

CHAPTER

11 Psychopathy, Empathy, and Moral Motivation

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Abstract


This chapter addresses the meta-ethical and psychological implications of Murdoch's epistemic internalism—her claim that moral responsiveness is a condition of reliable and accurate moral evaluations. Part 1 examines Murdoch's view that moral judgments feature a quasi-experiential phenomenology analogous to that of certain perceptual ones. Focussing on the phenomenology of our perception-based judgments of certain aspectual properties (e.g., pictorial and musical ones) it argues that such judgments support both Murdoch's analogy and the internalism she takes it to imply. In Part 2 this chapter considers Murdoch's internalism as a psychological thesis, assessing it in view of several empirical studies of psychopathic subjects. It argues that the psychopath's distinctive complex of cognitive and motivational deficits supports Murdoch's conviction that moral judgment and moral motivation are interdependent. Just as Murdoch believed, many of our ordinary, non-pathological moral beliefs seem to be the natural progeny of our responsiveness to other persons, and so inherit the intrinsic power that others have to move us.

Keywords: [moral motivation](#), [internalism and externalism](#), [moral epistemology](#), [moral phenomenology](#), [aspect perception](#), [aspect properties](#), [psychopathy](#), [empathy](#), [moral vision](#)

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Introduction

I can remember the first time in my life when I began to suspect I was a little different from most people. When I was in High School my best friend got leukaemia and died and I went to his funeral. Everybody else was crying and feeling sorry for themselves and as they were praying to get him into heaven I suddenly realized that I wasn't feeling anything at all. He was a nice guy but what the hell. That night I thought about it some more and found that I wouldn't miss my mother and father if they died and that I wasn't too nuts about my brothers and sisters for that matter. I figured there wasn't anybody I really cared for but, then, I don't need any of them anyway so I rolled over and went to sleep.¹

These remarks were recorded by psychologist Elton McNeil in his case study of Dan, a personal friend and prominent community figure. Dan enjoyed a successful media career, a high social profile, and a reputation for being lively and entertaining—'a great character'. McNeil, like many others, had initially been charmed by him. Over time, however, McNeil began to notice that Dan possessed some disturbing qualities: a lack of empathy for others' concerns, chronic deceitfulness, insusceptibility to shame or remorse or regret, manipulateness, a grandiose self-image, and strangely superficial relations with even his closest associates. In short, Dan exhibited the hallmarks of psychopathic personality disorder.² At the same time, McNeil observed, Dan could easily assume the surface demeanour of a caring and trustworthy friend: he 'talked the talk' of everyday, conventional morality, even while his conduct revealed him to be  utterly

unmoved by its requirements. Like most psychopaths, Dan ‘knew the words of morality but did not hear its music’.³

Psychopathy provides for moral theory a paradigm of amoral agency, combining intellectual and rational competence with a profound indifference to the claims of morality. Unlike psychotic subjects who suffer from delusions or other defects in their cognitive functioning, the psychopath appears to think clearly and to understand well both the rules of morality and their implications for particular cases, whilst failing regularly and systematically to be guided by them in his practical judgements. For this reason, some theorists have proposed that psychopathy offers an empirical vindication of anti-rationalist, non-cognitivist accounts of moral motivation. After all, if the psychopath understands moral requirements as well as you or I, and if his deliberative procedures are as rational as yours or mine, then what remains to explain his conduct save a pathology of his affective constitution—his Humean sentiments? And is there not then good reason to suppose that we non-psychopaths, too, owe our moral natures to our affective ones?

This prospect sits uneasily with Iris Murdoch’s conception of moral motivation. The essays collected in *The Sovereignty of Good*, in particular, feature two recurrent ideas which, if correct, would require a different analysis of both psychopathic disorder and of ordinary moral motivation. The first idea is that our ability even to discern what morality requires—the ability to form accurate moral beliefs—is of a piece with a capacity for a ‘just and loving’ attentiveness to other persons’ inner lives, an empathic attentiveness that Murdoch sometimes calls ‘compassion’.⁴ ‘It is in the capacity to love, that is to see’, she wrote, ‘that the liberation of the soul from fantasy consists... [F]reedom from fantasy...is the realism of compassion’ (OGG 66–7/354). At one point, Murdoch even suggests that empathic love is the essence of moral knowledge: the central concept of morality is ‘the individual thought of as knowable by love’ (IP 30/323). Accurate perception does not float free of compassionate attention: a loving attention to others plays, for Murdoch, an ineliminable role in the very understanding of moral requirements.

p. 327 At the same time, Murdoch did not construe moral judgements as disguised desires or other emotions. The second recurring theme in *The Sovereignty of Good* is that ‘true vision occasions right conduct’⁵ (OGG 66/353); moral knowledge consists not only in perceiving others accurately and compassionately, but accurate perception ensures proper motivation.⁶ Murdoch’s picture of moral awareness as a kind of cognitive ‘vision’ resolutely characterizes it as a genuine belief-state directed on a real object of knowledge—the Good. A properly informed view of the Good carries with it a compelling attraction—an intrinsic motivational force. Once we perceive what morality requires of us we are drawn to it, even if the power of its attraction does not always suffice to defeat our other desires.

These two ideas taken together yield the unremarkable conclusion that a well-functioning moral personality will both be compassionately aware of others’ concerns and interests and be moved by this awareness. The psychopath, by contrast, is notoriously indifferent to others’ welfare; other people principally concern him as instruments of his own wants and needs. He might be described as an affective solipsist: while aware that other persons have aims and purposes, and while often aware too, in a particular case, of just what those purposes are, the psychopath does not typically regard them as providing *him* with reasons for action. Indeed, it is not easy to grasp in what his ‘understanding’ of others consists. On the one hand, it may be tempting to say that the psychopath possesses a relatively normal ability to identify others’ inner lives but simply fails to be moved by what he sees. (A number of Murdoch’s fictional protagonists seem to be like this—for instance, Julius Kahn in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.) On the other hand, we may balk at the suggestion that someone could genuinely understand others’ mental states, and particularly their states of suffering, without being moved by them in any way.

These alternative descriptions of the psychopath’s dysfunction parallel a different, but related distinction between externalist and internalist accounts of moral motivation. On the externalist view, moral motivation is extrinsic to the cognitive appreciation of moral requirements. Externalists typically follow Hume in insisting that beliefs alone move no one; if an agent’s representation of a moral requirement does motivate him, it does so by way of some further passion or desire. Those externalists who (unlike Hume) take moral judgements to be fully cognitive normally try to account for their apparent power to move us by associating them with an independent conative state, e.g. a general desire ‘do the right thing’ or a more specific wish to be kind or just or sincere, or a particular inclination to help one’s child or to relieve a colleague’s distress. The internalist, by contrast, holds that our moral convictions are intrinsically motivating: internalism maintains that one cannot fully grasp the content of a moral claim while remaining indifferent to it. If the internalist is also a cognitivist, his position is particularly delicate, for he must

maintain that at least some beliefs—namely, moral beliefs—are intrinsically motivating. This seems to have been Murdoch’s own position. Murdoch did not deny, of course, that emotions and desires play a role in our moral psychology. They plainly do. Rather, Murdoch’s internalism is articulated at the conceptual level: motivation is part of *what it is* to genuinely essay a moral belief. Understanding entails willing on this view, even when one’s will is ultimately too weak to move one to do the right thing. The dispute between the externalist and the internalist so described is an a priori one concerning concept possession—concerning, that is, the conditions under which it is true that a subject possesses a given moral concept and, derivatively, the conditions under which it is true that someone sincerely holds a given moral belief.

My aim in this paper is to test a broadly Murdochian account of moral perception against the findings of recent empirical studies of psychopathy. In particular, I will argue that the structure of psychopathic thought does *not* disprove the kind of internalism Murdoch had in view. To the contrary, we will see that the anomalies of the psychopathic mind actually lend empirical support to Murdoch’s idea that while our moral attitudes comprise genuine beliefs (not merely disguised feelings), they also have intrinsic motivational force: the contributions of emotion and cognition in moral judgement cannot be segregated. In Part 1 I set out Murdoch’s account of moral perception, focusing on her idea that moral experience features a quasi-experiential phenomenology analogous to sensory (and particularly visual) perception. I compare Murdoch’s phenomenology to the experiential phenomenology of other, more familiar kinds of properties which, like moral ones, can only be detected by subjects who possess specific experiential abilities. In Part 2 I turn to the psychopath, asking whether, as some have claimed, the anomalies of his psychology undermine the kind of internalism this phenomenology suggests.

Part 1: Moral rules and moral aspects

1.1 Moral experience

Murdoch’s writings venture into the territory of traditional, a priori metaphysics and epistemology, but their beating heart is her exercises in descriptive, experiential phenomenology, where she explores the detail of what it is like to engage seriously with ethical problems from a first-person, experiential point of view. Even where Murdoch focuses on metaphysical claims about the nature of moral properties—for instance, the Platonic nature of the Good—these claims almost always arise from and find their justification in her phenomenological observations. This method in part drives Murdoch’s objections to philosophical moral theories which neglect the experiential dimension of moral deliberation and conceive of moral knowledge as ‘theoretical’—as a set of impersonal directions or rules a grasp of which might suffice to guide one’s day-to-day evaluations.⁷ Against such views, Murdoch argues that moral understanding is *essentially* first-personal: like having a headache or bearing a grudge or becoming infatuated, moral insight is not to be had from a wholly impersonal point of view.⁸ Moral belief is not solely a matter of registering the truth of certain propositions; it is also a matter of experiencing the conditions which make those propositions true.⁹ This is why universal or highly general moral statements about kinds of characters or actions largely miss their mark; seeing that a person’s actions are loving or wicked or noble or base requires that one *respond* to them as such, and categories and kinds are not apt objects for the requisite responses.

Murdoch’s moral phenomenology is thus congenial to some version of particularism—roughly, the view that ethical properties are properties of particular actions and persons rather than of classes or kinds. The particularist usually holds, *inter alia*, that general principles and codifiable rules will often mislead us in ethics; we do better to consider the context and detail of the specific case. ‘False conceptions are often generalized, stereotyped and unconnected’, Murdoch writes. ‘True conceptions combine just modes of judgment and ability to connect with an increased perception of detail’ (SGC 96/379). For Murdoch, scrutiny of the relevant phenomena, alertness to specifics, and sensitivity to subtle differences must underpin reliable moral judgement. Of course, rules have their place: we could scarcely survive without them. As Murdoch notes, we need to know why and when to pay the bills. But we need not deny this to appreciate that a simple and straightforward appeal to general normative principles cannot accommodate the complexities of human experience. In real life we need, she says, to return to the beginning and inspect the details of the case.

