

An Empathy Based Account of Rational Sentimentalism

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I. Introduction

This project is an attempt to argue two things: first, that the Social Intuitionist Model can be used to advance forward a rational sentimentalist framework, and second, that empathy is necessary for both the existence and proper functioning of the Social Intuitionist Model. With the first argument, this project draws on two concepts, Haidt and Bjorklund's Social Intuitionist Model and D'Arms and Jacobson's rational sentimentalism. The Social Intuitionist Model (SIM) is a descriptive model which describes how individual make moral judgments. Haidt and Bjorklund argue that this model is sentimentalist in nature, meaning that moral judgments are nothing more than an individual's expression of their intuitions. D'Arms and Jacobson, on the other hand, construct a rational sentimentalist framework to solve what they describe as Singer's two horned dilemma. The dilemma is that, in making moral judgements, individuals can be either hyper rational or they can be strictly sentimentalist (like the SIM). D'Arms and Jacobson split the horns of this dilemma by crafting their view of rational sentimentalism, which preserves a role for both reasoning and emotions in moral judgment.¹ In making their account of rational sentimentalism, however, D'Arms and Jacobson solely offer a negative account by highlighting concerns associated with a sentimentalist view of morality and a hyper rationalist view of morality. They show what rational sentimentalism is *not* by juxtaposing it with both strict sentimentalism and hyper rationalism, but they do not advance forward a positive account of rational sentimentalism. This is the first aim of my paper, to show how a rational sentimentalist framework functions by combining it with Haidt and Bjorklund's SIM, which, while supposedly strictly sentimentalist, is actually compatible with a rational sentimentalist account.

¹ D'Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "Sentimentalism and Scientism." *Moral Psychology and Human Agency: Philosophical Essays on the Science of Ethics* (2014): 2.

The second argument I make is to show how empathy is both necessary for the existence of the SIM itself, and by relation a rational sentimentalist view, and how it is necessary for the proper functioning of the SIM. To make this argument I first draw on an evolutionary analysis of how and why empathy evolved within humans. I show that empathy emerged within humans as a way to facilitate cooperation and that the strains of cooperation led to the use of intuitions to determine whether or not an individual could be cooperated with; in effect, empathy led to, was necessary for, our using intuitions to make evaluative judgments. The second part of this argument is where my paper takes a normative turn. Whereas previously I had been describing *how* the SIM and empathy function together, in the next part I argue for the use of empathy in order to improve our moral decision-making process. This normative argument develops from the fact that empathy is necessary for our SIM to function properly as without empathy, individuals are unable to properly revise their intuitions. Since empathy is necessary for this revision process of our intuitions, I argue that individuals should strive to be what I call ‘properly empathetic’ in all situations. Finally, I describe how individuals can work to cultivate and improve their empathic abilities.

II. Constructing a Rational Sentimentalism Framework

At the core of my rational sentimentalist view is Haidt and Bjorklund’s social intuitionist model (SIM), which details how individuals make moral decisions.² This model is sentimentalist in nature, meaning that it argues for an intuitionist view of morality, i.e., moral judgments are nothing more than an individual’s expression of intuitions. Using their SIM, they argue that moral beliefs “come from a small set of intuitions that... enable and constrain the social

² Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008).

construction of virtues and values,” and that moral judgment is nothing more than the “quick and automatic intuitions” that lead to “slow, conscious moral reasoning”.³

For Haidt and Bjorklund, these intuitions are the evaluative emotions and quick gut feelings that individuals immediately experience after encountering a morality contemplating event, e.g., watching a person steal a purse or reading about child slavery.⁴ Furthermore, these intuitions are innate to individuals. What does this mean? For Haidt and Bjorklund, all intuitions within humans are comprised of five core intuitions: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, authority/respect, purity/sanctity, and concerns about boundaries for ingroups and outgroups. These five core intuitions, they continue to argue, “has a clear evolutionary story that has been told many times... and evolution has prepared the human mind to easily develop a sensitivity to [these intuitions].” In other words, Haidt and Bjorklund show that the human mind, through evolution, has been prepared to be receptive to various events that involve these five core intuitions, and an individual’s intuitional response will depend on how much their society emphasizes each of these core intuitions.⁵ While Haidt and Bjorklund might object to my using their SIM model with a rational sentimentalist theory, I argue that their model is compatible with my view and does not necessarily entail a strictly sentimentalist view of morality. Before I can make this argument, though, let us first examine how the SIM functions.

³ Ibid, 2.

⁴ The exact definition of a ‘morality inducing event’ is not entirely important. What is important are two things: 1) that these events are those that trigger some sort of intuitional response in the individual or individuals experiencing the event, and 2) that these responses may not be equal [the same?] across all individuals. For example, one individual may experience an intuition of complete revulsion after reading about child slavery, while another individual might not give the idea second thought; however, both did experience an intuition. The first individual’s intuition led them to feel revulsion, while the other individual led to a feeling of indifference. [Is this the intuition that slavery is not worth thinking further about? Because if all non-intuitions are actually intuitions, how do we individuate them? Are there an infinite number of intuitions that occur at any moment?]

⁵ Ibid, 19-21

A. The Social Intuitionist Model

The SIM is comprised of six links: 1) the Intuitive Judgment Link, 2) the Post-Hoc Reasoning Link, 3) the Reasoned Persuasion Link, 4) the Social Persuasion Link, 5) the Reasoned Judgment Link, and 6) the Private Reflection Link.⁶

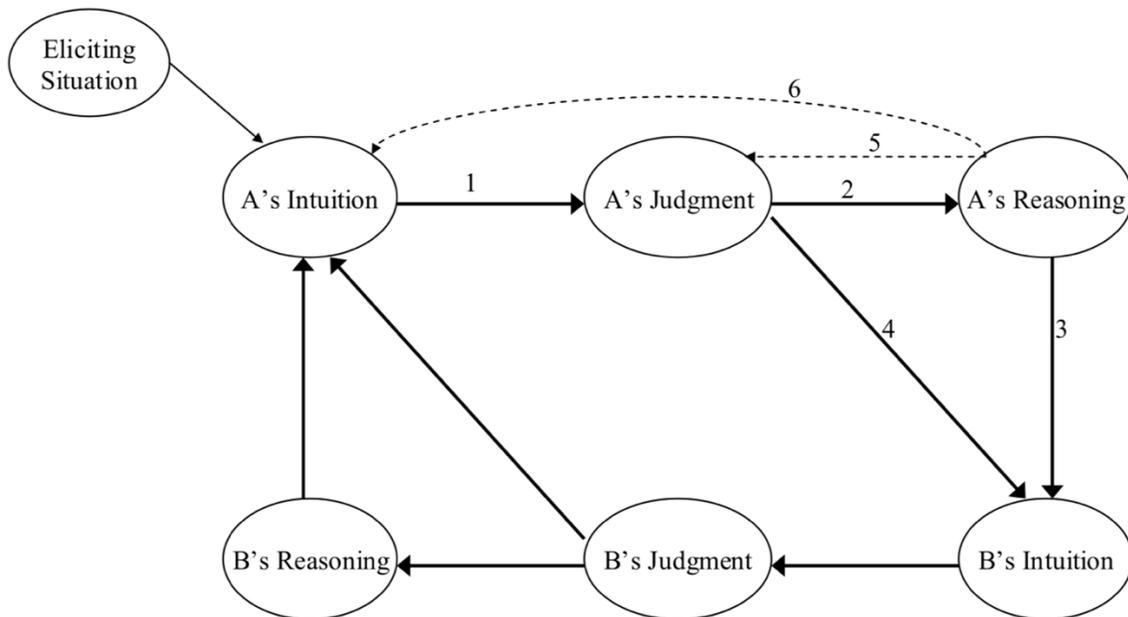


Figure 1. The social intuitionist model of moral judgment. The numbered links, drawn for Person A only, are 1) the Intuitive Judgment link, 2) the Post-Hoc Rationalization Link, 3) the Reasoned Persuasion Link, 4) the Social Persuasion Link, 5) the Reasoned Judgment Link, and 6) the Private Reflection Link.⁷

According to Haidt and Bjorkland, these links are the six steps that individuals go through when they make a moral judgment. To illustrate how this model functions, imagine that an individual named Sam sees someone lighting a cat on fire. Upon seeing this event, Sam experiences an immediate strong feeling of disgust followed by the thought, ‘this is wrong.’ This immediate feeling of revulsion coupled with the evaluative judgment, ‘this is wrong’ is the first link, the

⁶ Ibid, 7-13.

⁷ Ibid, 38.

