywhere, so to speak. Following the research tradition, and as it was argued earlier, being psychopathic comes down to having substantial difficulties with morality (i.e. a type of value judgment), and therefore the aforementioned threshold must be determined from the level of emotion attenuation that leads to substantial moral psychological difficulties. It must be anticipated that establishing such a conventional threshold must be empirically informed, that is, by measuring the correlation between degrees of emotion attenuation and degrees of moral incapacities, we may be able to locate a specific level of emotion attenuation that causes moral psychological incapacities.

Of course, there is also the (very) real possibility that those we diagnose as psychopaths might not have problems with morality substantial enough to set them meaningfully apart from average people (i.e. averagely functioning moral psychology), despite them having attenuated emotions. In such a scenario, researchers and practitioners would have to seriously consider the alternative option that perhaps psychopathy is not a meaningful diagnostic label. That is, meaningful in the sense that it can be empirically justified to be used in clinical (and forensic) settings. Such a consideration, however, is beyond the scope of the present contribution (but see, Jalava, Maraun, and Griffiths 2015). What is crucial to this contribution is that everything that has been said so far lend itself to proper empirical research since the theory makes a range of falsifiable predictions.

### **Objections to the blindness-analogy**

Up until now, an attempt has been made to not only qualify the blindness-analogy, but also to sketch a perspective for how to interpret some of the (moral psychological) data found in psychopathy research. It is important to emphasize that this perspective is tentative as the argument has only superficially touched on the complexity that these issues imply. Much theoretical and empirical work is still needed to arrive at a clearer and scientifically more

corroborated explanation of psychopathy as a form of moral blindness. In order to accommodate and alleviate this future task, a handful of foreseeable objections must be considered.

One plausible objection could be inspired by a well-known philosophical debate about moral motivation, namely, the so-called internalist vs. externalist debate (e.g. Brink 1986; Smith 1994, 60–71). In this paradigm, *internalists* purport that moral judgments are inherently motivating (i.e. knowing what is right implies a behavioral motivation), and *externalists* argue that moral judgments are purely cognitive and therefore rudimentarily stripped of motivational desires (i.e. one can judge something to be wrong without being motivated by it). All sentimentalist theories of morality – including Prinz’s constructivist theory – are committed to an *internalist* position, that whenever we make a moral judgment, we are also inherently motivated by it. This follows trivially from Prinz’s claim that emotions are (1) the necessary and sufficient makeup of moral judgments, and (2) in themselves motivational desires (Prinz 2007, 18–20). So, if we were to discover individuals who exhibited knowledge about morality, but had no motivational desires, it would then follow that moral sentimentalism is false. Thus, as is posited by externalists, the existence of psychopaths appears to refute sentimentalism insofar as psychopaths seemingly make moral judgments, yet remain wholly unmotivated by them (e.g. Brink 1986; Cima, Tonnaer, and Hauser 2010; Roskies 2003). Prinz responds to this challenge by suggesting that psychopaths are actually not making moral judgments; instead, psychopaths “lack moral emotions” which, therefore, makes it false to say that psychopaths have genuine moral beliefs (Prinz 2007, 45). The problem with drawing analogies between psychopathy and spectrumized blindness, then, is that it concedes what Prinz was not willing to concede, namely, that psychopaths are, in fact, making moral judgments. The objection being that this undermines the entire sentimentalist foundation that the present theory builds on (i.e. blindness-analogy): If psychopaths do make proper moral judgments, but are unmotivated by them, it simultaneously spoils the theoretical connection between emotions and moral psychology that qualifies the blindness-analogy.