Should a retarded child be kept at home or sent to an institution? Should an elderly relation who is a trouble-maker be cared for or asked to go away? Should an unhappy marriage be continued for the sake of the children? Should I leave my family in order to do political work? Should I neglect them in order to practise my art? The love which brings the right answer is an exercise of justice and realism and really *looking*. (SGC 91/375)

p. 330 Murdoch's particularism is thus of a piece with her experience-based conception of moral understanding: we can only properly understand the moral nature of an act—say, an act of betrayal—by attending to its detail and experiencing its character from ↪ within, and this requires that we attend to the particular instance, not merely to the general features of most or all acts of betrayal. Indeed in many cases we might be unable to decide that a particular action *counts* as a betrayal until we have inspected and internalized the particular details of the case.

1.2 Aspectual properties and 'deep configurations'

Murdoch's recommendation that we attend to the particular case and experience value from within is intuitively attractive, but what exactly is it to 'experience' an evaluative feature of the world? Kant and others have argued that certain *aesthetic* values (especially beauty) are perceptible ones, and these claims gain some credibility from the fact that we sometimes seem literally to see the beauty or ugliness of an object. However, the counterpart idea of perceiving a moral property—Murdoch's talk of 'moral vision'—is more mysterious. The metaphor of vision on its own tells us little more than that our observations of moral properties are in some sense experience-based. What would moral properties have to be like to be both experience-based and intrinsically motivating?

In answer to that question, I will introduce a term of art, naming a certain category of properties: 'aspectual properties', or 'aspects'. Aspects are ubiquitous in everyday experience. One of their distinguishing features is that they are supervenient in the sense that they are uni-directionally dependent on certain subvenient base properties: any alteration in the aspectual property requires an alteration in its subvenient ones, but not vice versa. A second feature of aspects is that they can only be detected by those who possess an appropriate sensitivity in their responses to the base properties on which they depend.¹⁰ By the same token (thirdly) aspectual properties are 'autonomous' or unanalysable independently of the responses of those able to detect them. In particular, they cannot be fully elucidated in terms of the non-aspectual, base properties on which they supervene. Finally, aspectual properties are organizational or 'pattern' properties—what Murdoch referred to, in the vocabulary of her time, as *Gestalt* properties, or properties possessed by a thing as a whole in virtue of the relations of its component parts.¹¹

p. 331 Many of our everyday observations target properties which exhibit these four characteristics. Consider our judgements of visible, pictorial aspects—the depictive properties which one targets when one judges, for instance, that a portrait depicts its sitter, or that a still life depicts a bowl of apples and pears.¹² In the ordinary case, we do not identify pictorial properties by learning a 'theory of depiction'—a set of norms or rules prescribing how to translate two-dimensional planes of lines and colours into representations of three-dimensional objects. It is of course true that we arrive at our ↪ pictorial judgements by way of seeing lines and colours on a two-dimensional surface; were the lines and colours invisible to us, so too would be the pictorial aspects we find in them. But at the same time the pictorial properties are themselves visible aspects that we detect directly, not via a rule-directed *inference* from our experience of the lines and colours. When we look at a painting, we perceive it as already organized into intelligible, coherent patterns, configurations which present items in the visible world (a landscape, a bowl of fruit). There is nothing particularly mysterious about this everyday skill: when we say that someone is able to discern pictorial aspects—that he possesses 'pictorial competence'—we are not imputing to him any special visual or cognitive faculty. We just take him to have acquired, in the normal course of his development, an ability to discern pictorial aspects by looking at the properties on which they supervene.

Of course one could, in principle, generate pictorial judgements in other ways. Suppose an individual were unable to perceive a two-dimensional image as a depiction of a three-dimensional object (as sometimes happens as a result of right-hemisphere brain lesions). This subject could be taught to 'read' simple images by calculating the geometric relations of the visual-field properties of the objects they depict. For instance, he could learn to generate pictorial judgements by referring to a 'picture-reading' rule book listing visual-field properties of various familiar objects—e.g. trees and flowers and bowls of fruit—described in terms of locations on a grid of Cartesian coordinates. The book would, to be sure, need to be a very long one if he were

to use it to interpret more than a few very standard images, but it matters here only as a hypothetical possibility. Pictorial judgements made in this way would be straightforwardly inferential ones. However, normal pictorial judgements—call them *basic pictorial judgements*—are typically non-inferential, or direct.¹³ Like inferential, rule-driven ones, basic pictorial judgements arise by way of one's responses to the subvenient, non-pictorial features of the canvas. In basic pictorial judgement, however, one responds to those subvenient features very differently. Although in both cases the perceiver is looking at a surface which possesses those features, and in both cases his experience is caused by them, in the basic case the content of his experience is an organized, pictorial aspect: he sees a ♀ ✨ or a. By contrast, in the inferential, rule-book case *the content of the perceiver's experience does not go beyond the subvenient lines and colors*. Rule-book generated judgements of pictorial aspects are not perceptual judgements as such: they would be justified by and inferred from perceptual experience, of course, but the pictorial aspects would not be themselves perceived. There is a further difference between the inferential case and the basic case. In both, the content of the subject's experience provides him with reasons for thinking that the surface has certain pictorial ↳ properties. Yet only in the basic case does it also *cause* him to see those properties. If a subject is pictorially competent, looking at the lines and colours does not merely justify his judgement that it represents a tree, a bowl of fruit, and so on; it also features in its causal explanation.

Consider another, non-visual type of aspectual property: musical aspects such as the melodic, the rhythmic, the dissonant, the harmonious. We arrive at judgements of these aspects by way of hearing sequences of sounded tones, but the musical aspects are not inferred from these sequences. Anyone familiar with such musical forms spontaneously organizes the sounded tones into coherent configurations or patterns that are directly experienced as melodies, rhythms, and the rest. Moreover, just as pictorial competence does not require any special visual faculty beyond a quite ordinary capacity for pictorial 'seeing-as', so musical competence does not require any special aural faculty; it issues from a quite ordinary capacity for aural 'hearing-as'—for discerning pattern properties of sounds by hearing them. Special training can of course refine one's ability to discern specifically musical properties. That is a matter not of creating some new faculty, however, but of developing the exercise of one we already possess.

Again, one might in principle learn to generate something like judgements of musical aspects in other ways. For instance, a person who is unable to perceive a major triad ✨ as consonant could be taught a rule: when the tonic, third, and fifth are sounded simultaneously, the combination of tones is consonant. Rules such as this could, in principle, be compiled in a 'tone-reading' rule book which listed the musical properties of different combinations and sequences of notes. (Beginning composition students use books more or less like this, although to different ends, and the software for some computer synthesizers is effectively a rule-book of this kind.) The tone-reading book, like the picture-reading one, would need to be very long were we to use it to interpret more than a few very standard musical features. But all that matters here is that it is empirically possible for a subject to identify musical properties in this way. The resulting musical judgements would be paradigmatically inferential ones, whereas a normal musical judgement—call it a basic musical judgement—is non-inferential, or direct. In both cases, one is hearing pitched sounds and is affected aurally by sound waves. But only in the basic case is the content of one's experience an organized, musical aspect—a lilting melody, or a pounding bass beat, or an harmonious sequence of chords. Inferential, rule-book generated judgements of musical aspects would not be basic: they would derive from one's perceptual experience of pitched tones, of course, but the subject would not *hear* the musical aspects themselves as would a musically competent subject who hears the pitched tones *as* melodious, in 3/4 waltz rhythm, and so on.

These two cases illustrate, *inter alia*, how our normal, basic judgements of pictorial and musical aspects identify and individuate those properties directly, by way of perceptual experience: they can only be properly understood and by someone acquainted with the characteristic, first-personal phenomenology of their referents. So what do our judgements of such aspects have to do with our moral beliefs? On my interpretation of Murdoch, she holds that an analogous phenomenology underpins our ↳ judgements of value generally and our moral judgements in particular. To see why, consider first the ordinary trajectory of moral education. When small children first begin to acquire a moral vocabulary, their assertions are very often a matter of reiterating the verdicts they have been taught by adults: 'This is naughty; that is nice.' Notably, while a child may have learned that these are the right things to say, that knowledge does not always translate into an understanding of what to *do*: the verdicts do not on their lips always carry the normative force which is part of their full import. He is simply echoing some familiar phrases. But as the child's command of moral concepts develops, he normally proceeds to something like a rule-book stage, and is able to venture genuine judgements of novel situations. For instance, he is able to judge that an act

should be called right or wrong because it has certain standard features: it annoys Mummy, or it makes the baby cry, or it creates a frightful mess. At this stage the child, like the tone-deaf judge of musical properties, may *infer* that something merits a certain moral predicate because it satisfies some other, non-moral description. But is he making a genuine moral judgement thereby? Is there not some missing *experience* that parallels the ability to perceive musical patterns or to see colours?

There is of course no discrete faculty of moral perception to parallel the visual faculty by way of which we see pictures or the aural faculty by way of which we hear melodies and harmonies. Nonetheless, there surely is a kind of responsiveness that is absent in the case of the child who knows how to label a range of actions with moral predicates—who knows the rules—but who applies them, as it were, merely compliantly. Admittedly, even in the fully developed, morally literate adult it sometimes happens that nothing more than a kind of rule-book calculation lies behind particular moral assertions; that is, it sometimes happens that one is simply echoing learned platitudes, as in condemning dishonesty and cruelty and commending charity and courage. (Just think of the moral rhetoric of politicians: it is not for nothing that we often call it ‘empty’.) But it is crucial that not all of one’s moral assertions are of this kind. Genuine participation in moral life requires that at least some of our assertions express basic moral judgements—judgements which, like basic pictorial and musical judgements, arise from our experience of configured aspects of value (Murdoch’s ‘deep configurations of the world’), and occur by way of our responsiveness to the subvenient features on which those aspects depend.¹⁴

p. 334 Saul Kripke suggests that something like this thought extends to our understanding of others’ suffering: ‘I, who have myself experienced pain and can imagine it’, he writes, ‘can imaginatively put myself in place of the sufferer, and my ability to do this gives my attitude a quality that it would lack if I had merely learned a set of rules as to when to attribute pain to others and how to help them’.¹⁵ ↵ Direct, non-inferential, and sensitive judgements of suffering depend on our first-person acquaintance with the features of experience subvening them.

