WHY DOES EMPATHY MATTER FOR MORALITY?[*]

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Abstract

In this paper we discuss Prinz's Kantian arguments in "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" (2011). They purport to show that empathy is not necessary for morality because it is not part of the capacities required for moral competence and it can bias moral judgment. First, we show that even conceding Prinz his notions of empathy and moral competence, empathy still plays a role in moral competence. Second, we argue that moral competence is not limited to moral judgment. Third, we reject Prinz's notion of empathy because it is too restrictive, in requiring emotional matching. We conclude that once morality and empathy are properly understood, empathy's role in morality is vindicated. Morality is not reduced to a form of rational judgment, but it necessarily presupposes pro-social preferences and motivation and sensitivity to inter-subjective demands.

KEY WORDS: Moral Competence; Morality; Empathy; Sympathy; Moral Judgment.

Resumen

En este trabajo, nos centramos en los argumentos kantianos de Prinz en "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" (2011), donde niega que la empatía sea necesaria para la moralidad porque no es una de las capacidades requeridas para tener competencia moral. Primero mostramos que incluso aceptando las nociones de Prinz de empatía y de competencia moral, la empatía sigue teniendo un papel en la competencia moral. Segundo, argumentamos que la competencia moral no se reduce al juicio moral. Tercero, criticamos la noción de empatía de Prinz porque es demasiado restrictiva, ya que

requiere convergencia emocional. Concluimos que una vez entendidas la moralidad y la empatía, el papel de la empatía en moralidad queda justificado. La moralidad no se reduce al juicio racional, sino que presupone necesariamente preferencias sociales y motivación y sensibilidad para con las demandas intersubjetivas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Competencia moral; Moralidad; Empatía; Simpatía; Juicio moral.

1. Introduction

The role of empathy within morality has been widely discussed. Some authors consider empathy an essential dimension of morality (e.g. De Waal 2008, Goldman 1992, Hoffman 2001, Masto 2015, Roskies 2011), while others claim that its role has been somehow overvalued (e.g. Bloom 2014, Maibom 2009). In this paper we are going to focus on Prinz's Kantian arguments in "Is Empathy Necessary for Morality?" (2011) where he contends that empathy is not a necessary condition for morality because it is not part of the capacities that make up basic moral competence. Presumably, he would also reject that empathy is a sufficient condition for morality, as some have claimed, such as Rowlands (2012) or Masto (2015). But in this paper we will discuss only whether empathy is necessary for morality. Prinz contributes with a negative answer, and we will defend a positive one.

In the second section, we summarize Prinz's arguments against the need of empathy for morality. On the basis of a specific understanding of empathy and moral competence, Prinz concludes, "one can acquire moral values, make moral judgments, and act morally without empathy" (p. 213). In the third section, we show that even conceding Prinz his notions of moral competence and empathy, his conclusion does not follow. Prinz's characterization of empathy can still be said to play a role in moral competence as defined by him. Having stated this, we discuss Prinz's understanding of both moral competence and empathy. In section four, we deal with the concept of moral competence, arguing that morality is not restricted to moral judgments. Instead, a morally competent subject is one that feels bound by the demands of others in interaction and whose preferences are not only self-interested. Spontaneous affective reactions, such as empathy and moral emotions, are thus also conditions for moral competence. In section five, we further criticize Prinz's notion of empathy because it is oversimplified. We contrast it with alternative notions offered by Batson (2009), Darwall (1998), Masto (2015), Wispé (1986) and De Waal (2008), among others. We also show that Prinz's notion does not apply to some central examples of empathy. Furthermore,

we contend that empathy involves a pro-social attitude by highlighting its relation to sympathy. Finally, in the last section, we argue further for a view of morality that takes into account, not just the level of rational judgment and action, but also the level of pro-social preferences and normative interactions. It is at this level that empathy plays its role. Thus, once morality and empathy are properly understood, empathy's role for morality is vindicated.

2. Prinz's Argument

The notions of empathy and moral competence are the grounds on which Prinz's argument is built. On the one hand, empathy is explicitly understood by Prinz (2011) as a kind of vicarious emotion: "it is feeling what one takes another to be feeling" (p. 212). Its main requisite is emotional convergence: the vicarious emotion needs to be similar to the one of the perceived subject; i.e. the vicarious and the perceived emotion need to converge. This emotional convergence can occur both automatically or through imagination: we can catch others' emotions either through automatic emotional contagion or through effortful imaginative processes. Consequently both imagination and automaticity are features that might be found in empathy. To talk about empathy, the necessary feature is emotional convergence: you need to feel what it would be like to be in the other's place.

