

Against Empathy

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2015/16 Humanity in Healthcare Series

This four-part series will examine the relationship between the personhood of clinicians and the organizations they serve. By exploring four specific themes, I hope to reflect a few broader questions: Do codes of ethics, organizational values, and corporate culture serve to enhance the authentic experience of care? Could institutionalized healthcare avail itself of the natural and beneficial caring aspects of human beings? Is authenticity essential to healthcare?

Part 2 *On the Roles of Humor in Healthcare*

Part 3 *Reason and Desire in Healthcare*

Part 4 *What is Dignity?*

Why empathy?



Why empathy?



- unquestioned virtue in health and professional pedagogy

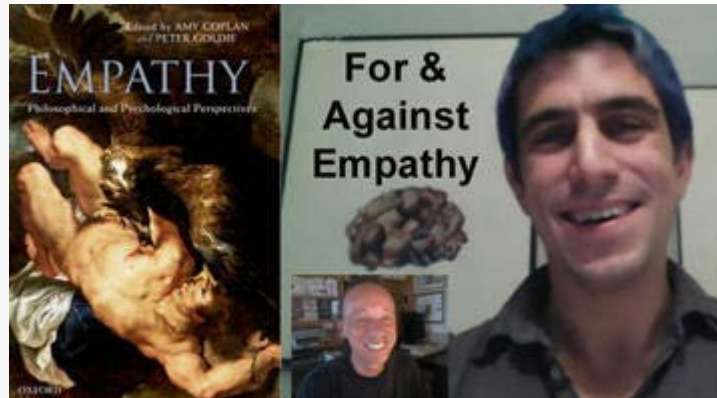
Why empathy?

- unquestioned virtue in health and professional pedagogy
- new critical work from moral psychology and x-phi

Jesse Prinz

PRINZ, J. (2011), AGAINST EMPATHY. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 49: 214–233. doi: 10.1111/j.2041-6962.2011.00069.x

Is Empathy Necessary for Morality? (Forthcoming in P. Goldie and A. Coplan (Eds.). *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.)



New Yorker, May 20 2015

A screenshot of the New Yorker website from May 20, 2015. The page features the masthead 'THE NEW YORKER' and a navigation bar with categories like NEWS, CULTURE, BOOKS & ARTS, etc. The main article is titled 'THE BABY IN THE WELL' by Paul Blumenthal. The article text on the left discusses a letter from a young girl to Barack Obama. On the right, there is a large illustration of a hand holding a globe.

THE NEW YORKER

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A CRITIC AT LARGE | MAY 20, 2015 ISSUE

THE BABY IN THE WELL

The case against empathy.

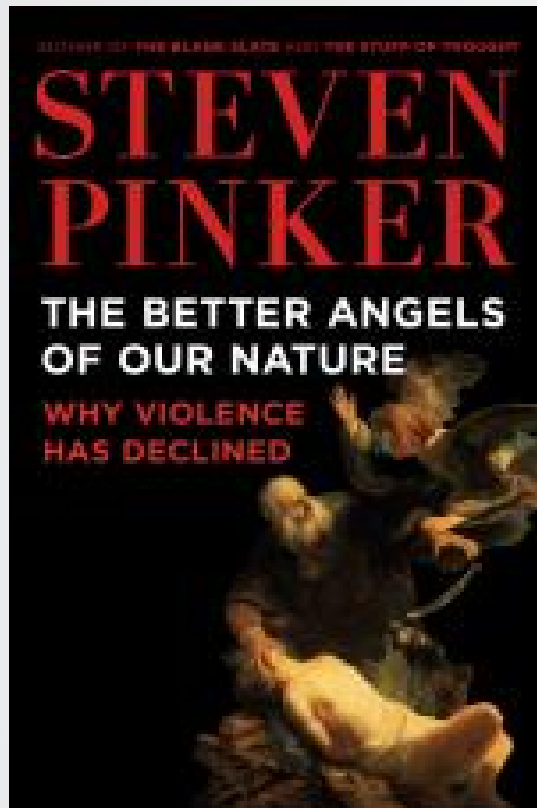
BY PAUL BLUMENTHAL

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In 2008, Kalina Escamacion, an eight-year-old girl from Missouri, wrote to President-elect Barack Obama with some advice about what kind of dog he should get for his daughters. She also suggested that he endorse recycling and less unnecessary wars. Obama wrote to thank her, and offered some advice of his own: "If you don't already know what it means, I want you to look up the word 'empathy' in the dictionary. I believe we

A stylized illustration of a hand holding a globe, set against a solid orange background. The hand is rendered in a light yellow color with black outlines, and the globe is a textured grey.