While this objection is philosophically important (and much more could be said about it), it is not necessarily undermining and problematic for the present use, since it builds on a number of fundamental misunderstandings about psychopaths. Indeed, Prinz’s key response to the externalist challenge, i.e. that psychopaths are deprived of moral emotions and, therefore, do not make moral judgments, is simply not supported by the empirical data. As mentioned, in a recent meta-analysis of diagnosed psychopaths’ moral psychological capacities, Marshall, Watts, and Lilienfeld (2018) found no strong support of substantial impairments or deprivations. And research also shows that psychopaths have emotions (e.g. Brook, Brieman, and Kosson 2013). In other words, to the best of our scientific knowledge the narrative of the psychopath as an absolutely unemotional and morally blind person does not fit with reality. But notice that this is not necessarily undermining for Prinz’s constructivist sentimentalism, because in defending his theory from the externalist objection, Prinz also conceded that psychopaths were unmotivated by their moral beliefs. This is similarly a problematic sweeping assumption. While we might hold that psychopaths can present as morally unmotivated, it would be a gross misrepresentation to say that they are wholly and absolutely deprived of any moral motivations. Moreover, then, all that Prinz needs to commit to is that psychopaths – like everyone else – are motivated by their moral-emotional beliefs proportionate to how wrong/right they judge them to be: i. e. the vigor of the emotion controls the degree of perceived rightness/wrongness *and* the degree of behavioral motivation. Psychopaths are not wholly deprived of motivation, but they may have odd and different motivational desires due to their global emotional

attenuation. This, however, is far from the same as saying that they are unmotivated. The externalist objection to the sentimentalist framework, then, is not based in reality. But more importantly, the ostensible reality of psychopaths having degree-specific moral insights and motivations is exactly what should be predicted from the blindness-analogy.

Another objection that must be expected to surface in some areas of psychiatry regards how the blindness-analogy posits the diagnostic *psychopathy threshold* as a matter of conventional designation. This objection goes along the following lines: If the threshold of psychopathy is conventional – being a matter of arbitrarily determining what degree of emotional deprivation suffices for a proper diagnosis – it would instead demonstrate another kind of fact, namely, that psychopathy is not a real disorder, because real disorders are *essential kinds*, that is, discrete and scientifically measurable entities, as opposed to conventionally delineated. Conventional thresholds, so the objection may further stipulate, are nothing short of stigmatization of normal human variation disguised as social and psychiatric diagnosis (for a discussion of these type of objections, see Kendler, Zachar, and Craver [2011]; Lilienfeld, Smith, and Watts [2013]).

These types of skeptical remarks are familiar in psychiatric theory and practice. But while they occasionally have had some merit in the history of psychiatry, it is not clear that they are legitimate objections to the present account of psychopathy. One important push-back is that while the indicated *threshold* in Figure 1 is indeed arbitrarily annotated (yet empirically informed), the theory behind portraying psychopathy as abnormally low affect is not committed to a notion of arbitrariness in terms of etiology. In order for psychopathy to be a distinct disorder, one could still hold that it necessarily must be the case that there are discrete etiological mechanisms causing the emotional attenuation. Here the blindness-analogy is again fitting. Like vision blindness can be caused by many different disorders, diseases, and events, so too may we expect psychopathy to have several possible etiologies. The view being that psychopathy, as it has hereto been presented, is only a general symptom of many hypothesized etiologies (which we must assume operate with a vast complexity akin to the many different types of etiologies behind vision blindness). This response is also on par with leading beliefs in the field, namely, that psychopathy presumably has many distinct etiologies (e.g. Blair, Mitchell, and Blair 2005; Fowles and Dindo 2006; Hare, Neumann, and Widiger 2012).

Having said this, it might be fair to suggest that there is a tendency in the field to search for etiological mechanisms as if these are uniform. For instance, the dominating approach in etiology studies is to search for patterns in samples selected using diagnostic tools (e.g. Hare 2003). Such procedures are equal to searching for etiological patterns (e.g. genetic or neurobiological patterns) in samples of individuals with vision blindness. Obviously, if a sample of vision blind people were subjugated to an etiological study, the results would probably be meaningless due to the numerous etiologies of blindness. The question is, then, why do we expect this to be different in psychopathy studies? Why do researchers keep searching for etiological patterns in a group that – according to the argument above – must be presumed to be etiologically diverse? Perhaps the blindness-analogy can here be a helpful reminder of the impossible task of searching for uniform causes for a single symptom (for a comparable view, see Lilienfeld, Smith, and Watts [2016]).