On the other hand, a concrete view of moral competence is implicit across Prinz's paper, but this view is neither explicitly explained nor justified. According to him, "empathy is not necessary for the capacities that make up basic moral competence: one can acquire moral values, make moral judgments, and act morally without empathy" (Prinz 2011, p. 213). Therefore, he assumes that these three dimensions of morality cover moral competence; otherwise his argument would be that empathy is not necessary for *those* dimensions of morality and not for morality, *period*. Furthermore, what he means by each of these previous terms is very concrete and hangs on moral judgment. Paying attention to his reasoning we can infer that when he talks about moral development he focuses on the acquisition of the ability to make moral judgments; and when he talks about moral motivation he just discusses the motivational strength of moral judgments. Consequently, Prinz's morality is structured around the ability to judge morally: the ability itself, its acquisition by humans and its motivational strength.

Following this conception of morality he argues against the necessity of empathy for moral judgment, for moral development, and

for moral conduct. Or, in other words, he argues against the necessity of empathy for the ability to make moral judgments, for its acquisition in human development and for its motivational strength.

First, he contends that empathy is not necessary for moral judgment. According to Prinz, there are cases where "empathy makes no sense" (p. 214): the vital organs' case (where after empathizing with five people in need of vital organs, you start questioning whether it is bad to kill an innocent person in order to use their vital organs to save five others), the case of the Rawlsian veil of ignorance (where there is no empathy for the needy, but rather concern for the self), cases where you are the victim of moral transgressions (you do not need empathy to judge the action as wrong), and cases with no salient victim (where you can judge the action without coping with someone else's suffering). There are other emotions or dispositions, such as disapprobation, that can play a major part in both these challenging cases and the empathy-amenable ones.

Second, Prinz argues that the collected evidence is not sufficient to state that empathy is necessary to develop the capacity to make moral judgments. Against Blair's developmental model, which emphasizes empathy, Prinz criticizes the role that Blair gives to violence-inhibition mechanisms (R. J. R. Blair 1995). According to Prinz, not only are these inhibition mechanisms in a controversial status, but they cannot account for rules that involve non-violent behavior either. In addition, the moral / conventional distinction is supposed to appear in development before the association between empathy and morality. Finally, he claims that the psychopathic condition – which involves moral deficit in these patients – can be explained without appealing to an empathy deficit. Instead, a more general deficit in moral emotions could explain both the low levels of empathy in psychopaths and the lack of moral competence. Thus, Prinz concludes that Blair fails to establish that empathy is necessary for moral development. Consequently, he prefers to remain skeptical on this point.

Finally, Prinz argues that empathy is not necessary to motivate moral conduct either. First of all, research on empathy in both children and adults is quite weak to assert that empathy leads to action. Secondly, in a moral judgment the motivational impact comes not from empathy but from the emotional basis of the moral judgment itself. It is the emotions that underlie moral judgment that are motivating states. Finally, empathy – defined in terms of vicarious emotion – should have a limited motivational force: the caught emotion is weaker than the originated one, and caught emotions are mostly sadness, misery, and distress, which are not great motivators. When it comes to moral motivation, other emotions

– such as those associated with approbation and disapprobation – appear to have a greater impact. Therefore, Prinz concludes that in the case of motivating action from a moral judgment "the meager effects of empathy are greatly overshadowed by other emotions" (p. 220)

Furthermore, and still according to Prinz, not only is empathy unnecessary for morality, it is also pernicious. Empathy has some negative effects: basically, it lacks motivational strength and it tends to be highly selective because cuteness effects, in-groups biases, proximity effects and salience effects influence it. In addition, it promotes a preferential treatment for those we empathize with, and can be easily manipulated. Thus, Prinz concludes that "empathy has serious shortcomings" (p. 227) and that "in the moral domain, we should regard empathy with caution" (p. 229).

Whereas the empathic processes that Prinz mentions might not be necessary for his view of moral competence,[1] there are reasons to doubt both his characterization of empathy and his view on how a proper morally competent subject is structured.

