"I'm Here to Understand You"

The Roles of the First, Second, and Third-Person Perspectives in Empathy

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Abstract

The project of empathy marks a long-standing debate between Theory of Mind defenders and phenomenologists. While they differ on their mechanisms of empathy, their research generally circles around the same question, "Do we or do we not have access to the mind of another person?" The work surrounding this question has produced many fruitful and fascinating discussions about empathy's mechanisms and interpersonal influence. And yet, with all the focus on what empathy is doing in us, the literature has often failed to address what we should be doing with empathy. In this thesis, I propose a conceptual framework for empathetically responding to others by identifying the roles we play in an interpersonal encounter. Because our roles vary based on our relationship to the other and the context in which we are encountering them, I also offer a normative analysis of what empathy ought to accomplish. In acknowledgement that the Kantian "ought" implies "can," I integrate sociological, biological, and technological literature to address who can empathize in terms of the three-perspectives. Ultimately, my aim is to provide an educated entry point for conversation and reflection on how to communicate empathetically, whether that be as a participant in a relationship or as an academic analyzing relationships.

Introduction

The philosophical discussion of empathy ranges far and wide with respect to thinkers, disciplines, and applications. Psychologists explore empathy from the rich avenue of Theory of Mind, the idea that humans can conceptualize the contents of another's mind. Neuroscientists and biologists reference mirror neurons and peptides in search of empathy's neurochemical mechanisms. Philosophers analyze aesthetics and

ideas about intersubjectivity. Therapists recommend empathy for increased interpersonal understanding, and patients demand empathy from doctors in the hope of personalized healthcare. Empathy asks a lot of its scholars and practitioners. Yet, with all the academic avenues and personal values empathy offers, a consistent definition and list of expectations still eludes us.

Part of the trouble with empathy is its vast and diverse meanings. Colloquially, empathy can mean sharing someone's feelings. Sometimes, this entails living through the same or similar experiences; other times, it seems to be as simple as crying when someone else is crying. For those of us that want to avoid discriminating against dry eye ducts, empathy could entail merely caring about someone else's emotions and experiences. And yet, care may be asking too little or perhaps too much of the empathizer. Another definition of empathy refers merely to the capacity to imagine another's feelings – "taking a walk in their shoes" so to speak, notwithstanding whether we discard, treasure, or trash them.

For those of our friends we would call empathetic, what do they do and how do they do it? A friend of mine – we'll call her Josie – is quite empathetic. When I was crying after a really challenging week, she sat with me, listened to my laments, grabbed a Kleenex for my tears, clarified my concerns, and provided feedback for how to cope better in the future. How did she do this? Let us start with two Theory of Mind camps. Simulationism says that Josie empathized with me by noticing my tears and tense body language, mirroring that expression, associating it with her bodily reactions when she is

sad, and thereby concluding that I must also be sad.[1] However, Simulationists'

adversaries within the Theory of Mind camp, the Theory-Theorists, argue that Josie's

empathy is a result of a complex conceptualization.[2] She cannot simulate my mental

state, but she can piece together a map of my mental state based on a piecewise mixture

of my verbal and behavioral cues, her experience, and the overall environment. These

two theories differ on their mechanisms for imagining another's mental state, but both

theories and their derived hybrids foundationally agree that it is impossible to experience

another's mental state.[3] Phenomenology, on the other hand, defends the experiential

access Josie has to my state of mind.[4] It resists the idea that the only knowledge Josie has

of my sadness is in some way her own re-creation. While phenomenology does not offer

the same mechanistic appeals as the Theory of Mind arguments, it does maintain the

ownership I have over my own emotions by attributing Josie's access to something other

than her own creation.

Theory of Mind defenders, phenomenologists, and their various followers differ

on the principles of accessing another's mind and their implications, but they generally

circle around the same foundational question: do we or do we not have access to the mind

of another person? The aforementioned question has directed most of the discussion in

empathy literature in one way or another. The work surrounding this question has

produced many fruitful and fascinating discussions about empathy's mechanisms and

interpersonal influence. And yet, with all the focus on what empathy is doing in us, the

literature has often failed to address what we should be doing with empathy. Instead of

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[1] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 285-286.
[2] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 286.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 289.

asking whether Josie has access to my mind, I would like to address how Josie should *respond* to me in an empathetic encounter.