Intuitive Judgment Link. After this process comes the second link, the Post-Hoc Reasoning Link. For Haidt and Bjorklund, moral reasoning is an effortless, but not automatic process, in which individuals “search for arguments that will support an already made judgment”.⁸ Returning to Sam, imagine she accosts the individual burning the cat who then asks her why he should stop. After a second’s thought, Sam replies, ‘because it causes the cat harm.’ Sam has just engaged in the post-hoc reasoning process, as the intuitional feeling of disgust and thought of moral wrongness occurs before *and* independently of the reason that she gives after.

What follows after this reasoning link is what Haidt and Bjorklund describe as the social part of the SIM, links 3 and 4. Using links 3 and 4, the Reasoned Persuasion Link and Social Persuasion Link respectively, an individual attempts to persuade other people within their social groups about the validity of that individual’s own moral beliefs. In social groups, Haidt and Bjorklund argue, individuals strive to reach consensus on normative disagreements and use normative discussion to strengthen relationships and bolster social influence.⁹ What differentiates link 3 from link 4, though, is that reasoned persuasion is all about the use of reasons to persuade one another, while with link 4, social persuasion, individuals use alternative mechanisms such as ostracization, inclusion in cooperative groups, etc. to persuade individuals to adhere to certain normative guidelines. In our example, Sam is already engaging with link 3 when she gives her reply as to why the other person should stop burning the cat. She may continue trying to persuade the individual to stop their actions by also pointing out the danger of the action, or by asking the individual how it would feel if they were lit on fire. Sam, however, could also engage with link 4 and use other measures to persuade the individual to stop their feline harm. For example, she could put up flyers with the person’s face, labeling them as a cat

⁸ Ibid, 8.

⁹ Ibid, 11.

burner. While Max may not care about the private reasons that Sam gives (i.e., he is immune to link 3), Max might and would probably care about severe social stigma and risk of ostracization that could arise as a result of his behavior (i.e. Max is receptive to link 4).

For Haidt and Bjorklund, links 1 through 4 are the core links and workhorse of the SIM, while the next two links, links 5 and 6, are not as essential. Link 5 is the Reasoned Judgment Link, or when an individual engages in non-post-hoc moral reasoning, while link 6 is the Private Reflection Link, which describes the process of forming a new intuition that runs counter to other intuitions that an individual holds.¹⁰ Together, these two links are what give individuals the ability to adjust moral judgments and intuitions innate to them. Why do Haidt and Bjorklund neglect these links as being important, though? They hypothesize that individuals rarely engage with these links as most people are not reflective and contemplative about their moral reasoning. Instead, they privilege the social reasoning and persuasion as the most common way individuals go about shaping and refining their moral judgments.

However, for my rational sentimentalist view, links 5 and 6 have an equally, if not more important role as they detail how individuals revise and reshape moral judgments using reason. How, then, can the SIM model be incorporated into a rational sentimentalist view if the links specific to private reasoning are hypothesized rarely to occur? I argue that Haidt and Bjorklund are mistakenly discounting the extent to which these links truly occur. As mentioned, links 3 and 4 describe how individuals seek to persuade others to change their moral judgments. While Haidt and Bjorklund describe these links in detail for the individual doing the persuading, they neglect to describe the process occurring within the individual who is being persuaded, which, I argue, is moral processing using links 5 and 6. To illustrate this, let us once again return to Sam, but let us

¹⁰ Ibid, 12-13.

now see this event through the eyes of Max, who is burning the cat. When Sam voices her displeasure to Max about the cat burning and begins giving her reasons as to why cat burning is immoral, Max is engaging in moral reflection and judgment reasoning, taking Sam's reasons and weighing the logic against his own reasons. In the end, Max may side with Sam and change his initial intuition that there is nothing wrong with cat burning, replacing it with a new intuition that cats should only be loved, or he might reject Sam's reasons and continue his practices.

Regardless, whether Max changes or reaffirms his moral judgment concerning cat burning, he has gone through this supposedly rare moral reflection process. And this processing is not limited to just this instance; instead, nearly all individuals responding to the reasons of another person are working their way through links 5 and 6.¹¹ Clearly, it would be far stranger for individuals to accept reasons without any consideration or reflection regarding these reasons.

Now there are some obvious objections to this model; however, not all objections undermine my argument. First, there is an objection as to how they can claim that intuitions always occur before and independently of moral reasoning. In response, it is important to note that Haidt and Bjorklund do not claim that intuitions *always* occur before moral reasoning, only *usually*. Furthermore, Haidt and Bjorklund provide evidence to support their claim that intuitions occur before moral reasoning by pointing to various studies concerning moral dumbfounding, which is the puzzled inability to justify a moral conviction. These studies show that the majority of the time, individuals make immediate claims of actions being 'good' or 'bad' without engaging in a process of reasoning. After their immediate claim, when pressed to provide a

¹¹ Haidt, Jonathan. "The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment." *Psychological review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814.

reason to support their initial claim, the individuals are ‘dumbfounded’ and struggle to provide any actual reasoning; their initial intuition preceded their moral reasoning process.¹²

Another objection concerns their claim that links 5 and 6 rarely occur. Haidt and Bjorklund do not present any evidence to argue for the rare occurrence of links 5 and 6; rather, they just hypothesize that it occurs this way.¹³ Furthermore, and this is another reason as to why I believe that their SIM is not exclusive to a strict sentimentalist view, they provide numerous studies of how individuals *do* engage in private reflection about moral decision making.¹⁴ It seems that Haidt and Bjorklund discredit these links more out of necessity to preserve their sentimentalist view rather than due to actual empirical evidence suggesting so. Given this lack of credible evidence and logical reasons to think otherwise, I find no reason to discount the occurrence of these links in individuals as strongly as they do; there is clearly room for reasoning within the social intuitionist model. With the SIM explained and reasoning defended, let us now move onto how the SIM functions within a rational sentimentalist framework.

B. The SIM and Rational Sentimentalism

As previously explained, rational sentimentalism sits squarely between a hyper rationalist view of morality, such as those championed by Peter Singer, and sentimentalist views, like Haidt and Bjorklund’s.¹⁵ The main advocates of a rational sentimentalist view of morality are Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson, and their rational sentimentalist view provides the framework that I will build from and incorporate with the SIM. It will be useful, though, to first describe how rational sentimentalism is different from a simple sentimentalist framework.

¹² Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008): 14-15

¹³ Ibid, 12.

¹⁴ See Selman (1971) and Tappan (1997) for how individuals engage in moral reasoning.

¹⁵ I know that currently this has not been previously explained, but in my introduction, which will eventually be written, rational sentimentalism will clearly be defined. [OK]

The main point of differentiation between these two views regards the role of reason when making moral decisions. Both views agree that reasoning is a post-hoc occurrence that happens after an intuitional feeling arises in an individual; however, whereas sentimentalists neglect the extent to which reason and rationale can shape intuitions, rational sentimentalists hold firmly that reason can and ought to be a guiding force in correcting improper intuitions.¹⁶ This use of ‘ought’ further distinguishes the rational sentimentalist view I will be working with from the sentimentalist view advocated by Haidt and Bjorklund. For Haidt and Bjorklund, their SIM was nothing more than a descriptive argument of how moral decision making occurs; there is not prescriptive force with the SIM. With a rational sentimentalist view, however, D’Arms and Jacobson are not only making an argument along descriptive lines, but also along normative lines concerning how moral decision-making ought to happen.¹⁷ By incorporating the SIM with this rational sentimentalist view, I am not only offering a descriptive claim of how moral decision-making occurs, but I am also arguing that this framework is normatively stronger (though this latter half of the argument will come later).

Importantly, though, even with these differences, rational sentimentalism and the SIM are more than compatible. A rational sentimentalist framework functions in the same way as the first four links of the SIM does, since intuitions coupled with reasons form the basis of moral judgments for both views. The only possible difficulty with combining the views is that a rational sentimentalist view places a larger importance on the role of reason than Haidt and Bjorklund imagined for their SIM. However, as I previously argued, the SIM allows for the reflective reasoning that is necessary for a rational sentimentalist view. Additionally, being

¹⁶ D’Arms, Justin, and Daniel Jacobson. "Sentimentalism and Scientism." *Moral Psychology and Human Agency: Philosophical Essays on the Science of Ethics* (2014): 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5.

charitable to Haidt and Bjorklund, even if links 5 and 6 of the SIM rarely occur, this would not create a compatibility difficulty. How so? That few individuals engage in reflective reasoning is an empirical claim that a rational sentimentalist could agree with without compromising the integration of the two views. In response, a rational sentimentalist could make a normative claim that it is unfortunate that individuals do not engage in reflective reasoning more and would, as I seek to do, argue that individuals should refine their links. But, before I make this argument, there is a final piece of my rational sentimentalist framework that needs to be explained: the role of empathy in the proper functioning of the SIM.