3. The Role of Empathy for Morality in Prinz's View

Before taking issue with the main argument, we want to begin by relativizing the two main criticisms that Prinz makes of empathy: its high lack of motivational strength and its biases. Regarding the limitations that Prinz highlights, we propose: (1) that whereas the limitations may be true,[2] they do not license the inference that empathy is not necessary for morality just because it is not perfect; and (2) that these limitations make sense when the function of empathy is taken into account.

On the one hand, the limitations that Prinz mentions do not prove that empathy is unnecessary for morality. In general, the imperfection of a mechanism does not imply that it is not necessary. For instance, a peacock's tail is not perfect, given that its central function in mating hinders flight in peacocks. However, it does not follow that the tail is not necessary for flight, even for peacocks, because of its function in keeping stability.

As this example illustrates, natural selection is a satisficing process that works on what is available and under given constraints. Analogously, it may be the case that empathy is not a perfect mechanism,

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[1] We discuss Prinz's arguments against the role of empathy in each of the dimensions of morality in section 6.

[2] Find this discussion in section 6.

because of the trade-offs that were to be satisfied in our evolution; maybe it is even a by-product of some other process, a sort of spandrel (Gould and Lewontin 1979). It does not follow that, because of this imperfection, it is not necessary for morality. Thus, at this first point, we warn Prinz that empathy's limitations only allow us to assume its imperfection, but not its non-necessity.

On the other hand, the noted shortcomings depend on the function that Prinz unfoundedly awards to empathy. In line with his view of morality, Prinz expects empathy to have the ability to make objective moral judgments. Prinz assesses empathy according to this implicit criterion and concludes that empathy does not guarantee it. However, at his point Prinz commits the inverse version of the naturalistic fallacy: he infers "is" from "ought". More specifically, from a particular understanding of morality and empathy, Prinz considers that, to serve morality, a mechanism ought to help making objective and detached moral judgments, and from this "ought" he concludes that empathy is not the mechanism to generate such judgments. As empathy does not fully meet this requirement, Prinz rejects it.

However, if we adopt a different functional standpoint concerning empathy, it may turn out that such limitations are not imperfections. Rather, we must further study these features and verify to what extent they contribute to morality. In fact, the limitations that Prinz finds in empathy suggest that empathy's function is not related to judgment, but to social interaction, an idea that will be developed below.

4. Moral Competence

As we have seen, Prinz reduces morality to making moral judgments, acquiring this capacity and being motivated by it. However, there is more in moral competence than judging morally; acquiring the ability to judge morally; and being motivated by moral judgments.

To show this, we can use an adaptation of the thought experiment of Condillac's statue (Falkenstein 2010) to think about the conditions for moral competence. Imagine that we teach a robot (or a statue, as in Condillac's original proposal) some moral principles that he will be able to use to make moral judgments (think of it as a program). Consequently, this robot can reason about moral values, make moral judgments and even act motivated by his moral judgments. But from the point of view of the robot, this is just another program, just some other rules.

As a matter of fact, Prinz is aware that mere judging is not enough for morality. What else should we provide our creature with? If

we assume, as Prinz does, that moral judgments have to be intrinsically motivating states, a way to proceed would be to provide an emotional basis for these judgments, because emotions do have motivational power (Gomila and Amengual 2009). But how is it possible to ground moral judgments on emotions? And how is it that they have this motivational dimension? Notice that emotions are elicited by particular circumstances, not universal properties. Emotions may involve some sort of appraisal of a concrete situation, but this appraisal does not take the form of the application of a universal proposition to a particular case. The valuation may be sensitive to all the particular features of the context. Besides, it is also sensitive to the past history of rewards, and to its value given the current state of the organism and its needs. Thus, those very same emotions whose role in morality Prinz concedes exhibit the same limitations of empathy when a universal standard is assumed. In other words, Prinz needs to justify why partiality excludes empathy from morality, and not emotions in general.

This holds also more clearly for moral emotions – emotions whose appraisal concerns the particular interaction between oneself and the other. In remorse, for instance, one may feel that what one did to another was wrong – not necessarily wrong in general, but wrong *to* someone (Darwall 2006). A corollary of this particularism of emotional appraisals is the broad domain they open for moral conflict: one and the same situation may give rise to conflicting judgments, if different reasons are present, but it may also elicit a conflict between judgment and emotional response, or between different moral emotions that can be simultaneously felt. As Masto (2015) points out, most of morally difficult scenarios that we face in ordinary life are not like the generalized ones that Prinz mentions.