Regardless of whether we have access to another's mind, response is still a key part of empathy. After all, part of the appeal of having a "good talk" with people compared to a wall or a stuffed animal is their ability to respond in some manner – be it verbal or behavioral expressions. There have been so many times in my life when I have wanted a manual for how to respond. It would be so nice to have a flow chart for emotional responses; for example, "If someone cries, give them a tissue. If someone mentions a death, extend an arm to their shoulder and say, 'I'm sorry for your loss.'" These social conventions give us a flowchart of sorts, but I find myself getting frustrated with them a lot of the time. When my mother went into cardiac and kidney arrest, I felt like the people in my vicinity were not acknowledging the problem when they would say "Don't worry, she's in good hands," or "She's a fighter; I'm sure she'll recover." As convenient as a flowchart would be, it misses the nuance and personability being sought in moments of fragility and companionship.

Although a flow chart falls short in many circumstances, not having any directions for responses seems like a worse alternative. When my classmate announced that his parent died over winter break, standing still with no response seemed like a much worse option than uttering a Hallmark card courtesy, such as "I'm sorry for your loss." This thesis intends to address the uncertainty of the listener's role in an interpersonal discussion while also offering an alternative to social scripts. In this thesis, I propose a "framework" for approaching empathy. Rather than looking at empathetic phrasing, I offer a conceptual analysis of roles in empathy and consider their normative

consequences. This analysis will inform both empathizers and empathizees of the phenomenological dynamics in an empathetic encounter in attempt to provide a better understanding of what empathy ought to accomplish. The analysis will reference and orient itself in terms of historical and contemporary empathy literature while also integrating interdisciplinary literature and memoir-style anecdotes. The interweaving of the philosophical, psychological, scientific, and personal veins will serve as a multi-faceted source of accountability for the capacity of human empathy. After all, what good is a framework if it is neither feasible nor representative? While I do not provide the clarity and directness of a flowchart, I do hope to provide an educated entry point for conversation and reflection, either for practically applying techniques as a participant in a relationship or academically analyzing roles as an outsider of a relationship.

Chapter 1 introduces the terminology and framework for understanding empathy and how we approach it. The first section defines three, useful cognitive approaches, based on the first, second, and third-person perspectives. The first-person perspective in this context refers to the "I" language we bring to conversations with others. It is most often used when citing personal experience as a form of understanding another person's mindset. In attempt to distance our viewpoints from personal experience, the third-person perspective refers to the analytical objectification of another's experience with the intent to consider the experience in and of itself. This perspective becomes apparent in a type of scientific analysis of another's experience. Finally, the second-person perspective refers to a more elusive, interpersonal lens of another's experience; it acknowledges that the mode of sharing an experience changes based on one's relationship to another person. After defining the three perspectives, Section 2 integrates this language within the four-

part framework proposed by philosopher and psychoanalyst, Lou Agosta, in his History

of Philosophy dissertation, titled *A Rumor of Empathy: Rewriting Empathy in the Context*

of Philosophy. Ultimately, I accept his four dimensions of empathy, but I will revise his

framework by adding language, referencing the first, second, and third-person

perspectives. Although Agosta acknowledges the contribution of the first, second, and

third-person perspectives, Chapter 1 will more concretely implement the language of

these perspectives into his framework in order to clarify the different roles we encounter

in empathy and provide a non-technical language for describing such roles within an

empathetic setting.

Chapter 2 offers a normative analysis of what empathy ought to accomplish. This

chapter utilizes a common definition of empathy while also accounting for the fact that

expected responses are role dependent. For instance, we expect empathetic doctors to

respond differently than empathetic friends. But are these expectations justified? Is

empathy something not just freely *offered*, but *owed* by virtue of one's role? In the course

of this chapter, I will answer these questions in three different case applications. What do

friends owe one another in terms of empathy? What do therapists owe their clients?