A similarly insightful inference that we can borrow from the blindness-analogy is that when a person is diagnosed with, say, optic nerve cancer, an optometrist will not diagnose the patient as *blind* before her vision actually drops below the conventional threshold (e.g. visual acuity below 20/200). Indeed, between the different stages of optic nerve cancer, the patient might have perfect vision but only later have this function impaired. Likewise, whatever kinds of etiologies that may cause the hypothesized low degrees of emotion in

psychopaths, we would only say that the individual is properly *psychopathic* when the affective system has reached a specific level of deprived capacity (i.e. a level that effectuates a substantial impairment of the moral-psychological capabilities). Thus, what the objection above (i.e. the view that conventional thresholds are a mark of arbitrary diagnosis) is decisively conflating is the distinction between causes and symptoms. What has been described throughout this paper is an interpretative perspective of the psychological symptoms many researchers currently associate with psychopathy, which builds on a theory portraying how abnormally low affect may lead to an abnormal moral psychology (i.e. moral blindness), and on those terms the discussion has remained mute about etiology.

So far, the paper has emphasized theoretical aspects which have become incrementally more evident in the empirical research, namely, that psychopathy is expressed on a dimension of severity, manifest in degrees from *low* to *high* psychopathy (e.g. Hare and Neumann 2008). From a dimensional point of view, then, being high in psychopathy would correspond to the lower end of the psychopathy spectrum annotated in Figure 1. Corresponding with the blindness-analogy it equals having a substantially more insufficient visual acuity (e.g. 20/500) than the average blind populace. It follows from such theory that psychopathy is measurable. That is, diagnosed psychopaths must be a class of individuals who have relatively abnormally attenuated emotion dispositions. Why is this an important observation? Because it offers clear guidelines for what counts as a false-positive in diagnosis, namely, individuals with non-attenuated emotion dispositions. Indeed, it seems fully probable that a person with such non-attenuated emotions (i.e. a non-psychopath) could meet the threshold for clinical psychopathy as defined by current assessment tools (e.g. *The Hare Psychopathy Checklist-Revised* [Hare 2003]) (see also, Larsen [2018]).

There are anticipated pitfalls and challenges involved in allowing for the blindness-analogy to revise current theoretical frameworks, and further, to translate these theories into research designs. One pitfall is that researchers take attenuation of one specific emotion as proof of generally attenuated emotional dispositions. This would be a logical fallacy of generalization. Indeed, it is a mundane observation that all humans are disposed differently in terms of emotion – as the spectrum in Figure 1 also indicates – and researchers should, therefore, be careful taking single deviations in emotion as a sign of general dispositional attenuation (e.g. Larsen 2018). Prinz’s theory certainly emphasizes that moral relativity is a reality of human existence, and his theory, therefore, also explains how moral disagreement (in the form of relativity) is possible. Roughly, moral disagreement comes down to a difference in moral sentiment, for example, some people feel adultery is wrong, others feel it is their right (e.g. Prinz 2007, 138–141). With psychopathy, on the other hand, such contrasting differences of relativity would be less pronounced than what we see among “normal” individuals, since psychopaths would (theoretically) not have the emotional fluctuations and gravity to compile a perceptual moral landscape with genuine complex relativities. Comparatively, psychopaths are here theorized to have superficially flattened moral sentiments, never reaching the same types of high and lows manifest in an average moral psychology. Psychopaths are *globally* deprived of emotional dispositions (akin to a person who is globally deprived of vision), which is very different from saying that psychopaths have peculiar isolated differences in emotion processing; after all, a very normal aspect of human nature (e.g. Larsen 2018; Maibom 2018).