What this discussion suggests is that moral judgment is one of the elements of moral competence, but it is not the only one. According to Cela-Conde (1987), morality is made of different levels: the level of motivation, which covers pro-social preferences and second-person mechanisms (Gomila 2008), such as moral emotions or empathy; the level of normative terms; the level of moral judgment and normative codes; and, the level of ultimate ends and supreme values. From this perspective, Prinz's view is concerned with just one of the levels, and collapses the basic, motivational one, to moral judgment. However, to study the role of empathy for morality we need to investigate which is its role at each level and whether it is part of some of the levels.

Furthermore, Prinz's view of moral competence is simplistic, not only from our multi-level perspective. Thus, for instance, Haidt (2008)

includes respect for rules and the founding role of the group in his view of morality. Rowlands (2012) and also Masto (2015) and Monsó (2015), emphasize moral motivation, implicit and explicit moral reasons, moral responsibility, and the practice of giving reasons. Finally, Darwall (2006) and Gomila (2008) emphasize the inter-subjective dimension of morality: the sense that we are bound to respect the demands of others, which we experience as implicitly normative.

A fully morally competent subject, then, should have a sense of normativity, understood as feeling bound by norms implicit in the demands of others; and a set of pro-social preferences, which are elicited as spontaneous affective reactions. Being morally competent involves being sensitive to others' needs, and this aspect might require empathy.

5. The Notion of Empathy

Something similar has to be said as regards empathy, given that there is no agreement on a common definition of it. In fact, as observed by De Vignemont and Singer (2006), "[t]here are probably nearly as many definitions of empathy as people working on the topic" (p. 435), which causes "conceptual sloppiness" (Roskies 2011, p. 278). The term "empathy" refers to a heterogeneous collection of phenomena (Batson 2009, Roskies 2011, Stueber 2014) with different levels of increasing cognitive complexity (De Waal 2008). Therefore, our discussion has to involve which characterization of empathy is the best in this context.

The available definitions of empathy in the literature can be distinguished according to two features: (1) whether the consequence of empathy must be emotional convergence, i.e. both participants sharing the same emotion; and (2) whether the causes of empathy must be voluntary and cognitive processes, such as imagination, or automatic and involuntary processes. Prinz's notion of empathy requires emotional convergence, but it is neutral on whether voluntary or automatic processes cause it. Yet this definition is not a consensus view.

Both features, emotional convergence and level of automaticity, have been equally criticized and supported along the literature. First, regarding emotional convergence, Monsó (2015) and Masto (2015) see it as a necessary feature of empathy. However, there are some dissenting authors, such as Darwall (1998). According to him, any emotional response that is congruent with another's position should be interpreted as empathy, even if this expressed emotion is different from the perceived one. Secondly, regarding the automaticity of the process, some authors consider that it is a feature that depends on the empathic

phenomenon involved (Darwall 1998); others consider that it is an important feature (Monsó 2015); and others consider that it is a feature that must not be given: the necessary cause of emotional convergence must be imagination (Masto 2015, Wispé 1986). Therefore, Prinz should (a) justify his characterization of empathy according to these criteria, and (b) take into account which notion of empathy the defenders of its role for morality assume.

Prinz's notion of empathy applies to some empathic processes but not to all of them. Empathy as automatic emotional convergence is also known as "emotional contagion" (Darwall 1998; De Waal 2008; Hatfield, Cacioppo and Rapson 1993; Hatfield, Rapson and Le 2009), "emotional state-matching" (De Waal 2008), "emotional replication" (Dezecache, Jacob and Grèzes 2015), "emotional convergence" (Dezecache, Eskenazi and Grèzes 2016), "spread of emotions" (Dezecache *et al.* 2016), or "lower level empathy" (Stueber 2014). Empathy as emotional convergence through imagination is related to "projective empathy" (Darwall 1998), "proto-sympathetic empathy" (Darwall 1998), "perspective taking" (De Waal 2008; Decety and Jackson 2006, Jackson, Meltzoff and Decety 2005), or "higher level empathy" (Stueber 2014), among others. All these processes are not equivalent and, therefore, Prinz's description becomes ambiguous. Consequently, either Prinz's notion requires more concreteness, or its criticism should be put in context for each phenomenon.