Pinker, S. (2011). *The Better Angels of our Nature*. New York, NY: Viking.



Why empathy?

- unquestioned virtue in health and professional pedagogy
- new critical work from moral psychology and x-phi
- poorly defined and poorly understood

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What are the relevant questions today?

- should we use the concept of empathy in institutional design?
- is empathy dangerous?
- can empathy be taught?
- instead of empathy, what?

What is empathy?



emotions in moral philosophy

- Plato's reason/emotion dichotomy results in the reification of reason

emotions in moral philosophy

- Plato's reason/emotion dichotomy results in the reification of reason and relegation of emotion to instinct/sentiment
- when moral philosophy is considered outside again outside theology, reason regains/retains a central focus with rare exception (Hume, Schopenhauer, James and the phenomenologists (Husserl, Scheler, Heidegger)

History of Empathy

Einfühlung of Theodor Lipps (1851-1914) (Cassina 1800?)

provides the first systematic examination of what is now referred to as the phenomenon of *mind-reading*, generally, the ability of people to come to understand the contents of another's mind.

While Lipps is concerned with a variety of questions, his account is similar to a much earlier one that introduces the important distinction I hope to discuss.

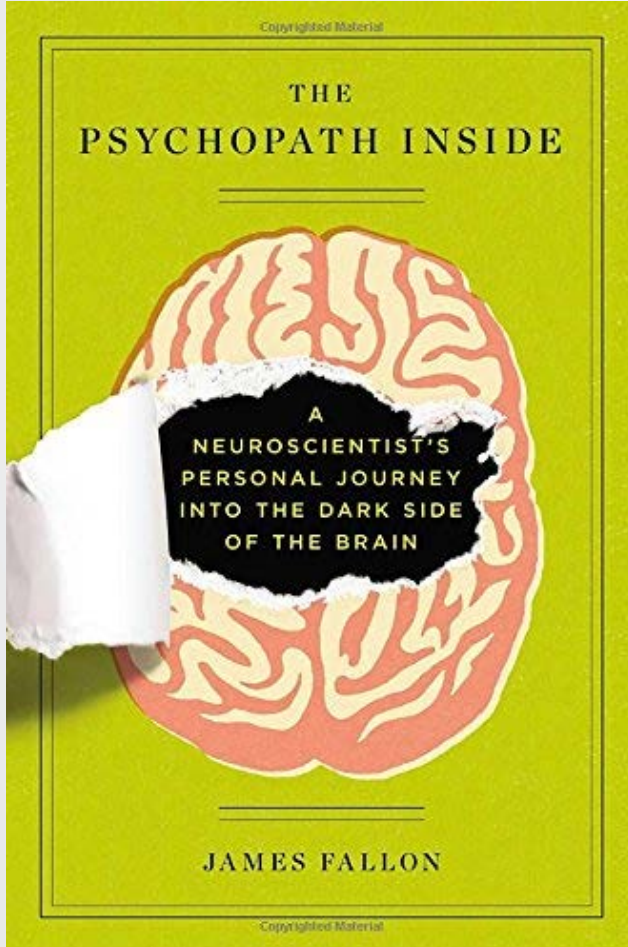
Prinz Definition

The British moralists, including David Hume and Adam Smith, used “sympathy” in way that is similar to the way I want to use “empathy.” Here is Smith (1759: II.i): “Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator.” My question, in the pages that follow, is whether empathy so-defined is necessary for morality.

Aristotle's Definition of Empathy/Compassion

- Three cognitive conditions must be met for Subject A to respond compassionately to Sufferer S.
 - Belief that the suffering must be serious
 - Belief that the person does not deserve the suffering
 - Belief that the Sufferer S shares similar possibilities and vulnerabilities with Subject A.

James Fallon cognitive -vs- emotional empathy



The Need for Empathy and The Danger of Empathy

The Death of Ivan Ilych (Louise and Aylmer Maude trans.)