C. Empathy

Empathy plays a key role within my rational sentimentalist framework because as I will show, empathy is essential to the proper functioning of the SIM, and therefore, to a rational sentimentalist view. What, though, is empathy? Psychologists normally speak of empathy when they are referring to perspective taking or imagining that you are in ‘someone else’s shoes.’ However, for this paper, that is an insufficient definition of empathy. ‘Perspective taking,’ by itself, sets too low a standard for empathy.¹⁸ It is possible to pretend to be in ‘someone else’s shoes’ without actually feeling any emotional relation. Imagining that I am in someone else’s situation is not the same as understanding or fully comprehending what it is like to be that individual. To understand someone else’s situation requires *emotional engagement* on the part of the observer. Importantly, this emotional engagement is what enables empathy’s unique function, directed altruism, which I will discuss later.¹⁹ Taking all this into consideration, the definition of empathy I will use is as follows: empathy is a cognitive action that involves an observer

¹⁸ Waal, Frans B.m. De. “Putting the Altruism Back into Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy.” *Annual Review of Psychology* vol. 59, no. 1 (2008): 280

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 285.

partaking in perspective taking of an observed individual coupled with emotional engagement on the part of the observer. With a formal definition, we can now move to examine how empathy relates to the SIM. To understand this relation, though, it is important to first explain how and why empathy evolved over time, as the evolution of empathy reveals key insights into why empathy is necessary for the SIM.²⁰

i. The Evolution of Empathy

Any biological theory should be able to answer two questions: first, the theory should be able to describe *why* something is the way that it is (i.e. what its function is, the ultimate cause), and second, a theory should be able to explain *how* something came to be (i.e. what the mechanism behind the evolution was, the proximate cause). A theory that does not do both leaves something to be desired and often raises more questions than it solves. In order to avoid presenting a weak evolutionary argument regarding empathy, I explore the evolution of empathy as it relates to these ultimate and the proximate causes. To do so, I argue that empathy: 1) evolved in order to facilitate altruistic behavior and human cooperation, and 2) co-evolved along with a similar system, mirror neurons, which eventually led to the formation of a positive feedback loop.

Beginning with the ultimate cause of empathy, there exist multiple theories about why emotion and the evolution of emotion has been necessary for the evolution of other faculties, such as language and social norms. In regard to empathy specifically, there are two rather similar theories about the evolution of emotion that I believe are relevant. The first theory is that

²⁰ I want to note, importantly, that there is a lot of hesitancy to use evolutionary arguments within philosophy, as what is 'accepted' scientific belief changes frequently and there is a lot of disagreement. Even with this hesitancy, I believe that examining the development of evolutionary is important to be thorough in my account of empathy and the SIM, since Haidt and Bjorklund examine the SIM from an evolutionary perspective as well. At best, this next section accurately depicts how empathy evolved and the implications for the SIM, but at worst, take this next section as a conditional argument: what would be true if it were the case empathy evolved this way.

empathy evolved to become further directed, altruistic behavior,²¹ and the second theory is that empathy evolved in order to facilitate human cooperation.²² These two theories are related to each other in that altruistic behavior is one of the tools of human cooperation. As such, I synthesize these two theories and examine how the former leads to the latter.

In “Putting Altruism back into Altruism”, De Waal details a theory that explains how empathy aids and directs altruistic behavior. De Waal’s theory takes the form of what he describes as a three-tiered Russian nesting doll, with each layer enveloping and building upon the preceding layer. As you move from the innermost layer to the outermost layer, empathetic capacity increases and, as a result, altruistic behavior becomes more targeted. The three layers to De Waal’s nesting doll are emotional contagion, sympathetic concern, and empathetic perspective taking.²³

The base layer of De Waal’s nesting doll is emotional contagion. Emotional contagion is the mimicking of another person’s mental state. Importantly, though, this mimicking is not voluntarily; rather, it is a reflex mechanism.²⁴ An example of this emotional contagion can be seen when babies cry: when one baby starts crying in a nursery, all the other babies begin crying as well. The crying of one baby acts as a trigger for other babies to adopt the same emotions as the first baby as hearing the one baby cry causes distresses in the other babies. These other babies want relief from their distress, and, as a result, start crying as well. Is this behavior directed altruism, though? The simple answer is no. In fact, it is more accurate to classify this behavior as selfish rather than altruistic. The baby is truly not concerned with the other baby, it

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jablonka, E., et al. “The Co-Evolution of Language and Emotions.” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* vol 367, no. 1599 (2012): 2152–2159 and Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer. *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2011).

²³ Waal, Frans B.m. De. “Putting the Altruism Back into Altruism: The Evolution of Empathy.” *Annual Review of Psychology* vol. 59, no. 1 (2008): 282-285.

²⁴ Ibid, 283.

just reflexively comes to share the other baby's distress. There are indirect benefits, however, mainly the amplification of distress which increases the likelihood a maternal or paternal figure will hear the distress and come relieve it.

Building on the foundation of emotional contagion, the next layer, sympathetic concern, involves being able to distinguish between personal distress and another's distress.²⁵ As a nesting doll, emotional contagion still occurs, and individuals are able to mimic another person's mental state; however, this response is more controlled and direct. The response is more controlled in that individuals consciously *choose* to adopt the other being's emotional state rather than being simply triggered by it. Though not perfect, at this stage, humans are also able to direct their actions towards aiding distressed individuals due to a desire to help that individual. Using sympathy, individuals appraise the other's situation, attempt to understand the cause of the other's distress, and then attempt to relieve the distress. These attempts, however, do not always succeed because the individual does not fully understand the other's situation. An example of this can be seen when a toddler seeks to soothe her father's pain after he stubs his toe. The toddler understands that her father is upset and in pain; however, she does not fully understand what the cause of his pain is. As a result, the toddler may bring her father a toy in an attempt to make her father happier and ease the pain. If this action does not work, then the toddler might try a different measure, such as giving her father a hug. Through trial and error, the individual will eventually learn best how to relieve the distress of the other.²⁶ This quasi-appraisal and attempt at understanding is the true beginning of empathy within humans.

The last step towards achieving full empathic capacity is the refinement of the skills of perspective taking and emotional engagement. At this point, individuals are able to engage in

²⁵ Ibid, 284.

²⁶ Ibid, 285.

what De Waal calls “targeted helping.”²⁷ In contrast to the learned altruism of the secondary stage, targeted helping involves a *complete* understanding of the situation and *complete* emotional engagement on the part of the observer. As a result, this fully empathetic individual is able to give help to a distressed individual that is fine-tuned to that individual’s specific situation and goals. Returning to the previous example, imagine now that instead of a toddler, a teenager saw her father stub his toe. In this case, the teenager understands not only that her father is in pain, but that the pain is caused by his stubbing his toe. To help, she might go to the fridge and grab an ice pack for her father or grab some ibuprofen. As can be seen, in this case, the actions chosen by the teenager are not indiscriminate actions (like grabbing a toy); rather, they are targeted and tailored to what that individual needs to relieve the cause of the distress. This evolution of ‘targeted helping’ enabled individuals to better interact, understand, and help one another, and, as a result, facilitated cooperative behavior among humans.

With empathy’s relation to altruism explored, the question now is: how does empathy, working through altruism, impact human cooperation? Human cooperation is believed to have arisen over half a million years ago. During this time period, archaic humans lived in small bands and engaged in big game hunting along with foraging practices. It is easy to see why cooperation was a necessary precursor to these types of communities: big game hunting requires extensive reliance on one another for both the planning and execution.²⁸ Less obvious, however, and more related to empathy, is a different type of cooperation that occurred in these communities among mothers, a practice known as alloparenting. Alloparenting is the care of the young by individuals other than just the mother. Furthermore, in most cases, alloparenting involved care of the young

²⁷ Ibid, 285.

²⁸ Ginsburg, Simona, and Eva Jablonka. “Memory, Imagination, and the Evolution of Modern Language.” *The Social Origins of Language* (2014): 316–324.

by non-kin members of the community.²⁹ From a traditional fitness perspective, this practice does not make a lot of sense. The cost of raising children is huge (e.g. reduced time to engage in foraging for oneself or family members), but the benefit of furthering one's own gene line normally outweighs this cost. However, if you remove this genetic benefit, there seems to be little reason to engage in the practice of childrearing due to these costs associated with it. Therefore, at the surface, alloparenting seems to contradict traditional notions of fitness. Why would non-kin members willingly choose to engage in an apparently fitness-harming practice? The reason is empathy, and how empathy changed how humans viewed their relations to one another.