Furthermore, there are empathic processes that cannot be tackled by Prinz's notion of empathy, such as "imagine another perspective"(Batson 2009). And personal distress may count as empathy in Prinz's definition, although it generally does not (Batson 2009, Maibom 2009). A position against empathy should also criticize these processes or, at least, justify its removal.

Finally, in his oversimplified characterization of empathy, Prinz tries to distinguish empathy from other phenomena such as sympathy. However, if we consider the history of both terms, this separation turns out to be more complex.

The term "empathy" ("*Einfühlung*") appeared in philosophical aesthetics to mean the ability to "feel into" works of arts and into nature, namely, expressive perception, so that we project emotional properties on objects that are not capable of emotion (Stueber 2014). From this broad conception of empathy as a human subject's affective participation in an external reality, the concept evolved to address the classical problem of other minds, as an epistemological alternative to Mill's inference from analogy; and to serve the human sciences as the unique methodological

alternative to understand subjects and their cultures (Stueber 2014). Following this view, in psychology, Titchener defined empathy as the subject's awareness in imagination of the emotions of another person (Wispé 1986). Thus, so understood, empathy is a way to know other minds: a cognitive dimension. As Wispé (1986) calls it, it is "a way of knowing."

As regards sympathy, it was introduced into behavioral sciences by Hume and Smith in discussions of moral motivation and moral development to explain how humans could know, think and feel about the feelings of others (Wispé 1986). Applied to human psychology, sympathy focuses on human social motivation (Stueber 2014) and it has been described as "a way of relating" (Wispé 1986). Specifically, it is defined in moral psychology and moral philosophy as a psychological mechanism which explains how an individual might be concerned about and motivated to act on behalf of another (Stueber 2014, Wispé 1986). Thus, sympathy includes two components: cognitive abilities to understand other persons, and emotional and motivational abilities to promote their interests (Stueber 2014). Thus, in sympathy we find two components: a cognitive one, and an emotional one.

When empathy became a topic of scientific exploration in psychology, both empathy and sympathy merged and empathy absorbed the bidimensionality of sympathy (Stueber 2014). As empathy had been attributed a role in the recognition and understanding of other subjects (Wispé 1986), empathy-related phenomena were understood as playing an important role in interpersonal understanding and motivating humans to act in a pro-social manner. Empathy's cognitive dimension incorporated sympathy's pro-social character.

Nowadays, "empathic accuracy" means the cognitive phenomenon of apprehension of another's condition, which is related to both "empathy" in its origins and the cognitive component of sympathy; and "emotional empathy" means the emotional reaction to another person who is experiencing or is about to experience an emotion, which used to be the emotionally reactive component of sympathy. As a matter of fact, none of these understandings consider emotional convergence as a necessary feature of empathy, against Prinz's view.

In conclusion, Prinz's concept of empathy is of a very particular nature. It is not the original concept of empathy, which might be equated to empathic accuracy or perspective taking, because Prinz's empathy does not need a cognitive process; neither is it sympathy, which might be equated to compassion, because Prinz's empathy does not require an appraisal, nor a pro-social attitude either. Prinz's empathy is reduced

to the emotional component of empathy, and sympathy; independent from cognitive processes, and pro-social attitudes. It is just an emotional matching.

Given this understanding of empathy, Prinz's claim of the un-necessity of empathy might be reduced to the claim of the un-necessity of emotional contagion; which turns out to be a weaker claim that we would all probably agree with.

However, the common understanding of empathy takes it to involve not just an emotional reaction congruent to that of the other, but also a pro-social attitude towards the other (Batson 2009). From this point of view, empathy has motivational force, plus an implicit valuation of the other's situation. Hence, its moral function.

6. Empathy Is Sometimes Necessary for Morality

We have shown in section 3 that even conceding Prinz his notions of both empathy and morality, his thesis does not follow. From the fact that empathy has some limitations we cannot infer that empathy is not necessary for morality. Either empathy might not be perfect, which is expectable from the process of evolution through natural selection; or empathy might have a function in morality, which is not so straightforwardly related to moral judgment as Prinz assumes. Therefore, we concluded in section 3, Prinz's thesis about the un-necessity of empathy is unjustified.

In this section, we take a step further and argue that not only is the claim about the non-necessity of empathy unjustified, it is also false. Empathy is sometimes necessary for morality, and so are other emotional and interactive phenomena. First, we defend this thesis in Prinz's understanding of both empathy and morality, and show that empathy might prove necessary for moral judgments; secondly, we defend that empathy is necessary for morality in what we consider a preferable framework.