Finally, what do doctors owe their patients? In addressing these questions, I will explore

the normative foundations of Kant's four moments of aesthetic judgement:

disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and necessity. Ultimately,

I will argue that my definition of empathy can be used to legitimize and explain role-

dependent empathetic responses, in terms of Kantian aesthetic judgements.

At this point, we will have constructed a framework for empathy and discussed

how to apply it without ever questioning whether the philosophical applications are

feasible for biological beings. And so, Chapter 3 explores the question, "Who can empathize?". To address this question, I will analyze psychological, sociological, neuroscientific, and technological literature about the components and mechanisms of empathy and consider whether the first, second, and/or third-person perspectives were accounted in the variable of empathy. Referencing sociological theories and psychological studies, I will first consider the relevance of transposing perspectives for childhood development. Next, I will consider whether neurologically atypical populations, such as Psychopaths, have the capacity to transpose perspectives. Building on this biological discussion and pushing into technologically relevant frontiers, I will inquire about whether non-biological, artificially intelligent beings can empathize. To accomplish this, I will review the mechanisms of machine language processing and reference them in terms of the BingChatbot transcript, as released by the New York Times in February 2023. Finally, I will compare these machine learning "mechanisms" to human mechanisms and end with a reflection on whether empathetic human relationships are replaceable or reproduceable by machines.

Collectively, this thesis strives to offer a conceptual analysis of empathy by identifying common philosophical themes in various interdisciplinary approaches to the topic. Much of the content incorporates modern and contemporary philosophy, but it will also dabble in psychotherapy, neuroscience, sociology, and computer science sources as well. The goal is to acknowledge empathy's varying applications while also clarifying its unifying characteristics. This project acknowledges that empathetic statements account for the subjectivity of various individuals while also exemplifying the normative "Thou Shalt Not's" that generally disturb empathetic attempts, no matter who the listener is. By

better clarifying empathy academically, we can more effectively influence and inform what ought to be practiced socially and personally. Perhaps this will change who we think can empathize and how we strive to measure empathy. Regardless of academic background, communication style, or profession, I have found the language of the first, second, and third person perspectives useful when inquiring about what types of responses others seek in our conversations. And so, this thesis proposes the framework of the first, second, and third person perspectives as something replicable for a broader audience and valuable to further academically develop.

Chapter I: How Do We Think About Empathy?

In this chapter, I will detail the elements of empathy. Firstly, I will describe three different perspectives that affect our approach to empathetic thinking. The first addresses the role of personal experience. The second highlights our relationship to the other during empathy. Lastly, the third provides a perspective of analysis, usually presenting in the solutions we provide to people seeking empathy. While each perspective is described separately, I acknowledge that they do not truly present themselves separately. Rather, empathy includes all three to different degrees, depending on the scenario. This becomes more apparent in Section 2 when we will discuss the four stages of an empathetic encounter, including empathetic receptivity, empathetic disposition, empathetic interpretation, and empathetic response. While these stages are borrowed from empathy scholar, Lou Agosta, I will be adding the first, second, and third-person perspectives to increase clarity and continuity. Moreover, this chapter will include a thorough historical foundation for how these stages have been previously described in philosophical literature. Ultimately, this chapter aims to provide a conceptual framework for better identifying, understanding, and communicating empathy.

Section 1: Introducing a New Framework

Empathy functions within relationships. The more roles we play in our relationships, the more dynamics inform (and complicate) our attempts at empathy. When I am empathizing with my mom, am I empathizing with her as her daughter, a woman, or a conveniently available roommate? Inevitably, all of these roles inform how I perceive what she is sharing. Sometimes, more information is helpful. As her daughter, I have more familial background information. As a woman, I may have some shared sociological and biological recognition of roles. As an inhabitant of her space, I am

generally available and willing to listen if for no other reason than respect of social bonds and submission to the hierarchy of the house. However, for all the helpful information these roles contribute, they also leave many avenues for distraction. Perhaps I reference an older family feud that is no longer relevant. Perhaps I fall into using her experience as an example for wider social commentary. Perhaps, my expectations of my mother distract from my ability to understand that she is also a human, a woman, a perfectionist, and not the same Wonder Woman I imagined at age 7. When my ability to empathize falls short, it is helpful to be able to identify and bracket which bias got in the way.