Murdoch’s notion of moral vision is compatible with a conception of moral properties as aspectual ones, on analogy with pictorial and musical aspects. Perhaps the most abstract, ‘thin’ moral properties—good, evil, right, wrong, and so forth—are not best conceived in aspectual terms. Nonetheless it seems that the properties picked out by many thick moral concepts are good candidates. When we regard a character as cruel or kind, a remark as undignified or an act as generous or malicious, we are not discerning simple, unanalysable, unitary phenomenal properties such as colours, nor experience-independent ones such as weight and size, nor natural-kind categories which might be reductively analysed in scientific terms. Rather, we are targeting complex, pattern properties by organizing an array of indefinitely many subvenient characteristics under an evaluative description identifying aspects of the whole.

What, in the moral case, might those subvenient features be? Again, Murdoch’s observations of everyday moral phenomenology point us in the right direction, for among the best and most obvious candidates surely are persons’ concerns and interests—the wants, needs, and purposes of other subjects of experience. We discover what we ought to believe, ethically speaking, and how we ought to act in part by attuning ourselves to the claims of other human beings. The subvening base properties of many thick moral concepts clearly include such familiar human concerns and interests, particularly the concepts featured in our ‘other-regarding’ moral judgements targeted on the *welfare* of other persons. Let us say that a moral belief or correlative imperative is an ‘other-regarding’ one just if the welfare of another person or persons is its primary and principle justification, e.g. ‘If a small child is suffering, it is unkind not to console him’, or ‘A loyal friend should not abandon you in times of need.’¹⁶ Because other-regarding moral judgements (hereafter moral^{o-r} judgements) supervene quite directly on persons’ concerns and interests, we decide their truth in part by attuning ourselves to others’ ends. To put the point in Murdoch’s terms, proper moral attunement is of a piece with learning to love other individuals, where loving someone implies that one acknowledges his concerns (SGC 102–3/384). If a suitably sensitive, properly attuned moral subject attends to another’s ends—to their hopes, fears, needs—and if he sees them clearly and correctly, he will see actions affecting them as manifesting certain moral aspects: as just, loving, malicious, disloyal, kind, and the rest. And then, all things being equal, he will be in a position to essay a *basic* moral^{o-r} judgement.

This conception of moral properties as aspectual ones also harmonizes with several meta-ethical commitments to which Murdoch repeatedly alluded. First, it recognizes that moral properties are not fully analysable in terms of their subvenient base properties. What it is to be, say, cowardly or kind cannot be fully analysed in terms of some other, non-evaluative base properties such as an agent’s attitudes, aims, and

intentions or ↪ the consequences of his actions. This is not because aspects fail to constitute genuine properties on par with natural ones. ('Melodic' names a perfectly good property; so does 'malicious'.) Rather, it is because mention of our experiential responses is essential to any correct elucidation of what it is to be, say, melodic or malicious.¹⁷ The analogy also suggests, secondly, that, as Murdoch put it, moral values are '*deep configurations*'. They are not unitary, sensible, and simple like colours and odours; they are organized forms that emerge within highly complex relations of entities within the human world. In a well-known passage, Murdoch describes a mother-in-law struggling to see her son's wife as vivacious rather than undignified, and as unaffected rather than common. Her struggles are an attempt to perceive one evaluative *pattern* rather than another in the same natural facts, to configure her observations in accordance with different moral categories and concepts or, as I have put it, to discern different moral aspects.

Thirdly, the analogy supports the idea that moral understanding is not only a matter of learning the rules—learning a normative theory—but also involves learning how to look, to see, and to respond to particular cases. Rules can take us a certain distance, of course: in music, for instance, we can expect a sequence of pitched tones within a given key to be resolved only by a return to the tonic, and in morals we can expect an action which causes gratuitous pain to be forbidden. But rules alone cannot enable one to hear the resolution of a melodic variation, nor to be moved by another's suffering.

1.3 Internalism again

This sketch of moral properties as aspects supports a hybrid model of moral experience and thought, combining cognitive and affective-motivational functions in a way that renders them conceptually *and* causally interdependent. Likewise, it implies an internalist interpretation of what it is to properly understand moral^{o-r} requirements. In fact, in respect of basic moral^{o-r} judgements it implies both a conceptual and an empirical version of the internalist thesis. It is a conceptual truth that basic moral^{o-r} judgements are intrinsically motivating because those judgements are defined in part in terms of their etiology, an etiology according to which they inherit the intrinsic motivational force of our responses to other persons. And it is an empirical truth that an individual who properly understands moral^{o-r} requirements (who understands them by way of this normal etiology) will, as a matter of fact, be moved by the moral significance of others' concerns, interests, and other salient states. Conceptual internalism builds motivation directly into the possession conditions of basic moral^{o-r} beliefs: the aversion we direct at moral^{o-r} transgressions and the pleasure we take in moral^{o-r} achievements are part of ↪ what it is to possess such beliefs at all. Empirical internalism builds moral motivation directly into the causal conditions of basic moral^{o-r} beliefs—it says that individuals who have such beliefs will, as a matter of fact, experience some motivation to act on them, even if that motivation is often insufficiently weak relative to other competing ones.

Now suppose that we add a further, stronger claim, namely, that a capacity for basic moral^{o-r} judgements is a necessary condition of mature moral competence: what it is to possess a genuine, fully-fledged understanding of moral requirements requires, *inter alia*, a capacity for experience-led, basic moral judgements. (Or correlatively: moral competence requires a capacity to directly recognize moral^{o-r} aspects, a capacity that rests, in turn, on a natural tendency to resonate, affectively and motivationally, with other persons.) Internalism would then be true, not only of basic moral^{o-r} judgements but of competent moral judgement quite generally.

Is the stronger claim true? Is it a fact that anyone who is competent to understand moral norms is also sensitive to their motivational force? Several theorists have claimed that the phenomenon of psychopathy disproves that thesis. Shaun Nichols, for instance, claims that the psychopath's moral beliefs are motivationally, but not cognitively impaired; he is unmoved by moral requirements, but he has no difficulty in understanding them. Nichols holds that 'the psychopath's deficit in moral judgment depends on a deficit in an affective mechanism, not on deficits in rationality. The evidence on psychopaths thus seems not to support cognitivist and rationalist accounts at all, but rather their rival, sentimentalism.'¹⁸ If Nichols is right, then empirical internalism is false: understanding moral requirements does *not* reliably cause subjects to be moved by them, because the rational mechanisms required to grasp moral norms are, in the case of psychopaths, dissociated from the affective mechanism which confers on them their motivating force. Moreover, if the psychopath can understand moral judgements without being moved by them, then it must be logically possible for *anyone* to understand moral judgements without being moved by them. Hence conceptual internalism would be false as well, if unobviously so. Note, however, that Nichols's argument

only works by assuming the truth of externalism in the first place. That is, only if we accept an externalist interpretation of the *psychopath's* defects do those defects provide evidence for externalism more generally. But ought we to adopt an externalist interpretation of psychopathy? That is the question to which I now turn.

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Part 2 The Realism of Compassion

There are certain moral dispositions such that anyone lacking them could have no duty to acquire them. These are *moral feeling, love of one's neighbor, and reverence for oneself* (self-esteem). There is no obligation to have these, because they lie at the basis of morality...All of them are natural dispositions of the mind (*praedispositio*) to be affected by concepts of duty—antecedent dispositions on the side of feeling. To have them is not a duty: every man has them and it is by virtue of them that he can be obligated.

Kant, *Doctrine of Virtue*, Sec. 59

2.1 The Psychopath: Unfeeling or ill-informed?

Our ordinary sense of ourselves as moral agents depends, as Kant says, on certain familiar features of our psychologies. For example, an ordinary moral agent will be subject to moral feelings or emotions such as shame, guilt, and remorse. He will also be capable of and disposed towards attachment to and respect for others: he will not be loveless or ruthless. Finally, he will be aware that he, like others, possesses value: as a person, he too is deserving of respect. The psychopath, by contrast, is arguably deficient in all three of these qualities, and some have argued that he does not possess them at all.¹⁹ As Robert Hare has commented, psychopaths are

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social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow their way through life, leaving a broad trail of broken hearts, shattered expectations, and empty wallets. Completely lacking in conscience and empathy, they selfishly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.²⁰

What explains these extraordinary moral defects? Is the psychopath unable properly to understand moral norms proscribing harming others (harm-based moral^{o-r} norms)? Or does he simply fail to care about them? It is widely recognized that psychopaths have a good command of the moral vocabulary and a good grasp of the norms that *others* in his community typically endorse: he can 'talk the talk' of morality well enough. But this hardly settles the matter for, we have seen, there is more than one way to become conversant in a discourse which targets aspectival properties. In the arena of moral discourse it is not enough to learn the rules of concept application: a capacity for *basic* moral judgement requires that one be able to exercise those concepts by way of the right experiential route. Hence in order to decide whether or not the psychopath 'understands' moral^{o-r} norms, we need to decide a further question: is the psychopath's facility with moral discourse merely rule-driven, or does it reflect a genuine capacity for basic moral judgement?