6.1. Empathy is necessary for moral judgment

For the sake of the argument we assume that empathy is a kind of emotional convergence, and that morality is reduced to moral judgment. Even in this framework, empathy has a role for morality in the three dimensions that Prinz identifies: in making moral judgments; in learning to judge morally; and in being motivated by moral judgments.

First, empathy is necessary to make moral judgments: it has an epistemological role. As Masto (2015) argues, empathy helps us to manage with nuanced morality; to be more informed; and to know the right thing to do in a given situation. Taking the other's perspective is essential to make moral judgments, since "it does matter, morally speaking, how others actually feel" (p. 84). It does not seem so in Prinz's examples because he focuses on paradigmatic cases with already established norms. In those cases, such as the vital organs' case or the veil of ignorance, we do not need empathy to know that some action might be wrong. Yet it is in dilemmas, and other cases of conflict, where empathy proves necessary. Evidence for this claim comes from people with autism who describe how they struggle to know how to help someone, despite their motivation to help her (James and Blair 1996).

Furthermore, in these more nuanced cases it is not only empathy towards the victim what is required, but also towards an impartial spectator. Empathizing with an impartial spectator helps us grasp what he would judge. In other words, to act morally we need to take into account not only our perspective, but also the perspectives of others. As Raitlon (2016) explains, "diminished ability to simulate affectively 'what it is like' for others, or 'what it would be like' for others or for one's own future self were one to take certain actions, leaves one at a systematic disadvantage in successful navigation of the human landscape" (p. 7). Social dynamics seem to require this impartial or, in Railton's (2016) words, "non-perspectival" standpoint. Consequently, although we agree with Prinz that there *are* "cases where empathy makes no sense" (2011, p. 214), there are also many other cases which do require empathy. Even in those cases where there is not a clear victim, empathy might prove necessary to grasp the right action to follow. Morality is not only about approving certain actions, but also about being justified. Being justified, or as Masto (2015, p. 76) puts it "being morally praiseworthy", requires taking an impartial perspective, and this requires empathy.

Second, empathy is necessary to learn how to judge morally, i.e. to acquire moral values, and to be able to make moral judgments. As we anticipated in section 4, a creature without empathy could still learn a set of norms, and hence judge morally. Yet she would be clueless when facing a new situation. This is why researchers in moral robots are currently focusing on "empathic" robots, which are able to learn, rather than robots with moral norms (Asada 2015; Lim and Okuno 2015; Paiva, Leite, Boukricha and Wachsmuth 2017). Focusing on moral development, and in line with what we previously said about the epistemological role of empathy in moral judgments, Railton (2016)

states that moral learning might require taking others' perspectives through empathy. To back up his argument, Railton mentions that early damage in regions with a key role in affective simulation and evaluation, such as ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) and frontopolar cortex (FPC), can cause serious impairment in moral learning (Baez *et al.* 2014; Mendez, Anderson and Shapira 2005).

Furthermore, moral development is not limited to learning how to judge morally; it implies learning how to react to certain situations, and also acquiring a sense of normativity. In this sense, empathy has a role. It helps us to connect with others, and interact spontaneously with them. Actually, Railton (2016) mentions that empathy might work as an "alarm signal" (p. 7) to call our attention to people who might need help. Indeed, at the sight of someone in need, adults show first a distress-like response and right after that cognitive and affective responses associated with taking the perspectives of others (Thirioux, Mercier, Blanke and Berthoz 2014). Hence, empathy helps us to have a sense of normativity about what we ought to do, which is triggered spontaneously and in interaction with others.

Finally, empathy is necessary for moral motivation. As Heyes (2018) reviews it, empathy in its different forms "motivates helping and consolation behavior" (p. 502). According to Prinz, what makes the moral judgment motivating is its emotional basis. Yet how can a moral judgment have an emotional basis without empathy? For moral judgment to be emotionally laden we need a mechanism to connect with others. Empathy, together with other affective phenomena, does this job. Hence not only does empathy help us to know the right action to do, but also it makes us feel the binding force of morality by connecting us to others.