He went. Everything took place as he had expected and as it always does. There was the usual waiting and the important air assumed by the doctor, with which he was so familiar (resembling that which he himself assumed in court), and the sounding and listening, and the questions which called for answers that were foregone conclusions and were evidently unnecessary, and the look of importance which implied that “if only you put yourself in our hands we will arrange everything — we know indubitably how it has to be done, always in the same way for everybody alike.”

It was all just as it was in the law courts. The doctor put on just the same air towards him as he himself put on towards an accused person. The doctor said that so-and-so indicated that there was so-and-so inside the patient, but if the investigation of so and-so did not confirm this, then he must assume that and that. If he assumed that and that, then...and so on. To Ivan Ilych only one question was important: was his case serious or not? But the doctor ignored that inappropriate question.... All this was just what Ivan Ilych had himself brilliantly accomplished a thousand times in dealing with men on trial. The doctor summed up just as brilliantly, looking over his spectacles triumphantly and even gaily at the accused.

From the doctor's summing up Ivan Ilych concluded that things were bad, but that for the doctor, and perhaps for everybody else, it was a matter of indifference, though for him it was bad. And this conclusion struck him painfully, arousing in him a great feeling of pity for himself and of bitterness towards the doctor's indifference to a matter of such importance.

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PROFESSION

Students lose empathy for patients during medical school

■ Researchers found that female medical students showed more compassion than male students.

By MYRLE CROASDALE — Posted March 24, 2008

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It only takes a year to start draining empathy from future physicians, according to a study of medical students in the March issue of *Academic Medicine*. But empathy is a key quality medical schools should promote, experts said, because it makes for better physicians.

"We know as a medical community that really good communication skills with patients help the patients to comply with the instructions of the physician," said lead study author Bruce W. Newton, PhD. "It puts them more at ease with the physician, a bond of trust is established, and if something unfortunately goes wrong, if you have this bond and communications skills, you are much less likely to be sued."

Communication experts said the study underscores other research on the value of empathy in the physician-patient relationship. They said the erosion of compassion that begins in medical school is the start of a career-long battle for physicians as pressure to become increasingly efficient squeezes out time for building relationships with patients.

The study followed 419 medical students at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, Little Rock, from 1997 to 2004. Students from four

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Confronting bias against obese patients

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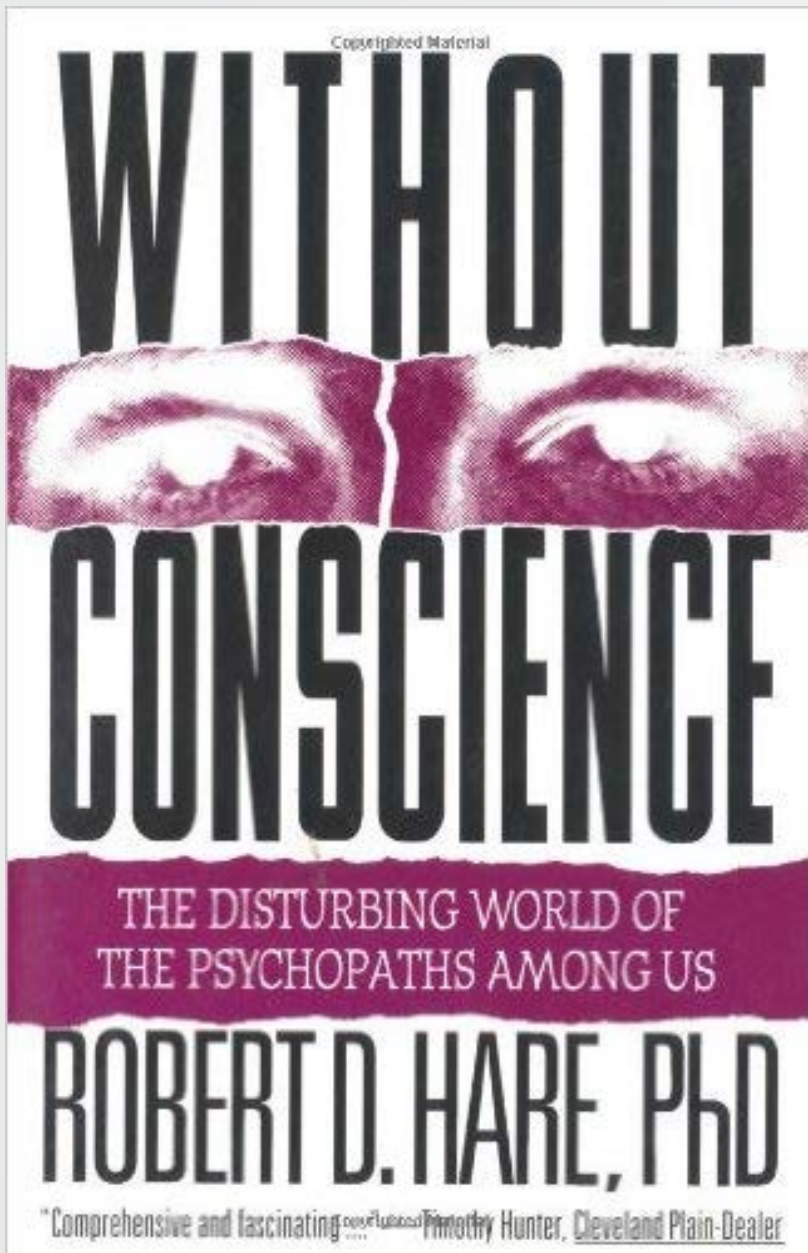
Goodbye