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To answer this further question, we need to know whether the psychopath's competence with moral discourse is appropriately related to an awareness of others' ends—their concerns and interests. If it is, then we will have reason to think he understands moral^{o-r} norms as well as anyone else; if it does not, then we will have reason to think that his facile talk masks some cognitive defect at a deeper level, for instance, a defect involving his ability to identify others' morally salient psychological states. I have already intimated that a 'proper awareness' of others' morally salient psychological states is itself intrinsically motivating. Is that true? Here again we must decide between an externalist and an internalist answer. The externalist will say that a cognitive grasp of others' morally salient experiential states—detecting and individuating them—entails nothing about motivation: a subject may judge them correctly, even proficiently, yet remain unmoved by them. The internalist, by contrast, will say that a genuine understanding of, e.g. others' hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows cannot but move us, at least to some extent and in at least many cases. Framing the dispute in this way, it is easy to see why psychopathy counts as an important test case for theories of moral motivation. The externalist has no difficulty explaining how a psychopath can understand moral^{o-r} beliefs while being unmoved by them: he is systematically unresponsive to the action-guiding significance of these beliefs precisely because he is motivationally

indifferent to the concerns, interests, needs, etc. of other people. He perceives others' salient psychological states as well as the rest of us do, but he lacks the additional desires which, in the normal case, prompt us to respond to them in action. Beliefs alone never constitute a reason to do anything, the externalists will say: desires alone can motivate. And the desires that drive the rest of us to think of others' ends as reasons for action are desires the psychopath does not have. The externalist view implies, therefore, that the psychopath is what I will call a *desiderative egocentrist*:²¹

Desiderative Egocentrism A subject is a desiderative egocentrist just if none or few of his desires concerning others are directed at satisfying *others'* morally salient ends—satisfying their needs, relieving their suffering, etc. The desiderative egocentrist's desires are always or almost always driven by his own interests, purposes, etc. Others' ends only concern the desiderative egocentrist insofar as he believes that addressing them will instrumentally serve some end of his own.

The internalist should of course reject this analysis of psychopathy, for it leaves open the possibility that the psychopath's moral beliefs are in good order. He may instead propose that the psychopath is unresponsive to the moral significance of others' morally salient states because he does not properly register those states themselves. The internalist view suggests, that is, that the psychopath is a kind of *mindreading egocentrist*:²²

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Mindreading Egocentrism A subject is a mindreading egocentrist with respect to some psychological (or psychophysical) state just if he is unable to correctly identify that state in others.

Which of these two 'diagnoses'—desiderative egocentrism or mindreading egocentrism—best describes the psychopath? Is he simply unmoved by others' inner lives, or is he somehow defective in his ability to correctly understand them?

Nichols argues that mindreading egocentrism cannot explain psychopathic disorder, because the psychopath exhibits no noteworthy mindreading dysfunctions.²³ In support of this thesis Nichols turns to psychologist James Blair's studies of criminal psychopaths. Blair's studies purported to show, *inter alia*, that psychopaths exhibit no significant cognitive defects with respect to their abilities to represent others' mental states and that they do not differ significantly from normal controls in respect of their theory of mind (TOM) abilities.²⁴ As Blair describes his results, psychopaths appear to be able to infer the 'full range of mental states (beliefs, desire, intentions, imagination, emotions, etc.) that cause action: the psychopath is as able as a normal subject to reflect on the contents of his own and other's minds'.²⁵ All is not well in with the psychopath in other ways, however: psychopaths *are* dysfunctional in their emotional and motivational responses to others. Psychopaths exhibit vivid deficits in their autonomic responses to others' mental states, and specifically to others' states of psychological and psychophysical distress, e.g. fear, sorrow, and pain. Psychopaths also show significantly reduced physiological indications of affective responses (tested by skin-conductance, heart-rate variations) to images, narratives, and speech representing others in threatening, painful, and otherwise adverse circumstances. (In controls, these same autonomic responses are strongly correlated with self-reports and other evidence of emotional-affective engagement.)²⁶

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This combination of cognitive competence and affective deviance seems to provide good empirical evidence for motivational externalism. That is the conclusion both Nichols and Blair draw from Blair's findings.²⁷ If correct, the Nichols-Blair analysis of the psychopath would cast him as a desiderative egocentrist—as an able enough mind-reader burdened by a dysfunctional motivational system. And that diagnosis of the psychopath would in turn give us reason to favour an externalist account of moral^{o-r} judgements quite generally, for it suggests that the cognitive grasp of others' concerns and interests underpinning such judgements can float free of their affective-motivational force. Moral belief and moral feeling, on this account, could each exist independently of the other.

2.2 The moral/conventional distinction and the sympathetic autistic

Nichols argues that the externalist thesis finds further support from studies of high-functioning autistics. The pervasive image of the autistic depicts him as unresponsive to socio-affective cues of others, lacking emotional warmth, and incapable of empathy. The image is not without some justification, and there is ample evidence that autistics suffer from TOM defects: most have real difficulty representing others' beliefs and intentions, and even quite high-functioning autistics characteristically fail very simple false-belief tests and other tests of an ability to 'mentalise'.²⁸ Autism clearly carries with it an impaired ability to deploy psychological concepts in predictions and explanations of others' speech and behaviour. Whatever the right explanation of this deficiency, all sides are agreed in their diagnosis of the autistic as to that extent an impoverished ↪ mindreader.²⁹ And if the autistic is impaired in that way, there is good reason to expect that he will also be impaired in his capacity to form accurate beliefs about others' interests and welfare. It seems to follow that he should be poorly placed to form basic moral^{o-r} judgements.

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However, several studies of autistics suggest that in many respects they are as morally responsive as normal subjects. In particular, James Blair's studies indicate that autistic children (already evaluated as TOM-defective) performed well on two critical tasks which play an important role in moral judgement. The first task was to distinguish between transgressions of 'moral' versus 'conventional' requirements. The moral/conventional distinction, although fraught with ambiguities, is now a commonplace in experimental moral psychology.³⁰ Roughly speaking, a moral requirement is one which is directly justified by considerations of others' welfare—their pains, pleasures, desire, fears, and so on. A conventional requirement is not so justified (or at least not directly), but rather serves to maintain social conformity and order. Hence the requirement that we refrain from causing gratuitous physical pain is a moral requirement, whereas the prohibition against wearing pyjamas to a professional seminar is a conventional one. By the same token, moral requirements do not depend on the say-so of any authority: they hold (more or less) no matter what, and their normative force cannot be rescinded by the dictates of some individual or community. Conventional requirements, however, are 'authority-dependent'—they only hold relative to some individual or social authority, without which they would carry no normative force. Certain rules of etiquette are clearly conventional in this way: if one is a guest in a community in which it is usual to eat with one's hands, the requirement to use a knife and fork lapses. Likewise, certain institutional rules, e.g. not laughing aloud in a place of worship, are also conventional: if the Rabbi tells a good joke the requirement lapses. Finally, transgressions of moral requirements are, for obvious reasons, typically viewed as more serious and less permissible than conventional ones. Of course, the moral/conventional distinction, thus defined, will (and should) strike most philosophers as both implausible and crude.³¹ Nonetheless, as an experimental device for probing and categorizing levels of moral competence it has proven to be surprisingly robust.

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When Blair tested autistics for their performance on the moral/conventional distinction, he found that autistic children show a sensitivity on par with normal children to the distinction between moral and conventional transgressions in response to narratives detailing acts of both kinds.³² In a second set of studies, Blair tested the same group of autistics for their autonomic responses to visual images of others in various states of pain and distress. The test procedures paralleled those in the studies run on psychopathic subjects, recording electrodermal skin-conductance and heart-rate variations while viewing the images. His results again favoured his hypothesis that autistic's TOM deficits did *not* render them insensitive to considerations of others' suffering. Specifically, Blair found that measures of autistics' psychophysiological responsiveness to images of human *distress* is not deficient; autistics who tested as TOM-defective exhibited virtually normal physiological responses to visual distress cues, although they were unable either to describe or initiate appropriate actions in response to them.³³ The fact that the (apparently) *pre-cognitive* responsiveness of autistics to others' distress appears to be intact helps to make sense of their good performance on the tests for the moral/conventional distinction.³⁴ No-TOM autistics do not typically display compassion or empathy in their verbal and other behaviour, and yet Blair's experiments reveal that they *do* show the usual physiological symptoms of empathic responses, despite their putative incompetence as mindreaders. This fact combined with the autistic's robust sensitivity to the moral/conventional

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distinction suggests that responding to others in the ways that matter to morality might well be a ↪ job allocated to a discrete, affective-motivational system or mechanism, just as Nichols and other externalists have claimed.

Even worse news seems to await the internalist when we turn to Blair's studies of the psychopath's grasp of the moral/conventional distinction. In this series of studies, both psychopathic and control subjects were

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presented with brief narratives involving transgressions of both kinds of requirements, further dividing moral requirements into ‘positive act’/helping requirements (e.g. sharing some new possession or assisting with a task) and ‘negative act’/harming prohibitions (e.g. refraining from hitting a child).³⁵ Blair subjected the resulting data to a range of ANOVAs (analyses of variables), exploring his subjects’ sensitivity to the moral/conventional distinction across three dimensions: the relative permissibility of a transgression, its relative seriousness, and whether or not the transgressed rule is authority-dependent (its modifiability).³⁶ Finally, Blair analysed the subjects’ perceptions of *why* a given transgression was impermissible (its justification category). The results again appeared to support the idea that psychopaths suffer from some kind of desiderative egocentrism. Blair’s control group (non-psychopathic, convicted criminals) revealed a clear tendency to respect a distinction between the two categories for *both* positive and negative requirements in all dimensions. The control subjects’ responses to narratives clearly indicated that they view some requirements (e.g. do not wear a clown suit to court) as wholly authority-dependent, and others (e.g. do not humiliate a disabled person) as authority-independent. Moreover, transgressions of moral requirements were judged appropriately as less permissible, and more serious and were specifically justified by consideration of the victim’s welfare. By contrast, the psychopathic subjects scored poorly in two ways. First, they showed a marked propensity to treat all requirements as moral ones: they more often treated conventional requirements as if they were authority-independent ones, transgressions of which were as impermissible, unmodifiable, and serious as moral ones.³⁷ Secondly, on the justification dimension of the distinction psychopathic subjects were significantly less likely to recognize that the rationale for the negative-act/harming requirements had to do with the pain or other distress of others, and they often failed to cite others’ welfare as a justification when doing so required them to recognize and respond to negative states in others. They tended instead to justify harm-based moral prohibitions in very inappropriate terms, often appealing to seemingly arbitrary norms (e.g. ‘that is just not the done thing’, or ‘no one is allowed to do that’) and social disorder (‘doing that would disrupt the class’ or ‘doing that would cause too much trouble’).