As previously mentioned, one of the important evolutionary steps for altruism was the change from self-orientation to other orientation (the move from emotional contagion to sympathetic concern). This change in perspective necessitated a good theory of mind, i.e. the ability to recognize the existence of an 'other.'³⁰ Furthermore, as I mentioned, this distinguishing between self and other enabled individuals to engage in 'targeting helping' of other individuals. What does this have to do with alloparenting? Another way to view alloparenting is the targeted and directed helping with child rearing by non-kin females. Non-kin females, most likely elderly individuals, would help rear children. These elderly females would recognize that young mothers needed assistance and would then engage in this targeted helping out of an empathetic desire to assist struggling mothers. From a traditional biological standpoint, this would not increase the fitness of the non-kin females as their own children are no longer in the need of assisted rearing, but through the lens of empathy and cooperative behavior, this practice makes perfect sense. By

²⁹ Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer. *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2011).

³⁰ Ginsburg, Simona, and Eva Jablonka. "Memory, Imagination, and the Evolution of Modern Language." *The Social Origins of Language* (2014): 316–324.

letting the younger mothers have more time to forage, more food could be gathered, benefitting the whole community. Later in life, these young mothers would then take the role of the elderly females and engage in alloparenting themselves.³¹

While this is just one case of cooperative behavior, alloparenting shows the power of empathy to reorient an individual's mindset from an inward to an outward perspective. Without empathy's unique feature of perspective taking and emotional engagement, individuals would not be able to engage in the practice of 'targeted helping'. As a result, while elderly females may still have assisted in the community, they would not have had the capacity to help mothers in a directed and focused way that enabled the mothers to leave their children to do other tasks such as foraging. Now, I do not believe empathy is the *only* factor that enabled human cooperation and alloparenting. Other factors, such as language, were necessary for human cooperation to occur as language allowed for the communication of needs.³² However, its importance cannot be understated. Empathy and the empathic connections that resulted were a necessary mechanism for humans to shift their mindset and begin cooperative practices.

With the *why* explained, I can now look at *how* empathy evolved. As I mentioned, the definition of empathy involves both perspective-taking and emotional engagement. Therefore, any explanation of how empathy evolved will also involve explaining how both of these features evolved. The evolution of both features can be explained by looking at the evolution of a closely related biological structure: mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are specific neurons in the brain that fire both when an individual is doing an action or when an individual observes another individual

³¹ Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer. *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2011).

³² Jablonka, E., et al. "The Co-Evolution of Language and Emotions." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* vol 367, no. 1599 (2012): 2152–2159.

doing the same action.³³ For example, a mirror neuron fires in my brain when I grasp a pen, but it also fires when I observe my friend grasping a pen. As a result, this dual firing allows me to receive the sensation of a particular experience (grasping a pen) even when I am not engaging in the experience myself.³⁴ Where do mirror neurons come from? Unfortunately, there is currently no direct evidence of where mirror neurons originated from. However, it has been theorized that mirror neurons evolved around the same time that early humans began developing language. The reasoning behind this is that motor neuron responses are strongest with movements associated with the mouth and hands, parts of the body used for transmitting spoken and gestural language.³⁵ This led to the theorization that motor neurons facilitated the teaching of language to other individuals in the population, and that there was a selection pressure for individuals who were able to imitate behavior the most effectively.³⁶

In what way does this apply to perspective taking and emotional engagement? The idea behind perspective taking is that I am able to relate to another individual's situation by acting as if I am them. Similarly, emotional engagement requires that my emotions are attuned to those of the 'other.' However, for both of these features, I need the capacity to imagine being in that individual's place and the ability to receive sensations of those experiences. Mirror neurons give humans this capacity. With mirror neurons I am able to observe another individual's actions and receive sensations as if I were doing those actions myself. With these sensations, I am then able to imagine and understand what it would be like to be that individual. Relating back to De

³³ Bonini, Luca, and Pier Francesco Ferrari. "Evolution of Mirror Systems: A Simple Mechanism for Complex Cognitive Functions." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, vol. 1225, no. 1, (2011): 166- 175.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 168.

³⁵ Rizzolatti, Giacomo, and Laila Craighero. "The Mirror-Neuron System." *Annual Review of Neuroscience* vol. 27, no. 1 (2004): 169–192.

³⁶ Ginsburg, Simona, and Eva Jablonka. "Memory, Imagination, and the Evolution of Modern Language." *The Social Origins of Language* (2014): 316–324.

Waal's theory, in infants, these mirror neurons give them the capacity for emotional contagion. How, though, did the other two layers of De Waal's nesting doll evolve?

Central to both perspective taking and emotional engagement and the role of mirror neurons is this idea of imitation. When an individual engages in perspective taking, they are merely imitating another individual's situation, and, through mirror neurons, they are able to receive the sensations of that situation, resulting in emotional engagement. As the capacity to imitate increased, so did an individual's ability to engage in these two activities. Ginsburg and Jablonka (2014) theorize that a driving force behind humans' ability to imitate is our desire for play. Play behavior in humans is the means through which the "young construct and practice their budding motor, perceptual, and social skills."³⁷ A large part of play behavior is pretend play. Pretend-play, or symbolic play, appears in infants around 12 months. Through pretend play, infants imitate those around them, but they also expect others to imitate them, or engage in reverse perspective taking. Over time, this capacity for pretend play aids in children beginning to develop a theory of mind, or distinguished sense of self, an essential part of higher layers of empathy.³⁸ By engaging in imitation and pretend play, children are not just having fun, they are refining their capacity and ability to be empathetic individuals.

How does all this relate to how empathy evolved? I believe there are two positive feedback loops that emerged that led to the amplification of empathic abilities within individuals. These two loops have the same beginning: the emergence of mirror neurons gave humans the capacity to imitate and engage in perspective taking and emotional engagement. Children, with their propensity to engage in play, incorporated imitation into their play behavior with pretend-

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer. *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2011).

playing. As their theory of mind developed, so did their ability to imitate. This refined ability to imitate and perform both perspective taking and emotional engagement allowed for more empathic understanding. Importantly, though, while all children could refine their ability to imitate, some children had a better innate ability to do so. Later in life, there was variation for empathetic tendencies within the population, with some individuals having a better capacity for directed altruism and others having less of a capacity. At this point, the two loops diverge.

The first loop deals with empathy and mating. These more empathic individuals, with their greater ability to cooperate, had more successful interactions with other humans. Mates of the other sex, I believe, were more likely to select these mates due to their empathic tendencies. In other words, there existed a sexual selection pressure for empathy due to its pro-cooperative nature.³⁹ As a result, over time, successive generations had higher innate capacities for imitation and empathy as highly empathic individuals produced offspring with a stronger innate empathic ability. Individuals from these generations with higher empathy were also chosen, leading to a quasi-self-domestication⁴⁰ and a ratcheting up of empathic ability over time.

The second loop relates to empathy and alloparenting. As empathy increased within the populations, more individuals, specifically females, engaged in alloparenting. This increased frequency of alloparenting, and over time, increased the average length of childhood.⁴¹ With longer childhoods, children had more time to engage in play-pretending and other imitating and empathy refining behaviors. This resulted in a higher capacity for empathy within these individuals. When adults, these individuals were then more likely to also engage in alloparenting,

³⁹ See: Arnoocky et al (2016), Moore et al (2013), and Phillips et al (2008).

⁴⁰ Jablonka, E., et al. "The Co-Evolution of Language and Emotions." *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* vol 367, no. 1599 (2012): 2152–2159.

⁴¹ Hrdy, Sarah Blaffer. *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press (2011).

further increasing the length of childhood over time, and as a result, increasing the average base empathy of the population. It is easy to see how these two loops working in tandem began building and then increasing the base empathic ability of a population.

This examination of the evolution of empathy elicits three important takeaways: 1) empathy was essential for the development of cooperative behavior among humans, 2) empathy enables individuals to engage in role play and perspective taking, and 3) within individuals, empathic abilities are able to be increased and refined, though there does exist an innate level of ability. These takeaways are important for analyzing why empathy is essential for the SIM, which is the focus of the next section.

ii. Empathy and the SIM

There are two relations between empathy and the SIM, one indirect and one direct. Beginning with the indirect, empathy is indirectly necessary for intuitions within individuals. How so? Haidt and Bjorklund talk briefly about how humans acquired intuitions from an evolutionary perspective. They detail that intuitions arose within humans due to innate sensitivities to human attributes such as loyalty, fairness, reciprocity, respect, and care.⁴² Though they do not state it, underlying all of these sensitivities is the idea of cooperation.⁴³ Humans are sensitive to these attributes because these attributes are key to determining whether or not an individual is cooperative and trustworthy. It is not controversial to state that cooperation is based on trust between individuals since cooperation, more often than not, involves short-term sacrifice for long-term gain. For example, it would be beneficial in the short term for me to lie, cheat, and steal from everyone I can if there was no way anyone would find out about it. However, the

⁴² Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008): 20.