These considerations imply that a psychopath must exhibit a general poverty of affect in both (1) emotion types (e.g. the six basic emotions) and (2) across emotion conditioning contexts (i.e. emotion triggers). One example of how a research design could fail to adhere to this theoretical assertion could be a case in which researchers take a perpetrator’s lack of empathy for the victim as a mark of generalized emotional poverty (i.e.

psychopathy). The inaccuracy of such conclusion would then rest on the fact that it is possible that the perpetrator actually has normally potentiated emotional dispositions toward other people (e.g. family or friends) or in different sorts of contexts (e.g. be nervous when speaking in front of a crowd). Only when an individual shows attenuation in all emotions and across contexts may we speak of him or her being *globally impaired*, as in fundamentally and profoundly deprived of emotional disposition. For instance, in surveying the psychopathy research on empathy, Maibom (2018) notices that some researchers tend to conclude that just because a test subject demonstrates one episode of different empathic responses, it thus follows that this is rooted in an overarching abnormality. As Maibom notes, there is plenty of evidence that normal individuals similarly display idiosyncrasies in their empathic response toward other people.

One of the major challenges with conducting experiments that a sentimentalist theory of psychopathy proposes (e.g. measuring global attenuation), is that affective scientists (for legitimate, good reasons) are vastly limited in terms of what kinds of experiments they are able to execute, and, therefore, also limited in terms of what kind of theories they are able to properly test. A typical experiment will be unable to mirror the stimuli/triggers that conditions our affective dispositions in real life. Instead, researchers deal with stimuli that are comparatively weaker and contextually off. For example, a research setup meant to measure the emotional reactions to fearful stimuli will never be able to replicate the authenticity of a fearful situation as it is experienced in real life. Anecdotally speaking, we cannot put a lion in the room, only a picture of a lion. This raises a fitting question about what it is we are actually measuring; are we measuring the fearful reaction to encountering a lion, or are we measuring the mere reaction of seeing and relating to a picture of a lion? Obviously, it is *not* the former. The question is, then, are the results legitimate and salient enough to either confirm or falsify the theory just presented?

So far, the paper has remained largely mute to the question about psychopathic *behavior*, limiting the topic to theoretical assertions about psychopaths' moral psychology. However, much of the practical interests in psychopathy evidently comes down to issues pertaining to their behavior (e.g. forensic risk assessment, see Gacono [2016]), and it naturally raises the question what the blindness-analogy and a moral sentimentalist theory can contribute in terms of behavioral (actuarial) sciences. One aspect that seems to follow is that it aims at defining measurable physiological criteria for selecting psychopathic individuals for research designs (e.g. emotional processes, dispositions, etc.). Such selection criteria have the potential to improve research sampling, controlling variation in test-subjects through discrete physiological criteria. With more discrete sampling, more precise data are likely to follow (e.g. Larsen 2018). Compare this to one of the main and long-standing criticisms of psychopathy research (e.g. Blackburn 1988), which proposes that much of the research prejudices the issue about psychopathic behavior by selecting its test-subjects through psychopathy assessment tools, which already includes many references to explicit (antisocial and criminal) behavior (e.g. Hare 2003). Selecting research participants through criteria *independent* of behavior could potentially cast further (and much needed) light on the link between, say, antisocial behavior and psychopathic personality.

### **Concluding remarks**

In summary, what has been proposed throughout this paper is a perspective in terms of how to interpret and improve psychopathy research, an approach which lends itself to theorize psychopathy as a peculiar form of *moral blindness*. Following leading research, it was posited that psychopathy must, first of all, be understood as an emotional disorder, that



is, a disorder of substantial emotional attenuation. Building on Prinz's constructivist sentimentalism, it was demonstrated how said emotional incapacity could manifest in moral psychological impairments, as an inability to perceive the *degrees* of moral rightness and wrongness. Prinz's theory was then expanded by adding (or amending) that psychopaths are not necessarily impaired in terms of perceiving the categorical value of a given moral situation, i.e. judging whether something is either right or wrong. Indeed, psychopaths must perceive this basic information by the mere fact that they do have some levels of valenced emotional experience. Instead, what is predicted is that globally low emotion attenuation (i.e. psychopathy) leads to observable differences in terms of judging the degree of rightness and wrongness of a situation.