The results of Blair’s different studies of psychopaths and autistics, taken together, seem to deliver an empirical argument that spells doom for the friend of internalism. The argument runs as follows: Psychopaths possess an intact TOM, but they are deficient in their pre-cognitive/autonomic responses to others’ distress. Psychopaths are also defective with respect to the moral/conventional distinction and to the justificatory role of other’s interests. Therefore, mindreading abilities are not a *sufficient* condition of moral competence. Moral motivation requires an independent desiderative mechanism which psychopaths lack: they are desiderative egocentrists.³⁸ Autistics, by contrast, lack an adequate TOM. They nonetheless have a good command of the moral/conventional distinction and their responsiveness to distress (on autonomic measures) is near-normal. Therefore mindreading abilities also are no *necessary* condition of moral responsiveness. Moral responsiveness requires some affective, desiderative mechanism—a source of motivation that is quite independent of a grasp of moral norms and of others’ psychologies. Externalism, this argument suggests, is true of our judgements of *both* moral^{o-r} norms and of other persons’ morally salient psychological states.

2.3 Problems for externalism

In its strongest form the argument set out above moves from premises concerning only the deviant sub-populations of psychopaths and autistics to a conclusion concerning the causal basis of moral responsiveness in normal, non-deviant subjects. In that form, it is unsound. But might not a less ambitious argument go through—say, an argument concluding only that the *psychopath* is a cognitively competent, desiderative egocentrist whose anomalies are owed to some kind of pre-cognitive, affective-motivational dysfunction? Do not the contrasting results for autistics and psychopaths at least establish that the disorder of the latter is causally independent of his cognitive grasp of others’ salient psychological states? This suggestion initially looks promising, but it turns entirely on the truth of two premises. The first premiss is that autistics lack all but the most minimal mindreading abilities, and hence that mindreading plays no role in their responsiveness to others. The second premiss is that the mindreading/TOM abilities of psychopaths are *not* impaired. The foregoing argument for externalism relies entirely on these two premises. There is, however, good reason to question both.

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With respect to the first premiss, it overstates the case to say that autistics are unable to identify and understand others’ inner lives. They are not, in fact, mindreading egocentrists with respect to any and all mental states, let alone all of those directly relevant to moral judgement. First of all, many autistic

children (at the same functional level as Blair's own subjects) use a range of propositional-attitude terms appropriately—particularly those relating to states of desire ('want', 'need').³⁹ They also frequently master terms reporting experiential states ('see', 'hurt', 'nice', 'sad', 'happy') and they are capable of attributing simple desires and emotions to others.⁴⁰ Simon Baron-Cohen observes that most autistics even understand that different people have different desires and can identify causal relations between desires and emotional states, e.g. 'that someone who gets what he wants will feel happy, and someone else who does not get what he wants will feel sad'.⁴¹ If the capacity for attributing some intentional states—and particularly desires—is reasonably well intact in most autistic children, then the idea evaporates that their facility with the moral/conventional distinction must be independent of a capacity for mindreading of some kind.

Moreover, mindreading is almost certainly not an 'all or nothing' ability: it is important to distinguish different mindreading targets. The ability to attribute emotions—so important to the formation of other-regarding moral beliefs—appears to depend on different neurological substrates from those underpinning the ability to attribute beliefs (an arena in which autistics are notably weak). In fact, the research indicates that the *only* mindreading ability at which autistics systematically fail is the ability to attribute false beliefs. Therefore neither Nichols nor Blair are entitled to conclude that the ability to mark the moral/conventional distinction is independent of mindreading skills generally (or even independent of all but the most 'minimal' mindreading skills, as Nichols puts it). They are only entitled to the much less exciting claim that this ability is dissociable from the ability to attribute false beliefs. Further, the Nichols-Blair observation that autistics exhibit normal autonomic responses to images of others in distress tells us little about the relation of those responses to mindreading skills, and there is very considerable evidence that autism leaves intact a significant attentional, verbal, and behavioural sensitivity to others' distress, discomfort, and fear.⁴² If that is so, it should be no surprise that autistics' autonomic responses follow suit.

Nichols's second premiss—that psychopaths evidence no TOM deficits and hence are able mindreaders—also distorts the wider evidence. Standard TOM tests typically present subjects with scenarios for verbal interpretation and pose questions which directly or indirectly require them to make attributions of propositional attitudes.⁴³ These tests are confined to 'cool' mental states such as beliefs, intentions, and desires, rather than states such as grief, rage, joy, embarrassment, physical pain, and fear which feature a rich phenomenology and are high in motivational charge. The claim that psychopaths are not TOM-impaired thus fails to reflect their mindreading deficits with respect to some of the very experiential states which are most likely to be morally salient. Moreover, the procedure of relying on verbal self-report measures may mask a difference between psychopaths and normal controls in their TOM processing. After all, there are more ways than one to identify others' mental states, and the same verbal reports may issue from two etiologically distinct kinds of judgements. This is more than a mere possibility: several studies have shown that even where the *verbal* responses of psychopaths to a presented image or scenario mirror those of normal controls, significant differences in their simultaneous autonomic responses betray the fact that the same words are masking very different global psychophysical states.⁴⁴

These doubts about the 'normal TOM' diagnosis for psychopaths find support in the fact that in studies specifically targeting their ability to detect the *morally salient* emotions psychopaths perform much less well than controls. In particular, psychopaths who rate high on an 'emotional detachment' scale are very significantly impaired in their attributions to others of the moral emotions of shame, guilt, and remorse.⁴⁵ Further studies by Blair's own research group show that many psychopaths have difficulty recognizing sad facial expressions and sad vocal tones. Likewise, they appear to be sub-normal in their ability to detect fear, distress, and sadness in visual and auditory representations (videos, pictures, and voice recordings).⁴⁶

Finally, recall that psychopathic subjects underperformed specifically in their appreciation of the moral nature of harm norms; it is with respect to transgressions of this kind (rather than transgression of rules enjoining positive-act/helping behaviour) that psychopaths most significantly failed to recognize the moral/conventional distinction and failed to appreciate that the rules in question are justified by others' welfare. The psychopath's judgement seems to let him down specifically with respect to actions producing pain, fear, grief, and other states of distress: despite his superficial facility with moral talk, it seems that he does not understand the rational implications and distinctive status of human suffering.

2.4 Distress egocentrism

These considerations suggest that the standard TOM tests conducted by Blair and others do not target some of the mindreading abilities most salient to moral judgement. A psychopathic subject could be expected to pass those tests with flying colours, but such success tells us little about his ability to detect and interpret the conditions informing everyday, other-regarding moral judgements. Hence the psychopath is not, on the evidence in hand, a walking vindication of the independence of thought and feeling in moral judgement generally. Instead, it appears that psychopathy features a highly complex, symbiotic interaction of affect and cognition.

We know that psychopaths are defective in their identifications of others' states of fear, sadness, and perhaps other kinds of distress. We have also seen that psychopaths are particularly impaired in their understanding of harm norm transgressions. The coincidence of these two results reinforces the idea that the motivational force internal to moral^{o-f} requirements in *normal* subjects is of a piece with their natural disposition to advert, dispel, and console others' distress. To put the point in terms of my distinction between rule-book and basic moral judgements, the psychopath's normative judgements are often of the rule-book kind: he is able to correlate the descriptive features of a situation with this or that normative requirement, but he is unable to make certain *basic* moral judgements by way of attending to and reflecting on the subvenient features of persons' concerns and interests, and particularly to their susceptibility to distress. If he is unable to attend to those features and to represent them in his thought, he will also fail to perceive the moral aspects they manifest; he will be as blind to these aspects as is the pattern-blind subject to the images in a portrait or a landscape. The analogy is not perfect, of course: while the pattern-blind subject is unable to organize the subvenient lines and colours into a coherent image, he is at least able to identify them. The psychopath, however, does not even see the 'lines and colours' subvening moral aspects —the affective and motivational features of others' experience from which some of our most fundamental moral aspects are composed.

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This is not to say that the psychopath is altogether unaware of the fact that others are capable of suffering. He is clearly able in some sense to recognize and attribute such states to others. But he fails to represent these states empathically—as from an experiential perspective possessing the aversive motivational force they carry for those who suffer them.⁴⁷ He is unable to represent others' experience as from their point of view, and so is less likely to be moved by it when generating his normative judgements. This empathic dysfunction typically manifests itself in a quite specific distortion in his understanding of normative requirements, namely a distortion in his moral^{o-f} beliefs involving harm to others. Indeed, the psychopath's cognitive grasp of harm norms is defective in a quite dramatic and telling way in this arena: by failing to recognize the moral/conventional distinction and to recognize others' welfare as a reason for action, he shows that he does not properly understand the distinctive basis of an important and primitive category of moral requirements: the badness of the suffering of other persons.

The non-pathological, 'ordinary' empathizer represents others' distress as from a point of view which is, in its affective force, partially isomorphic with that of the subject whose states they are.⁴⁸ This shift in perspective not only brings to his attention certain facts which are only available from within an experiential, first-person point of view, but carries some part of the associated motivational force. The psychopath, by contrast, may be described as a 'distress egocentrist':

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Distress Egocentrism A subject is a distress egocentrist with respect to some affectively and motivationally characterized state of suffering just if his representations of that state in other subjects systematically exclude its characteristic, first-person phenomenology.