⁴³ Haidt, Jonathan. "The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment." *Psychological review* 108, no. 4 (2001).

world does not work like this, and doing so would put me at a long-term disadvantage as no one would ever work with me or trust me again. When I act cooperatively, then, I am not only choosing to sacrifice short term benefits, but I am also trusting that the other person will choose to not defect against me. But how can individuals tell if another person is trustworthy? This is where those key concerns come into play. By being sensitive to traits of loyalty, fairness, reciprocity, respect, etc. individuals can gain insight into and decide which people are trustworthy and which people are not.

Looking at this from an evolutionary perspective, as individuals began cooperating, they had to learn which traits were associated with good cooperators and which traits were associated with bad cooperators. Over time, as Haidt and Bjorklund state, these learned associations developed into sensitivities for these key traits. What does this have to do with empathy? The first takeaway of the previous section detailed how empathy was essential for and enabled the development of human cooperation. From this takeaway, it is appropriate to say that without empathy, there would have been no mutually beneficial human cooperation. Without human cooperation, these sensitivities to these key traits would not have been ingrained and, as a result, we would not have moral intuitions. Therefore, empathy is indirectly necessary for the existence of moral intuitions and, by relation, our moral decision-making process.

Switching to the second connection, empathy is also essential to the use of reason to reshape and guide intuitions. When explaining links 5 and 6, Haidt and Bjorklund discuss ways in which individuals use reason when reflecting on their intuitions. One of the main ways they discuss new intuitions forming is through “role-taking.”⁴⁴ This ‘role-taking’ is nothing new for us though, it is just simply another name for emotional engagement through perspective taking,

⁴⁴ Haidt and Bjorklund (2008) and Selman (1971).

or empathy. In other words, according to Haidt and Bjorklund, one of the best ways in which individuals can reshape their intuitions is through the use of empathy. Though this takeaway would not be as relevant for them since they discount reason, for a rational sentimentalist view, this conclusion is important. In order to engage in reasoned judgment about our intuitions, we need to be able to connect empathetically with other people. Empathy, therefore is not just essential for our moral judgments, it is also key in our ability to refine and reshape potentially problematic intuitions. Finally, an even bigger takeaway that will be discussed at the end: improving our empathic abilities serves the purpose of working to make us more moral individuals, and we should, therefore, work to improve these abilities.

There is an objection to this view, however, that needs to be acknowledged. I have been arguing that empathy is not just essential to the SIM, as it is necessary for the evolution of intuitions in the first place, but also that it enables us to be more moral individuals by allowing us to reform potentially problematic intuitions. There are numerous individuals, such as Paul Bloom or Peter Singer, who would take issue with the statement that empathy makes individuals more moral. In *Against Empathy*, Paul Bloom argues that feelings, especially empathy, should be restricted and minimized during the moral decision-making process. He argues that empathy leads to individuals improperly privileging closer family members, as these are the people individuals naturally have stronger empathetic ties too, which leads to misguided moral decisions.⁴⁵ For example, imagine that my uncle asks me for \$100 because he wants to take his family out to dinner. Before I give him the money, though, I see an advertisement on my phone that states how \$100 could feed a malnourished child for a month in Africa. When I weigh the

⁴⁵ Bloom, Paul. *Against Empathy: the Case for Rational Compassion*. Vintage (2018): 9

two options, I feel a stronger empathic tie to my uncle and therefore give him the money. Paul Bloom, and others who share his view, would argue that empathy led me to make the wrong decision, and that I should have instead used pure reason to decide between the two options. He believes that reason would have led me to donating the money as that is the more rational choice (i.e. the choice that his preferred theory of utility favors).

Brushing aside that his argument is uncompromisingly intolerant of moral partiality, I want to look strictly at the critique the empathy leads to improper privileging, and therefore the wrong moral decision. Now, to be fair to Bloom, he does not state that empathy *always* leads to the wrong decision, but that it narrows our field of vision and will *sometimes* lead to the wrong decision. As such, he does not think that empathy can be a reliable tool for individuals to use. I want to push back on this claim, though, by first agreeing with him. Yes, the improper use of empathy can lead to improper privileging. My model, as I will shortly show, allows room to criticize individuals who use unbridled empathy to make moral decisions. It would be shortsighted of me to claim that empathy is an infallible tool for moral decision making strictly due to it arising from natural selection. However, I am not advocating for a pure sentimentalist approach where empathy is privileged above all other mental faculties. Instead, I am advocating for a rational sentimentalist view that combines both reason and empathy to refine and reform our intuitions. Individuals can and should use reason to discover the problematic intuitions that they have, and then they should seek to change these intuitions through empathic refinement. To illustrate this, in the next section, I apply my model to a case examining the treatment of an addict by a high empathy, low empathy, and ideal empathy individual.

III. Case Study: Empathy and Addiction

Before we dive into this case example, let me first explain why I am using a case study. Most ethical theories and models offer some sort of prescriptive principle that individuals can follow in order to guide them towards the right action. For example, Act Utilitarianism's principle is that individuals should do the action that maximizes the utility of the society, and Kantianism's principle is the Categorical Imperative. By offering a principle, rule-based moral theories create a universal guide that individuals can and should follow in every situation in order to aid them in their moral decision-making process. My model, however, does not lend itself to issuing such a broad, normative 'step-by-step' guide. Why? At its core, the SIM is innately situational and contextual as it depends on the differing intuitions that arise depending on what situation an individual finds herself in. Offering a detailed step-by-step guide, I believe, would not allow for the immense variability of individuals, their intuitions, and the situations that they find themselves in.

In a lot of ways, however, a moral theory is seemingly meaningless if it does not offer *something* by way of normative guidance. What good would a moral theory be if it could not at least help individuals work towards doing the right action? Straddling this line between offering a principle that is either too restrictive or too meaningless, the principle that I offer for the SIM is this: the moral action to do is what a perfectly balanced empathetic version of yourself would do in the same situation. This principle raises a lot of questions, though. What does it mean to be a perfectly balanced empathetic version of yourself, and how are we to know what this action would be? In responding to the first question, the perfectly empathetic version of yourself is the version that has grown her empathetic capacity (through means that will be discussed in Section IV) and uses this capacity to reform her problematic intuitions using the Reasoned Judgment and Private Reflection Links of the SIM.

Furthermore, drawing on Aristotle's idea of "hitting the mean" when acting, she hits the empathetic mean that the situation requires.⁴⁶ What is the empathetic mean? Thinking about empathy as a spectrum, on one end of the spectrum is callousness, which is complete empathetic detachment and disregard for the other individual. On the other end of the spectrum is reactivity. Reactivity is hyper-empathy, characterized by an overattachment to the other individual's state of being. Like drinking from a firehose, feelings overpower a reactive individual until he is unable to separate his own feelings from the other person's, putting him at risk of complete burnout and reducing his ability to maintain good judgment within the situation. This mean, or balance between callousness and reactivity, however, is not firmly set. Rather, it changes from situation to situation; one situation may require a more measured response than a reactive response, and vice versa. Part of being a perfectly balanced empathic individual is learning to discern what each situation calls for, and then acting in line with that situational 'mean.'

This description of proper empathy raises the question, though, of how my view differs from a virtue theory of ethics. In a lot of ways, the two views are quite similar; both are particularist and contextual, both have an ideal of a perfectly virtuous or empathetic individual, and both use an analysis of the mean to determine the rightness of an action. However, there are two key ways in which my empathy-based approach differs significantly from Aristotle's virtue ethics.

First, virtue ethics is a theory of ethics while mine is a moral theory. This difference is evident in the fact that virtue ethics *also* offers a theory of 'the good life' by stating that the virtuous person will have a life of *eudaimonia*, or flourishing, in addition to describing how

⁴⁶ Aristotle. *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Translated by W. D. Ross, Oxford University Press (1959): 29

individuals do the moral action. In contrast, my view strictly advances forward a moral theory arguing how individuals make moral judgments and how individuals can improve their moral decision-making. Second, my view does not incorporate the role of other virtues in the decision-making process, and, more importantly, my view does not see empathy as being a virtue. Instead, empathy in my framework functions like an Aristotelian capacity, enabling individuals to properly engage in their moral decision-making process.⁴⁷

Returning to the principle of the mean, I acknowledge that this principle may be unsatisfying as it does not seem to offer much in the way of guidance. In addition, there still remains the question as to how we can act with proper empathy. The case study is an attempt to resolve both of these concerns. By offering a case study, I can explore how the SIM and empathy functions within a specific context, which will help shed light on how the exact process of intuition refinement takes place and what it means to have balanced empathy. I will first examine the inner workings of the SIM within the specific context of the example and then consider objections. Let us move then to look at an example involving a callous individual, a reactive individual, and a properly empathetic individual in their interactions with an addict.