The analogy between psychopathy and vision blindness was also parsed out. Blindness is when a person has reached a (fiat) threshold of insufficient mental visual representation, thus failing to reliably perceive the content of one's surroundings. Similarly, psychopathy can be said to be a condition in which a person has lost the relative ability of reliable orientation in the moral sphere. Like it is with visual blindness, the psychological state of psychopathy also comes in degrees, and it similarly becomes a matter of convention (prudently informed by research) to distinguish when the threshold between being a non-psychopath vs. a psychopath has been reached, i.e. determine what degree of emotion attenuation suffices as psychopathy. On those premises the blindness-analogy appears to represent with illuminating and useful analogies worthwhile embracing in the broader research discourse, hereunder its relevance for theorizing and studying the symptomatology, dimensionality, and etiology of psychopathy.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

### Notes on contributor

**Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen** is an Assistant Professor in the Forensic Science Program and the Department of Philosophy at the University of Toronto Mississauga. His research is primarily concerned with interdisciplinary issues, hereunder theoretical and applied challenges in forensic psychology, forensic epistemology, data representation, and bioethics.

### Notes

1. It should be mentioned, though, that there are researchers who pursue the theory that psychopathy is a *rational* or *cognitive* disorder (i.e. not a disorder of emotion, affect, arousal, temper, etc.). These researchers suggest that the psychopath's abnormal emotional and behavioral patterns must be explained as a problem of cognitive failures, such as difficulties in attention span and attentiveness. According to these theories, it is not the case that psychopaths cannot undergo the same emotions as normal healthy persons; quite differently, the psychopath's failure manifests as a strong tendency to overlook cues that, all things considered, would have triggered the affective system (Hamilton, Racer, and Newman 2015; Maibom 2005). While a recent meta-analysis was particularly undermining of cognitive theories of psychopathy (Smith and Lilienfeld 2015), the current contribution will not discuss these theories for the mere reason that affective theories and cognitive theories are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it could (theoretically) be the case that there exist two different conditions, namely, an *affective version* of psychopathy, and a *cognitive version*. For the sake of brevity, only the former line of research will be considered.
2. The challenge of defining what part of a dimensional subject-matter corresponds to our concepts is a much debated metaphysical topic – typically referred to as *the problem of vagueness* – and it is not the intention here to give a full account of the implications this has on psychopathy

*Psychopathy as moral blindness: A qualifying exploration of the blindness-analogy 17  
in psychopathy theory and research*

research. What is instead underlined is that there is a (practical) way of dealing with this problem in psychiatric practice and research, which will certainly not solve the philosophical problem, but perhaps more importantly, it will allow for circumventing the problem (for a general review of the problem of vagueness, see the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entrance by philosopher Roy Sorenson [2016]).

3. This section used a metaphysically non-controversial definition of dispositions as specifically dependent continuants that are realized through trigger conditions. For example, a ceramic cup has the disposition of fragility inhering in it. Thus, the disposition of fragility is a continuant that is specifically dependent on another continuant, namely, the ceramic cup. In order for the disposition of fragility to be realized (i.e. in a process of shattering), the disposition must be triggered, for example, by having enough physical force applied to it, such as being dropped on a concrete floor (e.g. Röhl and Jansen 2011). Similarly, affective dispositions inhere in the human organism, and they must be triggered in order to be realized (i.e. a process of emoting), for instance, the disposition of fear must be triggered by something appraised as frightening before the human organism is in fear (Hastings et al. 2011).
4. For example, Prinz's theory of aesthetic judgment (which according to Prinz is similar to moral judgment, i.e. also associated with specific feelings) posits that the degree to which we find something aesthetically pleasing is controlled by the degree to which we undergo a positive feeling (Prinz 2011, 77). The analogy to morality would thus be that the degree to which we find something morally right/wrong is controlled by the degree to which we undergo a positive/negative feeling.

## ORCID

Rasmus Rosenberg Larsen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9294-8645>

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*Psychopathy as moral blindness: A qualifying exploration of the blindness-analogy 19  
in psychopathy theory and research*

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