The psychopath's particular form of distress egocentrism is that his attributions of suffering feature none of the *motivations* it carries for the person whose suffering it is. A distress egocentrist may, of course, succeed in correctly identifying many cases of that experience-type in others and he may form rule-directed beliefs about those states. (He might even pass standard verbal tests for recognizing instances of that experience-type, as many psychopaths do.) However, the distress egocentrist will not be moved by his attributions of the experience to others, and if he judges that another is, for instance, suffering, he does so as a non-partisan observer: he does not register, as Nagel puts it, a 'pained awareness of their distress as something to be relieved'.⁴⁹

The distress egocentrist's blindness to human suffering thus excludes him from participation in some of our most fundamental moral practices, for he is unable to form many of the basic *judgements* in which they

consist. Of course, his failing is not one of rationality in the sense of a failure to reject contradiction, inconsistency, or arbitrariness: the psychopath can be perfectly consistent in refusing to harmonise his beliefs and actions with others' purposes. But he nonetheless suffers from a cognitive defect in so far as he fails to perceive and believe all that he might—indeed all that he must if he is to form true, other-regarding, basic moral beliefs. Moreover, what is missing from his understanding of other persons is not something arcane or exotic: he misses out certain wholly ordinary and pervasive facts about their everyday psychological states, as those states are presented to the persons subject to them. And in so far as these states subvene and give rise to moral aspects, he misses out the moral facts as well.

p. 351 It may be tempting to insist that the distress egocentrists' cognitive failings are *caused* by this affective and motivational ones. But we must tread carefully here lest we falsify the phenomenology, and so falsify the nature of the relation between responding to and representing another's psychology. The thought that an affective deficit causally explains a cognitive one might suggest that these two capacities are, in Hume's words, 'distinct existences', and that the former has some kind of temporal priority. However, I have argued (Part I) that this does not correctly capture the phenomenological relation between empathic response and accurate representation: it may be that one manages accurately to represent another's point of view because one feels with and for him, but it is also true that one feels with and for another because one has managed accurately to represent his point of view. Our empathic responses to another's suffering, for instance, are not normally independent of our belief that he is suffering—and *vice versa*. One may, of course, essay the belief in the absence of the ↵ responses, but that is just to say that in some cases such beliefs are essayed for different reasons and by way of a different (and derivative) route of thought. In a *basic* moral judgement, your 'pained awareness' of another's distress is at once a matter of responding to this state and detecting that he is subject to it. Of course your propensity to respond empathically may be a necessary condition of your ability to represent his psychology as accurately as you do, and your responses may in part rationally justify your psychological attributions. It does not follow, however, that these responses are empirically distinct existences—empirically independent occurrent states. As Murdoch insisted, our attunement to and perception of another, if the perception is just and true, will be at once a state of knowledge and a state of the will. And so too will be the basic moral judgements to which it gives rise.

Endnote: Configurations of love

Sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido. Mens alius suadet: video meliora proboque deteriora sequor.

(Some strange power draws me on against my will. Desire persuades me one way, reason another. I see the better course and approve it, [but] I follow the worse.)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 19–21

All of us at times have acted against our better moral judgement. This may have been because we felt ourselves compelled by motives we did not respect, but were powerless to resist. Or we may simply have found ourselves indifferent and unmoved by considerations of right and wrong—perhaps because we were too worn with fatigue or overwhelmed by cares. On such occasions, it undoubtedly can be helpful to advert to a 'rule-book' knowledge of morality to steer our practical reasoning, and at least to this extent general moral principles will be indispensable both as a guide to and explanation of our conduct. Murdoch was right to observe, however, that rules cannot be the whole of morality; the messy and complicated cases of day to day life require an experiential engagement sensitive to particular details and differences and responsive to the individuals whose welfare is at stake. Murdoch argued for this type of particularism in concert with two further commitments: an epistemological commitment to the robust cognitive content of moral requirements and a phenomenological commitment to their intrinsic motivational force.

p. 352 The first commitment, I have argued, fits well with a conception of moral properties as aspectual properties on analogy with other 'deep configurations' of reality, such as pictorial and musical aspects. This conception invites an experiential account of our awareness of moral requirements according to which the subject's first-personal responsiveness to others is a necessary condition of his capacity to essay certain basic moral judgements. Murdoch's second commitment—her internalist thesis—is closely related. That thesis, we saw, features both a conceptual component (the thought that motivational force is built into the meaning of moral concepts) and an empirical ↵ component (the thought that affect and motivation are empirically necessary conditions of competence in moral reasoning). I have focused here principally on the

empirical claim, arguing that in the case of psychopathic disorder—a paradigm of moral incompetence—the psychopath’s blindness to states of suffering and distress renders him unable to represent accurately certain crucial human concerns, and so unable properly to grasp a range of fundamental moral requirements. The psychopath’s disorder, in short, is just as Murdoch’s phenomenology of ‘moral vision’ would predict: it is at once a failure to feel properly and a failure to judge correctly.

The experimental studies discussed here also connect in an interesting way with Murdoch’s emphasis on the role of love in moral development. She frequently suggests that sensitivity to the Good is of a piece with our capacity for love, and she develops this point in both a metaphysical and a psychological dimension. The metaphysical dimension leads her to endorse Plato’s thought that knowing the Good and loving it are unified aspects of our perception of a transcendent moral ideal. The psychological dimension is less exotic, but no less important: it is that our ability to understand what morality requires of us in specific, ordinary cases is bound up with an ability to regard others lovingly. The phenomenon of psychopathy lends support to this idea: two defining features of the psychopath’s disorder are his incapacity for deep attachments to others—for persisting love—and the solipsistic, emotional isolation that follows on love’s absence. In Murdoch’s *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, she herself constructs a striking profile of a personality disfigured in these ways in the novel’s anti-heroic protagonist, Julius King. King is revealed to be a sometime camp-survivor, Julius Kahn, and his personality is morally and emotionally dysfunctional in ways that vividly reflect the cold and calculating nature of the psychopath. His personal history, too, is marked by many of the events characteristically associated with that disorder: the childhood loss and abandonment, the social exclusion, and the exposure to radical brutality he suffers are all common features of the often tragic biographies of psychopaths. I doubt that Murdoch intended to construct a fictional instantiation of any particular psychopath-ology, but we nonetheless find in Kahn a striking portrait both of the lovelessness and its origins that are the hallmarks of the psychopath’s inner life. Perhaps as we come better to understand the nature and causes of psychopathy we will also grow to appreciate more deeply the importance of our ability to respond to one another with love. For there is surely something correct in Murdoch’s claim that ‘even partially refined [love]...is the energy and passion of the soul in its search for Good, the force that joins us to Good and joins us to the world’ (SGC 103/384).

Notes

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- * This research was generously supported by the *Centre de recherche en Sens, Ethique, Société* (CERSES) of the CNRS (UMR 8137), Paris V.
- 1 E. McNeil, *The Quiet Furies* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 87.
 - 2 See the ‘Psychopathy Checklist’ in R. D. Hare, T. J. Harpur, R. A. Hakstian, A. E. Forth, S. D. Hart, et al. ‘The Revised Psychopathy Checklist: Reliability and Factor Structure’, *Psychological Assessment* 2 (1994), 338–41.
 - 3 J. H. Johns and H. C. Quay, ‘The effect of social reward on verbal conditioning in psychopathic and neurotic military offenders’, *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 26 (1962), 207–20.
 - 4 I abbreviate the titles of Murdoch’s three essays ‘The Idea of Perfection’ (1964), ‘On “God” and “Good”’ (1969), and ‘The Sovereignty of Good Over Other Concepts’ (1967) as IP, OGG, and SGC respectively. Page references are given both to their appearance in *The Sovereignty of Good* (1970) and to the reprintings in *Existentialists and Mystics* [E&M], ed. P. J. Conradi (Allen Lane Penguin Press: New York, 1997), separated by a slash/. The phrase ‘just and loving’ attention occurs within Murdoch’s discussion of her well-known example of the resentful mother-in-law (M) and her son’s high-spirited wife (D). Cf: ‘I can only choose within the world I can see, in the moral sense of ‘see’ which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort...When M is just and loving she sees D as she really is’ (IP 37/329).
 - 5 See also ‘Vision and Choice in Morality’ [VCM] (1956), reprinted in *Existentialists and Mystics*, 76–98, *passim*.
 - 6 See, for instance, OGG, *passim*.
 - 7 See VCM. cf. ‘The insistence that morality is essentially rules may be seen as an attempt to secure us against the ambiguity of the world...There are times when it is proper to stress, not the comprehensibility of the world, but its incomprehensibility’ (VCM 90).
 - 8 See IP.
 - 9 An analogy may help to make this point, and we find one ready in Kant’s account of aesthetic judgement. Kant argues that aesthetic judgements are necessarily singular in form, and never universal. If we are judging the beauty of a thing, he says, then that thing must be *perceptually* present to us (or at least present to us through the remembering or imagining of a perceptual state). This is because what it is to judge that a thing is beautiful is in part just to respond to its sensible presentation in a particular way, and to express that response in the form of a judgement. If one says of some item ‘X is beautiful’ in the absence of any perceptual engagement with X (whether present or past) then one is not essaying an aesthetic judgement proper. Hence one cannot properly judge that, for instance, *all* roses are beautiful (for one cannot perceptually engage with and respond to all roses). One can only judge that *this* (demonstratively identified) perceived rose is beautiful. This analogy should not be taken too far: I do not think that Murdoch anywhere says that universal

judgements fail—by definition—to be moral judgements at all, and in this respect her account differs from Kant's account of aesthetic ones. At the same time, Murdoch sometimes seems to endorse the epistemic claim that if one is to judge *correctly* in moral matters one should proceed on a case-by-case basis.