To set up this example, let us imagine that we have a drug addict by the name of Harry. Harry has been struggling with depression and turned to using heroin to cope; however, he has been able to conceal his drug habit from his childhood friend, Sandy. As his addictions grows, Harry has gotten more and more careless with hiding his drug use. To complicate the situation, Sandy has always had a zero-tolerance stance against drugs. Sandy firmly believes that drug users are degenerates and a blight on society and advocates for the mass incarceration of any and

⁴⁷ While these two points do differentiate my view from a virtue theory of ethics, I do admit that my view is strikingly close to virtue ethics. Though not accomplished in this paper, it would be interesting to exam these differences further and perhaps explore the ways in which these views are compatible with one another.

all drug users. While over at Harry's house one day, Sandy discovers Harry's drug paraphernalia. Sandy is shocked, confused, and unsure how to act.

A. Callous (Low Empathy) Sandy

Upon seeing the drugs, Callous Sandy (CSandy) enters the SIM and CSandy's Intuitional Judgment Link fires off a response of revulsion and disgust. However, CSandy also has a slight intuitional response of compassion as she has been friends with Harry since childhood. This intuition is incredibly weak, though, compared to CSandy's intuitional feeling regarding Harry's drug use. As a result, the feeling of compassion is overwhelmed and disregarded by this stronger feeling of disgust. CSandy then progresses to the next link, the Post-Hoc Reasoning Link, as she begins rationalizing her intuitions. CSandy tells herself that drug users choose to become addicts and that there is no excuse Harry could offer that would make his behavior acceptable.

Furthermore, she twists the situation in her mind so that she is the victim: how could her best friend do something so inconsiderate that would clearly hurt her? She becomes angrier the more she thinks about the drugs and Harry. Sufficiently ramped up, CSandy grabs the drugs and goes to the living room to confront Harry.

The encounter goes about as well as one could imagine. CSandy begins yelling at Harry and throws the drugs on the table. She calls Harry a degenerate and tells him that she cannot believe he would be so selfish and inconsiderate of her own feelings. Feeling attacked by CSandy's belligerent accosting, Harry goes on the offensive and begins shouting back at CSandy. CSandy sees that her Reasoned Persuasion argument is going nowhere and leans on the Social Persuasion Link, threatening to tell all of Harry's friends and family that he is a heroin addict unless he stops using. At this point, Harry tells CSandy to leave and that he never wants to see her again CSandy storms out. As she is walking home, CSandy plays the interaction over and

over again in her head, wondering what went wrong. However, since she is lacking in empathy, CSandy is unable to properly engage the Reasoned Judgment Link as she is unable to see things from Harry's perspective. In other words, she cannot engage in perspective taking, which is a crucial part of the Reasoned Judgment Link. She eventually convinces herself that her actions were justified and that it must be that Harry has changed. CSandy never speaks to Harry again and her intuitions remain unchanged.

There are two takeaways I want to highlight before we move to our next case with a reactive individual. First, as we can see from this example, individuals with low empathy are considerably limited in their ability to refine their intuitions. Without a robust empathic capacity, these callous individuals are unable to engage in the necessary reflection for intuitions to change and be modified as a result of experience. Now, that is not to say that these individuals will never change their intuitions. Rather, individuals like CSandy have a high empathic threshold and would therefore need a situation that elicits a strong identification in order to clear that threshold and engage in the perspective taking necessary for intuitional change. The second, albeit obvious, takeaway is that individuals with low empathy experience different intuitional responses. Since care/concern is itself a core intuition within the SIM, having an underdeveloped empathic capacity results in weaker intuitions regarding care/concern. This low empathic capacity and its implications will be fully analyzed in the final part of this section, but for now, with these takeaways in mind, let us move to the next example concerning a reactive individual.

B. Reactive (high empathy) Sandy

Like CSandy, when Reactive Sandy (RSandy) sees the drugs, her Intuitive Judgment Link fires off a response of revulsion and disgust. However, unlike CSandy, RSandy has a much higher innate empathic capacity, and as a result, RSandy also experiences a strong feeling of

concern for her friend. With these dueling intuitions, RSandy works to rationalize and understand both feelings (Post-Hoc Rationalization Link). She feels strongly that drug users are degenerates and that they cause their own problem, but she also feels strongly that Harry is one of her best friends and has been a rock in her life. Unsure of what feeling to trust, she decides to walk into the living room and ask Harry about the drugs. Harry is defensive at first, but then reveals how he has been struggling with depression and tells RSandy how good it is to finally admit to someone how much he is struggling. Upon hearing this, RSandy experiences another strong intuition of care and concern as she empathizes with Harry's situation. With another strong empathetic response, RSandy disregards her initial feelings of disgust and chooses to fully engage in Harry's emotional state; RSandy has lost her ability to maintain good judgment in the situation. Furthermore, rather than try to engage in any form of persuasion, RSandy is now just focused on the concern she feels for Harry, and she empathically relates to understand why Harry turned to drugs to cope with his depression.

After talking with Harry for over an hour, RSandy finally leaves but not before promising Harry that she will not tell anyone about his drug use. She also gives him some money because he mentioned how he desperately needs his next fix. At this point, as RSandy has become too emotionally engaged; she is an enabler of Harry's actions, doing anything that might help alleviate the pain Harry feels. When reflecting on this interaction, RSandy feels overwhelming sadness and pain as she has internalized Harry's emotions after perspective taking (Reasoned Judgment Link). As a result, she works to eliminate her intuition of disgust regarding drug use and replace it with feelings of overwhelming concern and worry (Private Reflection Link). Over time, and with repeated interactions with Harry (i.e. repeated SIM processes), RSandy is able to alter her intuitions away from disgust and towards unconditional enabling.

As with the previous example, there are two brief takeaways I want to mention before moving to the final example. First, the example of RSandy highlights the way in which a larger empathetic capacity alters the types of intuitions, and the strength of intuitions, an individual feels. RSandy experienced a more robust feeling of care in response to her interactions with Harry than CSandy because RSandy possesses a larger capability to empathize. How can I make this assertion? As previously explained when exploring the evolution of empathy, at the core of empathy is the ability to understand when individuals are experiencing distress. This recognition of distress then triggers feelings of care and concern. Therefore, the greater the capacity to discern distress, i.e. the larger the empathic capacity of an individual, the stronger the feeling of care will be. In the case of RSandy, however, she is unable to properly regulate her immense empathetic capacity. Her large empathetic capacity led to an all-consuming pity of Harry that culminated in complete indulgence of Harry's actions. The second takeaway is a quick recognition of how intuitional refinement works. It is not a one step process; rather, it is continual and repetitive. As seen with RSandy, it took multiple interactions with Harry and continual processing through the Reasoned Judgment and Private Reflection Links before RSandy was able to refine her intuitions.⁴⁸ This slow process of refinement is consistent with Haidt and Bjorklund's evidence that intuitions, at least within adults, are resistant to change.⁴⁹ Let us now move to the final example with a balanced individual.

C. Proper (mean empathy) Sandy

⁴⁸ Importantly, though, as I will later argue, just because she refined her intuitions successfully using empathy does not entail that the intuitions she now possesses are better. Since, RSandy does not have the mean level of empathy, her refinement was not as the perfectly-empathetic individual's refinement would have been.

⁴⁹ Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008): 26.

The final example involves Proper Sandy (PSandy), who possesses the mean level of empathy. When PSandy sees the drug, she experiences the same dueling intuitions as her counterparts, an intuition of disgust and an intuition of concern (Intuitive Judgment Link). Processing both of these intuitions, PSandy recognizes her inherent disdain of drug users and belief that they are degenerates on society, but she is also confused because Harry does not fit her preconceived notions of what a drug user is like. PSandy is left confused after the Post-Hoc Reasoning Link and unsure of which feeling is right. She decides to bring the drugs into the living room and talk to Harry.

Harry is defensive at first, but then reveals how he has been struggling with depression and tells PSandy how good it is to finally admit to someone how much he is struggling. Upon hearing this, PSandy experiences another strong intuition of care and concern as she relates to Harry's situation. However, this emotion does not completely override her feeling of disgust; PSandy remains angry at Harry for his drug use. Unlike CSandy, though, this anger does not lead to PSandy shutting Harry out of her life. Nor does PSandy have so much empathy that she ignores the harmful implications drug use entails, as RSandy does. Instead, PSandy is able to empathize with the hurt and pain that Harry is feeling while remaining cognizant of how dangerous his habit is. PSandy tells Harry that she will support him in whatever capacity she can, but that he needs to seek treatment for his addiction (Reasoned Persuasion Link). She then talks about how worried his family and friends would be if they found out about his addiction (Social Persuasion Link). Knowing that Harry might react negatively if she presses too hard, though, PSandy tries to listen more than she speaks in order to better understand the situation. When PSandy eventually leaves, she lets Harry know that she will continue to check in on him and that he does not have to go through this alone.