6.2. Empathy is necessary for morality

We have criticized Prinz's arguments against the moral role of empathy assuming his understanding of both empathy and morality. In this section, we show that the main limitations that Prinz sees on empathy, its lack of motivational strength and its biases, are not so beyond Prinz's reductionist frame. As we have discussed in sections 4 and 5, morality goes beyond moral judgment, and empathy goes beyond emotional convergence. In this new framework, empathy together with other emotional and interactive phenomena proves necessary for morality.

Morality is not an ideal category, consisting in making impartial and objective moral judgments from a detached point of view. Morality is a product of evolution (Tomasello 2016); it is part of men of flesh and

blood; and hence it is far from being ideal, complete, or perfect. From this naturalistic perspective, morality is grounded in inter-subjectivity, i.e. in second-personal interactions (Gomila 2008, Isern-Mas and Gomila 2018). Both evolutionarily and ontogenetically, morality emerges from interaction (Sie 2014, Tomasello and Vaish 2013, Tomasello 2016: when we interact with one another not only do we learn how we and others are expected to act, but also how we and others should act. For instance, I learn that I should not hit my sister because she cries when I do it, and because I feel indignation when someone does it to me. In the same way, I learn that I should help my friend when she is in need, because she might feel indignation if I do not do so, and I know that she would be authorized to feel that. Hence, it is through interaction that we learn both the content of our moral norms, and, importantly, the fact that others matter to us.

In our view, empathy has different functions in morality, apart from those related to moral judgment that we have previously sketched. First, empathy allows us to respond emotionally to others, before we can make any moral judgment. Morality is not reduced to a cold, and detached moral judgment; it also consists of affective, and spontaneous reactions. We react against the person who offended us before we explicitly make a moral judgment about that action. Second, empathy allows us to bond with others because by reacting emotionally towards others, either through a cognitive or an imaginative process, we link with them. Prinz acknowledges this role of empathy in establishing tight social bonds, but he focuses on the dark side of it: bullying of outsiders, and motivation for suicide bombing. These are undeniably bad consequences, but the lack of empathy and hence of bonding would have even worse consequences. If morality emerges from interaction, all those processes and mechanisms that ensure interaction become essential for morality, despite its possible negative by-products. Empathy is one of those. Finally, empathy allows us to learn what others expect from us, and hence how we should act. Even the more basic forms of empathy, such as emotional contagion, have a role to play: they are necessary for higher-order empathy (Heyes 2018; Iacoboni 2009; Meltzoff and Decety 2003; van Baaren, Decety, Dijksterhuis, van der Leij and van Leeuwen, 2009). Therefore, empathy turns out to be one of the elements which promote interaction, and hence morality.

One could say that other emotional phenomena do a better job promoting interaction, and that these phenomena do not require empathy. Consequently, even in this new framework, empathy might not be necessary for morality. Prinz would probably endorse such

a view; enhancing the role of emotions, and diminishing the role of empathy for morality. Our reply to that criticism is that we can hardly imagine how morality could emerge from a creature with emotions but no empathy at all.

First, it is difficult to imagine how someone could acquire the so-called social or secondary emotions with no empathy. To feel guilty I need to be able to put myself into the crying victim's shoes and acknowledge that I am the one to blame for her sorrow; or to feel indignation I need to be able to put myself in the transgressor's shoes and check that I acted wrong although I knew that it was wrong (Dill and Darwall 2014).

Second, if for the sake of the argument, we imagine a creature endowed with all our set of emotions but with no empathy, could that creature really interact? Interacting requires not only expressing the emotional state that something might cause, but also grasping the contingency of the one who is interacting with us (Schilbach *et al*. 2013; Trevarthen 1977, 1980; Tronick, Als, Adamson, Wise and Brazelton 1978). My expressing pride at a strike in my bowling game only counts as interaction if my expression is influenced by the others' presence, as was the case in the study of Kraut and Johnson (1979). Yet my expression of pride in front of the screen of my laptop after submitting an assignment right before deadline does not count as interaction. Given this difference, could a creature with no empathy be able to interact emotionally with others? Interaction requires recognizing the other as an agent who can react towards our expressions, and we can hardly conceive how this is possible with no empathy.