- 10 Colour properties, although not aspectual ones, are like this: they can only be seen by those whose optical and cognitive systems are sensitive to the reflectancy properties of visible objects. The colours presented directly in experience are 'supervenient' properties, and the base properties on which they depend (reflectancy properties) are 'subvenient'.
- 11 For a more detailed discussion of aspectual properties, see my *Metaphor and Moral Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198240105.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198240105.001.0001)[↗] Chapter 5, *passim*.
- 12 See my discussion of pictorial aspects in my *Metaphor and Moral Experience*, 144–7.
- 13 As I am using the terms 'inference' and 'inferential', they apply to beliefs or judgements which follow from other, independently justified beliefs and which have no other justification save that relationship. A belief or judgement is, by contrast, 'direct' just in case it is somehow justified, but not inferentially. Perceptual judgements are paradigmatically direct ones, as are (arguably) certain logical and mathematical beliefs. See C. Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 151.
- 14 See my 'Motivation, Representation and Basic Moral Judgments', unpublished draft. Basic moral judgements a) are produced non-inferentially, b) are judgements of aspectual properties, c) are descriptive rather than expressive, d) describe the objects, not the subject who assents to them, e) describe the subject's experience of the aspects judged.
- 15 Ibid. The quotation is from Saul Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell/Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982), 140, emphasis in original removed.
- 16 The categorization is not wholly satisfactory, but it is important in this context, for it is with respect to the psychopath's personal relations and conduct towards others that he behaves so aberrantly.
- 17 A given concept—say, the concept associated with the predicate 'M'—is experience-dependent just if it is true a priori that for some item x , x is M if x is such as to elicit experiential responses of kind E in (substantially specified) suitable subjects S under (substantially specified) conditions C. Experience-dependent concepts often pick out properties that I shall call *empirically experience-dependent*: The property associated with the predicate 'M' is empirically experience-dependent just if it is true, as a matter of fact, that for some item x , if x is M then x is such as to elicit experiential responses of kind E in (substantially specified) suitable subjects under (substantially specified) conditions C.
- 18 S. Nichols, 'How Psychopaths Threaten Moral Rationalism, or Is it Irrational to Be Amoral?', *The Monist*, 85 (2002), 285–304. At this point Nichols is specifically discussing what he calls 'Empirical Rationalism'. Earlier in his article, however, he has entered similarly motivated objections against other versions of internalism, including those which, like my own, appeal to some kind of ability for perspective-taking. Nichols dismisses the latter on the ground that Blair's studies have shown that psychopaths suffer no deficits in perspective-taking abilities. Closer inspection of Blair's studies, however, reveal that they show no such thing, and that the experimental design does little to test the kind of empathic, perspective-taking skills to which I appeal. The most one can conclude from Blair's studies is that psychopaths do not show any deficits in quite basic TOM (theory of mind) skills.
- 19 The precise nature of psychopathic disorder has proven difficult to pin down with any precision, and clinical and research efforts continue to be hampered by definitional uncertainties. All are agreed that it should be characterized as a 'construct' or constellation of several co-existing features, but inconsistencies vitiate the way those features are identified and organized in the professional literature. First, there are terminological inconsistencies in the uses of the terms 'psychopathic disorder', 'sociopathic disorder', and 'anti-social personality disorder' (APD). Secondly, there are substantive disagreements about the specific characteristics criterial of each (and particularly those criterial of psychopathy as opposed to APD). Finally, there are radically different diagnostic instruments in use to identify psychopathic subjects—instruments which can yield strikingly different diagnoses. This is all bad news for any theorist attempting meta-analyses of past research and clinical records.
- In the past decade R. D. Hare's 'Psychopathy Checklist' (PCL), has become generally (but not unreservedly) accepted as a reliable measure. The PCL was first designed and tested by Hare in 1980 as a list of 22 items. It was revised in draft form in 1985 and, after scrupulous testing for inter-rater reliability and item-reliability, saw official publication in 1991 as a checklist of twenty items: the 'Hare PCL-R'. The highest possible score is thus 40, and a subject is typically classified as psychopathic if he receives a scoring of 30 or above. Perhaps the most influential achievement of the new PCL-R was that it introduced the critical distinction between 'Factor 1' items correlated to interpersonal/affective/trait characteristics and 'Factor 2' items correlating to social deviance characteristics. The resulting checklist, including 'Factor 1' items (1–8) and 'Factor 2' items (9–20) is:

1. Glibness/superficial charm.
2. Grandiose sense of self-worth.
3. Need for stimulation/proneness to boredom.
4. Pathological lying.
5. Conning/manipulative.
6. Lack of remorse or guilt.
7. Shallow affect.

8. Callous/lack of empathy
9. Parasitic lifestyle.
10. Poor behavioral controls.
11. Promiscuous sexual behaviour.
12. Early behaviour problems.
13. Lack of realistic, long-term plans.
14. Impulsivity.
15. Irresponsibility.
16. Failure to accept responsibility for own actions.
17. Many short-term marital relationships.
18. Juvenile delinquency.
19. Revocation of conditional release.
20. Criminal versatility

The division between Factor 1 and Factor 2 has subsequently served (in practice) to mark the distinction between *psychopathic disorder* proper, and APD, where the latter is normally identified solely by behaviourally-manifested criteria indicative of 'inadequate socialization'—for instance repeated law-breaking, aggressiveness, irresponsibility (as evidenced, for instance by employment history) and impulsivity. The label 'APD' thus serves better to reflect the anti-social, but not the interpersonal/emotional factors of the PCL. As it happens, however, almost all current research recognizes that there exist in fact two independent (if frequently co-morbid) disorders—the first, psychopathy, delineated roughly by the PCL-R, and the second delineated only by the *Diagnostics and Statistics Manual's* behavioural indicators of APD. APD is not unrelated to the psychopathy, of course: most (but not all) subjects classified in accordance with the latter also satisfy the former. It is significant, however, that in forensic populations the prevalence of APD is two or three times higher than the prevalence of psychopathy, as measured by the PCL-R. Most offenders with a high PCL-R score meet the criteria for APD, but the converse does not hold, for APD subjects often fail to manifest the PCL-R's Factor 1 items.

- 20 R. D. Hare, *Without Conscience: The disturbing world of the psychopaths among us* (New York: Pocket Books, 1993); p. xi.
- 21 This distinction is in part owed to Shaun Nichols. See his 'Mindreading and the Cognitive Architecture underlying Altruistic Motivation', *Mind and Language*, 16 (2001), 425–55 [10.1111/1468-0017.00178](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0017.00178) .
- 22 Some theorists (so-called 'theory theorists') have argued that 'mind-reading' or 'mentalising'—the ability to discern others' mental states—issues from a process of theory acquisition: the theory is an inductively acquired set of general principles or laws which relate mental states to one another and to external stimuli as input, and to speech and action as output. Others (the 'simulation theorists') have argued that the ability to mentalise is less a matter of possessing a theory than it is a matter of possessing an ability—the ability to imaginatively simulate others' circumstances and psychologies, and by doing so to play out in our own minds the processes to which they are subject and the resulting mental states. I will not engage with that debate here, but in due course it will be clear to the reader that I hold with the simulationists with respect to *affectively and motivationally characterized* psychological and psychophysical states such as grief, joy, anxiety, fatigue, nausea, etc. Many propositional attitudes such as believing, intending, and even desiring need not exhibit any occurrent phenomenology, however, and I am content to leave these to the theory theorists.
- 23 Shaun Nichols, *Sentimental Rules* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [10.1093/0195169344.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/0195169344.001.0001) . Chapters 1 and 2, *passim*. See also J. Kennett, 'Autism, Empathy and Moral Agency', *Philosophical Quarterly* Vol. 52, No 208, July 2002, 340–57 [10.1111/1467-9213.00272](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9213.00272) .
- 24 Blair's selection criterion was a score of 30 or higher on Hare's PCL-R, and scoring was not sensitive to the distinction between Factor 1 and Factor 2 criteria. All subjects (both psychopathic and non-psychopathic controls) were incarcerated for life, all had been incarcerated for at least eighteen months, and all save one were incarcerated for either murder or manslaughter. (Life sentences in the UK are mandatory for murder; for manslaughter they are discretionary but are typically given when there are no mitigating reasons for the act.) All were male and white. Subjects were matched for average IQ (90's range), average age (early to mid 30's) and social class (D/E). Some studies have used as few as ten subjects in each category (psychopath and normal control) and some used as many as thirty.
- 25 R. J. R. Blair, C. Sellars, I. Strickland, F. Clark, A. Williams, M. Smith, and L. Jones, 'Theory of mind in the psychopath', *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry* 7, 15–25 (1996) [10.1080/09585189608409914](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585189608409914) .
- 26 R. J. R. Blair, L. Jones, F. Clark, and M. Smith, 'The psychopathic individual: a lack of responsiveness to distress cues?' *Psychophysiology* 34 (1997), 192–8 [10.1111/j.1469-8986.1997.tb02131.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8986.1997.tb02131.x) ; R. J. R. Blair, D. G. V. Mitchell, R. A. Richell, S. Kelly, A. Leonard, C. Newman, and S. K. Scott, 'Turning a Deaf Ear to Fear: Impaired Recognition of Vocal Affect in Psychopathic Individuals', *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 111 (2002), 682–6 [10.1037/0021-843X.111.4.682](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.111.4.682) ; R. J. R. Blair, E. Colledge, L. Murray, and D. G. Mitchell, 'A selective impairment in the processing of sad and fearful expressions in