As she is walking home, she plays the situation over in her head (Reasoned Judgment and Private Reflection Links). She reflects on her interaction with Harry, and specifically focuses on her intuition of revulsion that she initially felt. Placing herself in Harry's shoes, she feels the pain that he would have felt had she been harsh and cruel, rather than caring and concerned. From this reflection, PSandy begins to understand how revulsion to drug use causes pain to the drug users themselves. However, she is hesitant to completely override this intuition, as she does not want to focus solely on her care and concern. Instead, PSandy decides to research and learn more about the most effective way to engage with drug users. She finds that while compassion and inclusion lead to higher chances of recovery for drug users, she also realizes that she needs to be careful and not become an enabler (as RSandy became). With this information and the lessons she learned through empathetic perspective taking, she works to revise both her intuitions towards Harry and drug users in general. She works to retain the feeling of compassion and concern, but also works to retain her good judgment in these sorts of situations, so as not to become overwhelmed emotionally. Over time, and through repeated interactions with Harry/repeated revision using the Reasoned Judgment and Private Reflection Links, PSandy is able to revise her intuitions.

D. Takeaways

With the examples given, I can now do an in-depth analysis and explore the broader implications of the three cases. As mentioned, I gave these examples to help explain how the SIM functions and to also shed some light on what it means to have 'proper empathy.' Beginning with the first aspect, how the SIM functions, these examples detailed the way in which an individual, Sandy, progressed through the six links of the SIM. What is important, though, is 1)

the way in which different level of empathy impacts the progression through these links and 2) the way in which levels of empathy alter the types of intuitions felt.

As the example of Callous Sandy showed, there is a base level of care and concern necessary to even engage in perspective taking. If an individual cannot engage in perspective taking, then they are increasingly unlikely to be able to process through the Reasoned Judgment and Private Reflection Links, as these two links primarily rely on perspective taking. This point underscores how vital empathy is for the proper functioning of the SIM because without some degree of empathy, individuals may not be able to revise the intuitions they have.⁵⁰ Individuals without empathy would then be static in regard to their intuitions once those intuitions had been “tuned” to their social environment during childhood.⁵¹ While too little empathy is problematic, there are also issues associated with too much empathy. Over identification, as we saw with Reactive Sandy, results in refinement that overemphasizes feelings of care and concern leading to all-consuming pity. These two extremes and the worries associated with either extreme highlights why I believe proper empathy is mean based, as too much and too little empathy leads to problematic occurrences.

This examination of the spectrum of empathy also leads to another conclusion, that different individuals possess what I will call different empathic thresholds. What is an empathic threshold? An empathic threshold demarcates the amount of identification with another person as a subject necessary for an individual to feel before they are willing, or able, to engage in perspective taking. Callous Sandy, in comparison to Reactive and Proper Sandy, possessed a much higher empathic threshold. This meant that Callous Sandy needed to have a strong feeling

⁵⁰ Now, it is true that there are other mechanisms for intuitional revision; however, the use of perspective taking, as noted by Haidt and Bjorklund is the main mechanism.

⁵¹ Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008): 21.

of identification with Harry before she was willing to engage in perspective taking, and therefore be empathetic. As we saw, though, Callous Sandy failed to be empathetic with Harry. What is the solution to this quandary? For a proper functioning SIM, individuals need to be taught to either lower their empathic threshold or be taught to experience stronger feelings of identification to clear their naturally higher empathic threshold, both of which will be discussed in the next section.

The other takeaway regarding the functioning of the SIM is how the level of empathy drastically altered the type of intuitions felt by both Reactive Sandy and Callous Sandy (Intuitive Judgment Link). Reactive Sandy's intuitions were predominantly concern-focused, while Callous Sandy's strongest intuition was the feeling of disgust she felt in regard to Harry's drug use. Proper Sandy, on the other hand, possessed a balance of these two intuitions. This observation, however, is not overwhelmingly revolutionary; it is readily apparent that individuals in society experience different intuitions. What is important to note concerning the level of empathy, though, is why I believe Proper Sandy possesses the 'mean' level of empathy.

Recall that for this model, drawing from Aristotle, proper empathy involves hitting the mean that the situation calls for. But what does it mean to 'hit the mean'? For Aristotle, hitting the mean of virtue means acting in regard to the circumstances, with the right emotions, at the right time, and with the right action; however, Aristotle does not detail what this means as it is all contextual and dependent on the circumstances. But this description is not entirely void of guidance. Aristotle argues that we can find guidance for how to act virtuously by looking to those who possess virtue and then copying their actions.⁵² How does this apply to our analysis of Proper Sandy? There are two aspects of Aristotle's description that are relevant: (1) how hitting

⁵² Aristotle. *The Nichomachean Ethics*. Translated by W. D. Ross, Oxford University Press (1959): 28.

the mean is a balance between various aspects, and (2) how individuals can look for guidance when they are uncertain about how to act.

Examining the first point, I argue that PSandy hits the mean of empathy because she properly balances her various intuitional feelings with reason.⁵³ Unlike CSandy, PSandy was actually responsive to her feelings of care and concern. Though she had feelings of disgust, PSandy allowed herself to also empathize with Harry. However, unlike RSandy, PSandy was also able to retain good judgment within the situation and remained responsive to reason. PSandy did not brush off Harry's drug problem and she did not become an enabler as RSandy did. Abstracting from this example, I believe that hitting the mean of empathy can therefore be described as being responsive to another person's feelings and experiences while maintaining good judgment and reason and not becoming overwhelmed. This 'remaining responsive to reason' is key because it allows reason to remain within the moral decision making process, i.e. when an individual is unsure about how to act.⁵⁴

Which brings me to my second point, how individuals can look for guidance when the situation becomes confusing.⁵⁵ With Aristotle, unsure individuals are encouraged to model their actions after how an ideally virtuous agent would act. My model lends itself to a similar framework, with individuals modeling their actions after how the properly empathetic agent

⁵³ Remember that a rational sentimentalist view advocates for an intuitional framework that is responsive to reason.

⁵⁴ It is important to remember, however, that proper empathy is completely contextual and situational. While this is the proper empathy for Sandy in this interaction with Harry, it is not the proper empathy for *every and all* situations. If instead of interacting with Harry, Sandy were being robbed, I certainly do not believe she should respond in a similar way. In fact, the proper empathy for a situation may be to have extremely minimal amounts of empathy, such as when being robbed at gunpoint or, drawing on Aristotle, on the battlefield.

⁵⁵ This is a good point to address the worry that my empathy-based SIM and rational sentimentalism places a large burden on the individual to 'know' how to act in every situation; however, I believe this is an unfair criticism. The SIM is meant to be dynamic and focuses more on an individual growing (i.e. revising their intuitions) than whether or not they 'hit the mean.' While I understand that the empathy model can be and is used to critique individuals who fail to act correctly in situations, I also appreciate the degree to which revising intuitions is difficult work. As such, I think growth itself can be something that is praiseworthy, not just whether or not an individual 'hits the mean.'

would act. When unsure how to act, the properly empathetic agent leans on an important source of guidance: reason. With a rational sentimentalist framework, reason is meant to shape and revise improper intuitional feelings (using Link 5 and 6 of the SIM). PSandy exhibited this when she realized she had two competing intuitions (care and disgust) and then worked to revise her intuition of disgust regarding drug addicts *after* the situation. However, how did she know that her intuition was improper?

This is where reason can serve as a source of guidance. What do I mean? When assessing her intuitions, PSandy realized that she did not know how to properly interact with drug addicts, i.e. in a way that best helps the drug addict. In other words, she used her reasoning skills to realize that she had no prior knowledge or experience of how to properly act in the situation. To remedy this, PSandy researched and worked to gain a better understanding of the best practices for helping drug addicts. She then applied this newfound knowledge to her earlier intuitional reactions to determine how she needed to revise her intuitions. It is this acceptance of uncertainty and use of external resources to learn more that is another defining aspect of being properly empathetic; no one is expected to know how to act in every situation, but they are expected to realize the limits of their understanding. As mentioned, however, this is only possible if individuals are able to maintain good judgment in the situation and not become overwhelmed by their feelings. Therefore, combining these two conclusions, proper empathy is a balancing act between being responsive to other's experiences and feelings but also remaining aware of the limitations of one's own empathic abilities in order to allow room for reason as a revising agent.