Finally, if for the sake of the argument we accept that our fictional creature can have emotions, and interact emotionally, could she have some kind of morality? For instance, she might be able to react emotionally towards someone's anger with fear; or towards someone's pride with envy. However, this creature would need to learn all these responses on the basis of the effects that those expressions had on her previously. For instance, she would need to learn that when someone shows anger one should show fear in order to avoid being hit by him or her; or that when someone shows pride it is because he got something we might desire. This situation sets at least two problems for the emergence of morality. First, our creature would not have a clue about which emotions fit better. This is a surmountable worry: our creature would just learn it by trial and error. Yet, and this is the second and more troubling worry, the creature could infer anything other than *unjustifiable* expectations. As Masto (2015) puts it, grounding morality on associative learning has worse consequences than grounding it on empathy, since "it is highly unlikely

that we have enough moral knowledge to be secure in the practice of conditioning others to feel outrage, anger, or disgust at all of the actions that we now believe are wrong" (Masto 2015, p. 82). Normativity cannot emerge out of emotional interaction with no empathy. Normativity requires taking the others' or even an impartial point of view, to decide whether the other is justified to do what he did. Without this capacity to grasp the other's standpoint or more cognitively to put ourselves into the other's place, morality is not possible.

In sum, from this perspective the two main limitations that Prinz finds in empathy, its lack of motivational force and its biases, might not be such. As for the lack of motivational force, the emotions that Prinz proposes do not do a better job than empathy. Furthermore, even the basic forms of empathy might encourage moral behavior by making us feel bound by morality. On the other hand, the so-called "biases" of empathy are only so (1) if we assess empathy according to its contribution to our capacity to make impartial moral judgments; and (2) if we understand impartiality as Prinz does. First, empathy can have other functions as we have seen in this section. Therefore, it should not be assessed only as regards its contribution to moral judgment. Second, impartiality in moral judgment is wrongly understood by Prinz as meaning that everybody counts the same. Yet from our naturalistic point of view, we have second-personal duties and obligations, which might change depending on the people involved. Even children are sensitive to our different obligations towards strangers, parents and friends (Rhodes and Chalik 2013). Thus, being impartial is not treating everyone in the same way, but not favoring one's own interest against others.

Furthermore, even if we accept this "partiality" as a problem, Heyes (2018) and Railton (2016) claim that the biases of empathy are not an innate and essential feature of empathy, but the product of a learning process. We have more empathy towards the dear and near because we interact more with them. As a consequence, one of the apparently insurmountable limitations of empathy might be overcome by interacting with agents from other groups (I. V. Blair 2002; Dasgupta and Rivera 2008; Pettigrew and Tropp 2006; Pettigrew 1998).

7. Conclusion

It might be said that Prinz is right when he states that empathy is not necessary for morality, but only if one accepts his notions of both empathy and morality, and also the function that he attributes to each of them. The problem is that both notions are highly problematic, as

we have tried to show. Moral competence is structured around moral judgment; and empathy, around emotional convergence.

First, we have criticized that Prinz equates imperfection and non-necessity, and that he does not justify the criteria (or function) under which he assesses empathy. The fact that empathy is not perfect for a function does not imply that it is not necessary. Instead, either it may be imperfect or it may help another function. Second, we have criticized Prinz's moral competence because it is too focused on moral judgment. Moral judgment is one of the levels of morality, but it is not the only one. Third, we have criticized the notion of empathy because it is oversimplified; it does not take into account all the empathic processes available in the literature, and it forgets about its relation to sympathy.

A proper view of both morality and empathy suggests, on the contrary, that empathy is required in order to be a moral agent. If morality is grounded in inter-subjectivity (Darwall 2006, Gomila 2008); the processes which allow interaction turn out to be a condition for the emergence of morality. Empathy helps at the level of pro-social tendencies and second person mechanisms, and this level is more present than abstract moral judgment in our everyday moral experience. Furthermore, if we consider this interactive aspect of empathy and morality, the pernicious aspects of empathy that Prinz mentions lose their value. Empathy is no more a mechanism to achieve objective, and abstract moral judgments, but a mechanism to favor interaction through flexible, spontaneous, and context-dependent responses. In conclusion, when morality is more than judgment about the rightness or wrongness of certain actions, and empathy is more than emotional convergence; empathy's role for morality is vindicated.

What we have outlined above are just some intuitions. A proper defense or criticism about the role of empathy for morality should: (a) analyze the positive effects of its apparently negative features and vice versa; (b) suggest one (or more than one) function for empathy which raises from its features; and, (c) to study the role that each feature might play in each level of morality. Such a huge task might throw light on the debate and help clarify both the notions of empathy and moral competence.

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