One method of fragmenting empathetic encounters into artificial divisions for analysis is by identifying first, second, and third-person perspectives. The first-person perspective comprises the personal experiences we bring as analytical tools. The second-person perspective prioritizes relationality to another person, as facilitated by their presence. Finally, the third-person perspective captures our ability to step back and objectify the encounter as an approach to analysis. On a practical level, these perspectives come about based on how we organize ourselves as subjects in the English language. On a philosophical level, these divisions are reflected in the aforementioned approaches to empathy in the literature– whether they be psychological, phenomenological, or neuroscientific. Two prominent psychological theory camps, the simulationists and theory-theorists assume a type of 1st-person perspective, approaching empathy from how the empathizer is experiencing it. Phenomenologists, aesthetically-founded theorists, focus more on the second-person perspective in that they ascribe empathy's ownership to the shared space and understanding *between* the two or more people, restricting it from being due to any singular party. Neuroscientists take a type of object-oriented, third-

person approach in order to isolate relevant components with an outsider-style impartiality. This triptych framework naturally reflects our daily language and academic literature. Therefore, it lends itself readily to describing the types of perspectives used in an empathetic encounter, particularly in a way that is readily articulatable to both popular and academic audiences.

The First-Person Perspective

The claim we have to our lived experiences is encompassed by the first-person perspective. If nothing else, it brings physical familiarity to interpersonal discussions. After all, sharing a physical experience with another, either previously or simultaneously, provides a unique set of information. I call this type of shared bodily information "somatic resonance." There is a unique type of intimacy that being physically familiar with another's experience offers. There is an indescribable resonance that I feel when discussing what it was like to go to college in another state with someone who has studied abroad; there is less pressure to verbally articulate all the physical features of the experience because the listener who went to college with me or also lived in other states or countries resonates with my experience on a somatic level. Of course, the level of resonation will depend to some extent the similarities of the experience.[5] It also really depends on the personality of the person processing the experience. It also will depend on the personality of the person hearing the comparison. The first-person perspective is not meant to capture another's experience, but it does give a point of access.[6] There is less burden on the verbal description because the 1st personal listener carries a bodily one.

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[5] The idea of similar experience was borrowed from Alfred Schutz's concept of directness. He proposed that the directness of relationship accounts to some extent for the ability to empathize. For example, a wife can empathize with her husband's illness in a different and more "direct" manner than his customers.
[6] Rizzolatti and Sinigaglia, *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions and Emotions*. 79-115.

Even though their experience is not identical to mine, they carry a greater depth of informational access than someone who cannot somatically resonate with me at all.

With that said, sometimes those with the same lived experience do not even remotely resonate with me. In fact, it can feel like they project their own thoughts about the event as if it represents how I feel. This often happens between siblings. Somehow, my four siblings and I were raised in the same house, but our memories and the emotional valence accompanying them differs greatly. Where I may have felt the impending pressure and liability of setting a bad example for younger siblings, they recall my experience of one with authority and privilege. In this case, the first-personal experience my siblings have of our shared environment is more inhibitive than informative when trying to explain my recalled experiences to them.

Another inhibitive use of the first-personal perspective is often referred to as emotional contagion in empathy literature. Emotional contagion refers to the case when your emotion "infects" someone else or vice versa.[7] Let's say that when I cried in front of Josie, she mirrored my tears. My sadness has infected her with her own overwhelming sadness, and the focus of the conversation may even shift to sadness-evoking events in her own life. There are several inhibitive measures in emotional contagion. Firstly, it stimulates a shift in focus from the sharer to the listener who is now consumed by her own emotion. In this case, I served less as a conversationalist and more-so as a catalyst for Josie's need for emotional release.[8] This is akin to watching "tear-jerker" movies for the sake of crying. Yes, the storyline where the dog dies is tragic, but I am now more