■ *American Medical News* is ceasing publication after 55 years of serving physicians by keeping



The Atlantic March 15th 2015





What, if not Empathy?

The Three Questions:

The thought came to a certain king that he would never fail if he knew three things. These three things were

- What was the right time to begin everything?
- Who were the right people to listen to, and whom to avoid?
- What was the most important thing to do?

The Three Questions

- The most important time is NOW. The present is the only time over which we have power.
- The most important person is whoever you are with.
- The most important thing is to do good to the person you are with.

Max Scheler

Quite a number of philosophers have alleged that the phenomenological course of fellow-feeling largely consists in a kind of comparison, which, if put into words, would run as follows: ‘How would it be if that happened to me?’ Whatever the palace of such a comparison may occupy in life, it certainly has nothing to do with genuine fellow feeling. If only because the answer would very often be, ‘Had it happened to me, with my character and temperament, it would have not been so bad; but being the sort of person he is, it is a serious matter for him’. True fellow-feeling betrays itself in the very fact that it includes the existence and character of the other person as an individual, as a part of the commiserating or rejoicing.

Compassion

The experience of compassion is a two fold phenomenon:

feeling the suffering of another combined with the incentive and motivation to alleviate that suffering.

history of compassion

- Misericordia is the Latin translation of two Greek words: (σπλαγχνιζομα) splanchnizomai, which means literally ‘to be moved in one’s bowels’, and (ελεεο) eleeo, which means ‘to have mercy for’ or ‘take mercy upon’. In the New Testament we see both terms translated as compassion in similar usages,

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion (splanchnizomai) [on him], Lk. 10:33

Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion (eleeo) on thee. Mar. 5:19

history...

The terms *racham* and *hesed* are both rendered into English as compassion, the first having similar associations with the term mercy, and the second with loving-kindness, particularly God's love for humanity.

And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion (racham) upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; Deu. 13:17

For I desired compassion (hesed), and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. Hos.6:6

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Lying Down in the Ever-Falling Snow

Canadian Health Professionals' Experience of Compassion Fatigue

'fatigue'

we discovered the phenomenon of fatigue was related not to the experience of compassion itself, but failure to satiate the first of the two phenomena. Experiencing the suffering of another while being incapable of, or prevented from, alleviating the suffering was the source of self-identified 'compassion fatigue'.

Matthew Fox

Compassion leads to works. Feeding, clothing, sheltering, setting free, giving drink, visiting, burying, educating, counseling, admonishing, bearing wrongs, forgiving, comforting, praying: all these acts of mercy are acts indeed. Though they come from the heart and go to the heart, they are not restricted to heartfelt emotions, however powerful. They all involve other people which is to say they are political activities.

Thich Nhat Hanh

It is true that the other person suffers, and that alone is worth your compassion. When you begin to understand the suffering of the other person, compassion will arise in you, and the language you use will have the power of healing. Compassion is the only energy that can help us connect with another person. The person who has no compassion in him can never be happy

But can we teach compassion?

Authenticity...

Authenticity

- the challenge of increasing compassion is creating structures and strategies of un-learning in both personal and systemic realms
- compassion is measurable, both subjectively and objectively as it is not merely feeling or sentiment but action.
- compassion is ostensive and didactic, it can be taught and it admits to expertise.

thanks

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