- 27 See R. J. R. Blair, 'A Cognitive developmental approach to morality: Investigating the psychopath', *Cognition* 57, (1995), 1–29 [10.1016/0010-0277\(95\)00676-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(95)00676-P). Blair's specific proposal was that the psychopath's defects in empathy and in his moral beliefs are owed to the failure of a dedicated 'violence inhibition mechanism'—VIM—which plays a solely motivational role. The notion of VIM was inspired by the ethologist Konrad Lorenz's observation that in many species (for instances wolves and lions) an aggressing animal will withdraw his attack if a con-specific victim displays submission-behaviour. A submitting wolf, for instance, may 'collapse his posture', tuck his tale between his legs, and slowly retreat; a lion will sometimes lie on its back and bare its throat. Blair hypothesized that the aggressor's withdrawal is activated by a VIM mechanism, which causes an aversive response in him. Extending this idea to humans, Blair proposed that VIM causes normal subjects to experience distress when confronted with others' negative-affect states—i.e. states of either physical and emotional suffering such as pain or fear. He then appeals to VIM to argue that normal subjects' grasp of the distinction between moral and conventional norms occurs by way of a four-stage process: (1) Perception of a distress cue in another person; (2) Aversion/withdrawal response; (3) A stage (somewhat obscure) of 'meaning-analysis' whereby one correlates one's aversion to the other's distress with characteristic causes of that aversion (e.g. our aversion to another's physical pain is correlated with the assaulting actions which caused it); (4) We identify the characteristic causes as distinctively moral transgressions, our prohibitions against which are justified post-facto by appeal to others' welfare; transgressions of other kinds are conventional ones. Philosophers will be familiar with Hume's very similar account of the 'natural' vs. the 'artificial' virtues in his *Treatise on Human Nature*. In Hume, of course, the mechanism of 'sympathetic resonance' takes the role Blair assigns to VIM, and differs from VIM too in causing in the subject an 'echo' of the same or a similar kind of distress as he has perceived in the other.
- 28 S. Baron-Cohen, A. M. Leslie, and U. Frith, 'Does the Autistic Child Have a "Theory of Mind"?', *Cognition* 21 (1985), 37–46 [10.1016/0010-0277\(85\)90022-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(85)90022-8).
- 29 See S. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1995).
- 30 The population from which Blair's subjects were selected adds procedural difficulties to the conceptual ones: all had been incarcerated within a highly punitive institutional setting for many years (Broadmoor Special Hospital and Wormwood Scrubs Prison, on high-security wards), subjected to a highly regimented daily routine in which, for example, the 'lights-out' curfew and the dress code are as strictly enforced as the requirement to refrain from violent physical assaults on staff. It is easy to see how such a setting might lead one to construe context-dependent conventional rules as on par with context-independent ones. This kind of setting positively discourages independent thought about the rationale for behavioural requirements. (I owe this observation to Terry O'Shaughnessy.) On the other hand, the 'normal' controls were drawn from the same population and setting and matched to the psychopathic subjects for gender, age, IQ, and social class.
- 31 Philosophically, the moral/conventional distinction is a Pandora's box of conceptual worries and does not survive well under pressure or in marginal cases. For instance many seemingly conventional rules (when in England, drive on the left) find their ultimate justification in moral ones (respect the lives and well-being of other drivers). Conversely, it can happen that merely conventional rules come to be regarded as carrying independent moral force: consider the indignation with which some react to infractions of institutional protocol (e.g. failing to follow proper procedure in a committee meeting, or to respect the norms of 'impersonal' conversation at a College dinner). None the less, there are enough clear and central cases to make the distinction a useful one for certain experimental purposes in developmental psychology: it is fairly easy to determine whether a subject falls below statistical norms in his sensitivity to the distinction even if, from a philosophical point of view, it is by no means clear in just what the distinction actually consists.
- 32 R. J. R. Blair, 'Psychophysiological Responsiveness to the Distress of Others in Children with Autism', *Personality & Individual Differences* 26 (1999), 477–85 [10.1016/S0191-8869\(98\)00154-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00154-8). Moral transgressions were represented by acts the consequences of which directly affected the welfare or rights of others (e.g. hitting a child or stealing valued property), and conventional transgressions threatened the social order (e.g. a boy wearing a dress or a child talking in the library).
- 33 *Ibid.* [10.1016/S0191-8869\(98\)00154-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00154-8). In interpreting these results, Blair cites Mandler's suggestion that an emotion state can be broken down in two components: 'the autonomic nervous system response and the cognitive appraisal, where the cognitive appraisal of the autonomic response gives rise to the experienced emotion'. From a philosopher's point of view, this yields a fairly crude view of what it is to experience an emotion, and yet there is no doubt some truth in it.
- 34 Both sets of results should be surprising, for at least two reasons. First, it was long believed that autistics simply did not recognize their common humanity with other persons in any way at all: as Kanner described them in 1943, 'people figure [for the autistic] in about the same manner as does the desk, the bookshelf, or the filing cabinet'. As recently as 1994, Sigman found that autistic children were *behaviourally* unresponsive to adults showing distress, fear, and discomfort in semi-naturalistic settings. Secondly, as Gillberg observes, 'if you do not even *understand* that other people have, as it were, inner worlds, how can you be expected to show compassion or empathy?' See C. Gillberg, 'Outcome in autism and autistic-like conditions', *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 30 (1991), 375–82 [10.1097/00004583-199105000-00004](https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-199105000-00004).
- 35 R. J. R. Blair, L. Jones, F. Clark, and M. Smith, 'Is the Psychopath "Morally Insane"?', *Personality and Individual Differences* 19 (1995), 741–52 [10.1016/0191-8869\(95\)00087-M](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(95)00087-M).
- 36 The dimensions were tested by putting the following questions:

Questions: (1) Was it OK for X to do Y? (permissibility) (2) Was it bad for X to [the transgression]? And on a scale of one to ten, how bad was it for X to do [the transgression]? (seriousness) (3) Why was it bad for X to do [the t]?

- 37 One sometimes reads that the psychopathic subjects in these experiments treated moral requirements as if they were conventional. This is misleading. Only in respect of the justification category do they ‘conventionalize’ the moral, usually by failing to mention others’ suffering as a reason for some prohibition. In respect of the other three categories, psychopaths actually tended to treat transgressions of conventional requirements as being as impermissible, serious, and independent as moral ones.
- 38 See Shaun Nichols ‘Norms with feeling: Towards a psychological account of moral judgment’, *Cognition* 84 (2002), 221–36 [10.1016/S0010-0277\(02\)00048-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0010-0277(02)00048-3)[↗]. For a different interpretation of the data see my *Metaphor and Moral Experience* [M&ME] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 150–80 [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198240105.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198240105.001.0001)[↗].
- 39 H. Tager-Flusberg, ‘What language reveals about the understanding of minds in children with autism’, in S. Baron-Cohen, H. Tager-Flusberg, and Donald Cohen (eds.) *Understanding Other Minds: Perspectives from Autism* (Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 1993).
- 40 J. Tan and P. Harris, ‘Autistic children understand seeing and wanting’, *Development and Psychopathology*, 3 (1991), 163–74 [10.1017/S0954579400000055](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400000055)[↗].
- 41 S. Baron-Cohen, *Mindblindness*, Cambridge (MA: MIT Press, Bradford Books, 1995), 63.
- 42 See S. Nichols and S. Stich, *Mindreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
- 43 I will not discuss Blair’s experimental procedures in detail here, but they are not without their difficulties. His subject pools were limited in both size and scope: most experiments featured fewer than twenty-five subjects in each category (psychopathic/non-psychopathic controls). Moreover, there are arguably serious procedural difficulties in identifying and classifying subjects by the ‘file only’ method on which Blair often relies. The first worry is that the selection features sometimes overlap with the target features (i.e. subjects who are described in their files as possessing little empathy are tested and found to be wanting in empathy). A further cause for concern is the fact that files are created in part by a process of ‘inherited descriptions’. Particularly in the case of repeat offenders, files stand to be a history written by overworked and underqualified penal officers whose views have been influenced by judges armchair assessments, whose views in turn have been swayed by penal psychiatric staff, whose views may be influenced by overworked and underqualified penal officers, and so on.
- 44 Repeated studies have shown that psychopaths exhibit markedly diminished physiological responses (skin-conductance and heart-rate variations) to pictorial representations of persons in motivationally-charged circumstances (e.g. a man cowering in terror before a gun, a child cornered by a snarling wolf). These diminished responses were not mirrored in the psychopathic subjects’ verbal judgements, however: like normal controls, they described the images as disturbing or frightening or distasteful. Psychopaths likewise exhibited diminished physiological responses to narrative representation of others’ ‘negative’ states (e.g. descriptions of grief, anxiety, and pain), while again there was no discernible difference in their verbal *reports* of the events described. What are we to make of these results? Of course there is much more to possessing normal empathic reactions to others than undergoing physiological responses. But these findings suggest that there is at least a stable correlation between the absence of such responses in psychopaths *coinciding* with an ability to linguistically evaluate the targets in much the same terms as do normal controls.
- 45 R. J. R. Blair, ‘A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath’, *Cognition* 57 (1995), 1–29 [10.1016/0010-0277\(95\)00676-P](https://doi.org/10.1016/0010-0277(95)00676-P)[↗].
- 46 R. J. R. Blair, D. G. V. Mitchell, K. S. Petschardt, E. Colledge, R. A. Leonard, J. H. Shine, L. K. Murray, and D. I. Perrett, ‘Reduced sensitivity to others’ fearful expressions in psychopathic individuals’, *Personality & Individual Differences* 37 (2004), 1111–22 [10.1016/j.paid.2003.10.008](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2003.10.008)[↗]; R. J. R. Blair, E. Colledge, L. Murray, and D. G. Mitchell, ‘A selective impairment in the processing of sad and fearful expression in children with psychopathic tendencies’, *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 29 (2001), 491–8; R. J. R. Blair, D. G. Mitchell, R. Richell, S. Kelly, A. Leonard, C. Newman, et al., ‘Turning a deaf ear to fear: Impaired recognition of vocal affect in psychopathic individuals’, *Journal of Abnormal Psychophysiology* 111 (2002), 682–6 [10.1037/0021-843X.111.4.682](https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.111.4.682)[↗]; R. J. R. Blair, ‘Responsiveness to distress cues in the child with psychopathic tendencies’, *Personality and Individual Differences* 27 (1999), 135–45 [10.1016/S0191-8869\(98\)00231-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(98)00231-1)[↗].
- 47 The psychopath’s disability, so described is neither a strictly affective nor strictly cognitive one: we may want to say that he does not perceive certain moral aspects *because* he does not respond to others as he should, but that is not to say that the seeing is conceptually distinct from the responding.
- 48 What is it to represent an experiential state ‘as from the perspective of the other’? Experiential states (as I have been using that phrase) have both content and phenomenological character. An empathic representation ‘as from the perspective another’ is a kind of quasi-experience: it is a representation of another’s state which features to some degree and in some part the very phenomenological features presented to the individual whose state it is. Where the target state is an emotion of some kind, these features typically will be affective and motivational ones. (For other targets, different phenomenological features may be involved, as in the case of empathically representing another’s feelings of physical pain.) Affective character and motivational force, like the perspectival features of visual experience, can only be captured in this way: one has to participate, sometimes by way of an exercise of memory, but often by way of an exercise of imagination, if one is to understand these dimensions of others’ experiential states. In this respect the notion of empathy at work here may be better captured by the German ‘*Einfühlung*—literally, ‘in-feeling’, as in feeling ‘in’ with or attuned to another’s state of mind. Roger Scruton, in his account of musical experience, appeals to an analogy with *Einfühlung* to describe our natural responsiveness and receptiveness to expression in music—a form of expression which is most often elucidated in terms of human emotions. Scruton writes: ‘When you move to music, the music takes charge of your response to it—you are being *led* by it, from gesture to gesture, and each new departure is dictated by the musical

development...You are *in the hands* of the music; your sympathetic response moves in parallel to the musical development.' This responsiveness, Scruton says, is not altogether unlike the natural responsiveness of one sympathetic human being to another:

Observing a gesture or expression we may have the experience of *Einfühlung*, or 'knowing what it's like', whereby the gesture becomes, in imagination, our own. We then feel it, not from the observer's, but from the subject's point of view. This experience may provide an intimation of a whole state of mind, regardless of whether the state can be described;...It is a creation of the imagination, prompted by sympathy. Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 358.

49 T. Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 80 n.1.