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[7] Zahavi and Overgaard, "Empathy without Isomorphism: A Phenomenological Account," 5-6.
[8] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 290-291.

consumed by my own tears than Lassie's welfare. This is not to say that all impacted by emotional contagion do not care about the listener or intend to discard their welfare. For the sake of our example, let's say that Josie is my best friend, and I can defend that she very much cares for my welfare. But, in the case of her emotional contagion, she lost the message I was trying to convey amidst the distracting tears.[9] What she took away was the tears I exhibited, but no real understanding of why.[10] At this point, Josie's ability to interpret my experience is colored by her own reasons for being sad.[11] Ultimately, the key distinguisher between emotional contagion and empathy is that emotional contagion adopts the emotional expression at the expense of understanding and interpretation.[12] The first-person perspective offers a unique insight into the experience of the sharer, but it can also be inhibitive. Acknowledging the capacity and limitations of the first-person perspective allows us to utilize its knowledge where appropriate while deferring it when it is not.

The Second-Person Perspective

Where the first-person perspective may distract us, the second-person perspective draws us into the other's experience. Prioritizing relationality, the second-person perspective requires putting aside the ownership and easy access of your own first-person perspective for the sake of engaging the other's first-person perspective.[13] This is the part of empathy that utilizes "walking in someone else's shoes." Such quippy and welcoming statements notwithstanding, utilizing the second-person perspective is demanding. To

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[9] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 290-291.
[10] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 80-82.
[11] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 290-291.
[12] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 80-82.
[13] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 290-291.

some extent, it requires a temporary relinquishing of personal identity and autonomy in the name of "putting on" someone else's.

Analogous to Humean sympathy, the second person perspective revolves around unbridled appreciation of the other person's presence. Not only does the listener put aside his own preferences to take on the perspective of the other, but the listener develops an appreciation for these approaches from the perspective of the sharer. [14] Why does the sharer do things this way? Why is he approaching this situation with these feelings, reactions, and/or thoughts? This appreciation in no way requires the empathizer to ethically agree or personally adopt the practices of the other, but it does demand a willing vulnerability – letting the approaches of the other confront and consume your own.[15] This is distinct from emotional contagion because you are not appropriating or reclaiming the feelings of the other.[16] In fact, in the second-person perspective, the senses are used to intentionally focus on the presence of the other.[17] From the second-person perspective, I acknowledge "you," – your thoughts, your approach, your experience. The ownership is "yours," and the only claim I have to ownership is, not to the emotions, but to the shared space that I am participating in with you.[18] Within the second-person perspective, listeners become aware of their closeness to the other in the interpersonal discussion.[19] "You" conveys an intimacy and intentionality missed by "she," "he," "they," or "it."[20]

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[14] Lou Agosta builds his framework based on his interpretation of Hume's four uses of sympathy. The second-person perspective corresponds to Hume's commentary about appreciating the experience of the other. While Hume does not include a normative component in sympathy, I will be addressing normative, albeit non-moral, elements of empathy in Chapter 2.
[15] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 5-6,100.
[16] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Shutz," 290-291.
[17] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 2.
[18] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 104-107.
[19] Buber, *I and Thou*, in passim.
[20] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 132.

This brings us to the crux of the second-person perspective – the acknowledgement of the *relationship* I have with the sharer in the moment of empathy.

When the other chooses to share their emotional state with you, it is because there is something unique you bring to the experience (or re-experience) of the emotion.[21] While the "buy-in" to the empathetic space requires the self-relinquishment into the second-person perspective, you are not meant to stay there.[22] Once you have engaged and understood the other person's perspective from their viewpoint and appreciated the beauty of their approach, you can move into offering your personal experience and objective analysis. The second-person perspective is a critical segue because it prioritizes presence and offers an accountability to the experience of the other, but it is ultimately the insight of the first and third person perspectives that offer advice and growth for the other.