IV. How We Can Cultivate Empathy

There are three distinct ways of cultivating empathy that I want to discuss within this section: 1) engaging in proper perspective taking, 2) expanding feelings of care, and 3) lowering

the empathic threshold. Before I begin, though, I want to note that I do not believe these three ways to cultivate empathy are exhaustive. Rather, I am choosing these ways because they directly pertain to matters previously discussed within the paper. There remains room for further consideration of this topic and I believe that, if you accept the validity of my argument thus far, it is an area worth exploring.

Starting with the refinement of perspective taking, I believe this is one of the most important areas of focus as perspective taking is essential for empathy. Drawing back to the case study, both RSandy and PSandy engaged in perspective taking, but CSandy was unable to do so. Why is that? As mentioned, CSandy lacked sufficient empathy to even engage in perspective taking, that is, to be able to relate to Harry's emotional state/perspective. This lack of perspective taking, however, is more of a problem regarding her empathic threshold than the process of perspective taking, so why am I bringing it up? I want to reimagine that case slightly differently for the purpose of this section. Instead of CSandy being unable to engage in perspective taking, imagine that CSandy *was* able to relate to Harry. As she considers Harry's point of view, she comes to believe that Harry also sees himself as a degenerate deserving to be shunned. Based on this perspective taking, she then decides that her initial intuition and reaction of disgust is justified and should not be changed.

What happened here? I argue that CSandy engaged in improper perspective taking, and that instead of truly relating to and understanding Harry's emotional situation, CSandy projected her feelings onto Harry as a way of rationalizing her own feelings. This projection of beliefs and feelings has a specific name, pseudo-empathy, as described by Rae Langton. Rae Langton discusses the idea of pseudo-empathy within the realm of belief projection and how individuals project their desires onto others. She notes that "pseudo-empathy makes the transition from 'I

desire to do this' to the belief 'She desires to do this.'"⁵⁶ This transition of desires is similar to the projection of feelings within the changed CSandy example. CSandy, by way of pseudo-empathy, made the transition from 'I feel disgusted by Harry' to the belief 'Harry feels disgusted about himself.' What, though, is the worry associated with pseudo-empathy? Langton does not directly address this question in a way that is useful to this project as she is more concerned with how projection leads to sexual objectification; however, the implications of pseudo-empathy are not too hard to determine. By projecting one's own feelings onto another, the individual is truly failing to understand the other's emotional state. As a result, any actions taken using beliefs formed by pseudo-empathy will be misguided and erroneous. For example, CSandy's decision that she should act harshly towards Harry is based on an erroneous belief formed from pseudo-empathy. Even more worrisome, though, is if an individual revised their intuitions based on their pseudo-empathetic beliefs. Then, intuitional revision is no longer corrective; rather, it is reinforcing improper beliefs.

This worry of pseudoempathy underscores the need to engage in proper perspective taking and work to cultivate proper perspective taking. How can this be done? The failure of pseudo-empathy is projection rather than understanding. With pseudo-empathy, individuals project their *own* feelings rather than understand the *other's* feelings. To be empathetic, then, means working to be better at understanding another individual's emotional state so that perspective taking truly matches what that individual feels and not simply what one projects that individual to feel. This can be done by listening rather than speaking when interacting with the individual that one is trying to empathize with or by asking the individual questions to better understand how they feel. In addition, by being mindful of what the empathizer herself is feeling

⁵⁶ Langton, Rae. "Projection and Objectification." *Sexual Solipsism* (2009): 298

when they are perspective taking, the empathizer can make sure not to simply project and instead actually empathize. But what about when the individual is not someone that the empathizer can directly interact with? What if someone is needing to empathize with another person on the other side of the world or empathize with a group of people with whom they have had no prior interaction?

This is where the second method to cultivate empathy comes into play, expanding feelings of care. Richard Rorty discusses this concept within his book *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, but he calls it by a different name, ‘solidarity.’ For Rorty, solidarity is the sense of community that individuals feel as though they belong too. These communities can be anything from small groups, such as the neighborhood that an individual lives in, to sizable communities, such as the community of being an American. Importantly, these communities are not based on human characteristics; rather, they are based on the felt similarities between individuals, meaning that solidarity can transcend divisions of race, ethnicity, etc. Rorty argues that increasing solidarity among individuals will help to advance the liberal goal of reducing cruelty by increasing the care and concern felt by individuals towards others.⁵⁷ In other words, Rorty is arguing that increasing solidarity will lead to more care and concern on the part of individuals.

How, then, does he say we should increase solidarity? Rorty urges us “to extrapolate further... the inclusion among ‘us’ of the family in the next cave... across the river... beyond the sea...” and to “stay on the lookout for marginalized people – people whom we still instinctively think of as ‘they’ rather than ‘us.’”⁵⁸ This process can be achieved through the consumption of literature, film, etc. of another culture, speaking with people who we view as strangers to understand their point of view, and working to learn more about the customs and values of

⁵⁷ Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge University Press (2009): 189-198.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, 196.

people outside our community.⁵⁹ All of these tactics can help us broaden our sense of community, or solidarity, and bridge the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them.’

But, in a lot of ways, this broadening of a sense of community may not be sufficient to increase empathy. As seen in the case example with CSandy, it is possible for individuals to have such a high empathic threshold that they are incapable of engaging in perspective taking, and as result, feeling empathy for anyone. With a high empathic threshold, a broadening of an individual’s sense of community will still not lead to empathy. How so? An individual with a high empathic threshold who increases their solidarity will feel no more empathy for these added individuals than she previously felt for people when her community was narrower. This is not a failure resulting from the size of her community; rather, it is a failure of how she relates to, or better yet, fails to relate to the individuals within her community. What is the solution? Individuals not only need to expand their sense of community by increasing solidarity, but they also need to work to lower their empathic threshold by seeking to acknowledge, and not just recognize, the individuals who make up their community. What is the difference? Simple recognition is nothing more than recognizing the fact that the individual exists and that they are a subject. Acknowledgement, on the other hand, goes a step further. Acknowledgement is both the recognition that the individuals exist in the community and the acknowledgement that they are subjects worthy of being empathized with. In other words, recognition seems to place oneself as a subject above all subjects while acknowledgement lowers oneself to the status of an equal subject among many other subjects. It is this equality that enables an individual to see others as

⁵⁹ An important note to make, the type of literature, film, etc. consumed is incredibly important. If someone read novels about another culture written exclusively by white men, for example, then this practice runs the risk of not increasing solidarity, but further entrenching misrepresentations. As such, it is important then that individuals consume culture from authentic sources who truly understand the culture. This can be done by aiming for diverse representation among the creators of the works being consumed or, as mentioned, directly engaging with people from the culture.

being worthy of empathy, increasing the feelings of identification and lowering one's own empathic threshold.

For my project, then, increasing our sense of solidarity and working to acknowledge those who make up our community will allow us to better empathize properly, and avoid the pitfalls of pseudo-empathy. This broadening of the sense of community, lowering the empathic threshold, and refining one's ability to perspective take is a step in the right direction towards making individuals more empathetic. I accept, though, that these ways of increasing empathy are not a panacea and will not make proper empathy easy. There are still broader concerns about how to lower one's empathic threshold and how to strengthen the ties of empathy within individuals. Furthermore, as Haidt and Bjorklund note, the refinement of the SIM begins at a younger age, meaning that empathy cultivation should also start early during childhood development.⁶⁰

This might entail a radical reimagination of how parents rear children privately within the home, but also how we educate children in school. For example, public schools might begin offering 'empathy lessons' in order to instill in children the proper way to act empathetically. There is also the worry about to what extent adults are able to refine their empathic capacities. Is empathic ability static once the developmental years are over, or does it remain moldable? Clearly, there are other avenues that need to be explored in order to fully flesh out how to best cultivate empathy within society, but these are the topics for other papers.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the SIM *is* compatible with a rational sentimentalist account of morality and a rational sentimentalist account can be improved by using the SIM to describe individual's

⁶⁰ Haidt, Jonathan, and Fredrik Bjorklund. "Social intuitionists answer six questions about morality." (2008): 21.

moral decision-making process. Furthermore, empathy is not just necessary for the existence of the SIM but also it is necessary for the proper functioning of the SIM and intuitional revision, and, as such, improving our empathic abilities leads to improved moral decision-making. There is a reason to be skeptical of these conclusions, however. This entire argument hinges on the SIM accurately portraying how people make moral decisions. While Haidt and Bjorklund do considerable work to convince their readers that the SIM is an accurate model, there is no certainty there. As such, the strength of the conclusions of this paper are limited to the following conditional argument: if it is the case that the SIM accurately portrays how individuals make moral decisions, then these conclusions are what follows. I myself am convinced of Haidt and Bjorklund's argument, but a more thorough analysis of the validity of the SIM needs to be done before these conclusions can be taken past this conditional acceptance.

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