The Third-Person Perspective

The third-person perspective distances the listener from the situation in order to objectively analyze it. Not only does this require relinquishing the biases of the first-person perspective, but it also requires bracketing the newfound knowledge from the second-person perspective. The third-person perspective detaches itself from interpersonal and emotional context of the relationships involved in order to classify and critique the situation. This does not necessarily mean that the situation being empathized with is a problem. Even if it is just an observation, the third-person perspective offers an informative abstraction.

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[21] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 104-107.
[22] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 109-115.

This perspective is evidenced in the approach of social workers, especially those who serve on crisis lines. When a caller reaches out to a social worker about a domestic violence issue, the social worker must be able to bracket any personal revulsion towards the situation. If the social worker is overwhelmed with disgust, then she will fail to respond with a solution. Similarly, if the social worker becomes distracted by an interpersonal relationship with the caller, then she will not prioritize the details relevant to the crisis. Good crisis social workers exhibit the ability to ask relevant questions and diagnose the situation in a clear but sensitive manner. This ability manifests from the third-person perspective.

While the separation from interpersonal interest is what gives this perspective its analytical prowess, the third-person perspective would not be the optimal first approach in a sensitive interpersonal discussion. The same depersonalization that provides unparalleled analytics also lacks the necessary connection to comment on someone's life so abruptly.[23] No one likes to be objectified, and the third-person perspective is inherently objectifying. With that said, its usefulness redeems it, but only after the listener has done the work of approaching and appreciating the experience and reasons of the other.

Ultimately, the three perspectives offer three different ways to envision and articulate another's experience. The first-person perspective references personal experiences as a comparison point for understanding others, usually more focused on the person than on the content. The second-person perspective offers acknowledgement of

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[23] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 57.

the space the experience is being shared in rather than the experience itself. Finally, the third-person perspective provides objective commentary about the content of the other's experience, irrelevant of the person who shared it. By dividing approaches to empathy into three different perspectives, we can better understand where attempts at empathy result in mishaps. Frankly, some perspectives may come easier for us than others, and our propensity to be overly personal or overly scientific may impede our ability to communicate with those who find these approaches off-putting or unrelatable. Not only do the perspectives give us a framework for understanding our own approaches, but they also provide terminology for communicating which parts of another's communication style we would like more or less expressed. Even if we like one perspective more than another, analyzing what each perspective does provides clarity for what the perspective is offering. When we apply these perspectives to empathy, we can better understand and communicate where we are relating to another and where we need to improve.

Section 2: The Language of Perspectives applied to Agosta's Framework

The First-Person Perspective and Empathetic Receptivity

Different empathizers may apply each of these perspectives in different ratios, but each of the first, second, and third-person perspectives are required to some extent by empathy. To further understand how each of these perspectives is used during an empathetic encounter, we need to identify what we mean by empathy and divide it into identifiable stages. By empathy or empathetic encounter, I mean any conversation I have with another person or persons which requires confronting the other's point of view in some way. In his dissertation, Agosta identifies four "dimensions" of this broad definition

of empathy – empathetic receptivity, empathetic understanding, empathetic interpretation, and empathetic response. Empathetic receptivity refers to an observer's capacity to observe empathetic information.[24] Empathetic understanding refers to the observer's disposition when receiving empathetic information.[25] Empathetic interpretation accounts for the observer's ability to analyze the empathetic information. Finally, empathetic responsivity provides a forum for acknowledging what the sharer has expressed.[26] The first three dimensions or stages correspond with one of the three perspectives, and the fourth stage, empathetic response, incorporates all three perspectives to different degrees.[27] Ultimately, Agosta's multidimensional framework serves as a helpful model for organizing different types of empathy, and the perspectives behind each of these stages can be communicated to the empathetic audience using the first, second, and third-person perspective language.

The multidimensional model's first dimension, empathetic receptivity, broadly addresses someone's ability to recognize the emotionality in another's expression. Let us imagine sitting in the back corner of a coffee shop, minding our own business when we are suddenly disrupted by the shriek of a woman on the other side of the room. After looking up from our laptops, we see her slam her phone on the table and exhibit a muffled combination of cursing and crying. After taking note of the situation, we return to our reading. While we didn't walk over to offer comfort, we did perceive her reacting in some way; this perception is called empathetic receptivity – the capacity to sense

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[24] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 4, 14-18.
[25] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 5-6, 19-21.
[26] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 6, 22-25.
[27] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 6-7, 26-28.

another's emotional presence.[28] Note that this "receptivity" does not require us to engage with her in any way; it merely refers to our capacity to sense that something happened to cause the scream. Now, at this point, we have no accountability to the experience of the other. Our sense capacity is tied to our own bodies and processed through our own perspectives. In other words, the product this perception produces is empathetic receptivity, and the mechanism by which we are getting it is branched under the "first-person perspective."

Just as first-person perspectives vary based on the sensory capacity, personality, and self-awareness of an individual, empathetic receptivity depends on a person's awareness of their environment. It requires that an individual can distinguish themselves from the outside world in some way and respond to it accordingly.[29] And so, it is at the stage of empathetic receptivity that contestations about empathy in autism and psychopathy arise.[30] Some are thought to have either missing or "broken" machinery for sensing the emotional valence of expressions.[31] This view generally assumes that if these individuals lack the necessary machinery to apprehend my expressions, then they are incapable of empathizing with me. One of the underlying assumptions here is the Lippsian idea that people empathize by simulating each other's experiences.

Theodor Lipps, the first philosopher to describe empathy, developed a mechanism for apprehending empathy from the first-person perspective. Let's say I observe someone crying. Driven by Lipps' Instinct of Empathy, I would imitate the crying, and this

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[28] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 14-18.
[29] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 14-18.
[30] Vivanti and Rogers. "Autism and the mirror neuron system: insights from learning and teaching," https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2013.0184.
[31] Ramachandran et al. "Broken Mirrors: A Theory of Autism," 1-6.

expression would stimulate memories of crying.[32] Assuming that these memories of

crying were considered sad, then I could determine that the other person was sad based

on my own reflections of sadness. If I expressed sadness in some other way than crying,

then I would not be able to determine that the other person was sad. This becomes

particularly relevant in psychiatric cases in which, rather than sobbing, some may laugh

hysterically to convey devastating sadness. Can only the insane empathize with the

insane in this Lippsian framework? Or, perhaps more fairly, the sane would think they are

empathizing with the insane, never to realize from their projected single-mind map that

they never accessed the other at all.

Ultimately, Lipps takes for granted that our expressions contain mental life. The

capacity to receive is equated to the capacity to interpret, resulting in a not-so-subtle fall

into the fallacy of subreption.[33] It is very possible that one person's method of expressing

sadness differentiates from another person's method. Lipps anticipates this by arguing

that the first-person perspective accomplishes a mere approximation of the other's

emotion. While it is reasonable to think that someone else cannot possibly be different

enough from me to not understand my empathetic attempts at all, the approach of

empathy-by-approximation undermines the goal of receiving the other's experience. In

Lipps's mechanism of self-projection, the emphasis is on creating rather than sharing, and

this is foundationally prohibitive, even if the product is occasionally effective.

If this sounds familiar, it is because emotional contagion occurs when another's

emotion leads to the "creation" of our own. Lipps very clearly describes a mechanism for

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[32] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 130.
[33] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 54-62.

emotional contagion: someone else is crying; I cry; I conclude I am sad; therefore, the other must be sad.[34] Part of the reason Lipps's account is relatable is that emotional contagion cleverly and frequently masquerades as empathy.[35] It is not unheard of to share about our devastating day at work with a particular friend only to have that friend describe how they also had a just as horrible or, daresay, worse day! They don't just stop at the description of their day. They describe how it made them feel and equate their feelings to your feelings. Sometimes, their "emotional trump card" closely represents your own. Other times, I find myself thinking, "No, that's not what I felt at all!" or "Get your grubby hands off my feelings!" While their personal anecdotes can sometimes provide helpful approximations of our experiences, they also distract from our feelings by changing the ownership of the narrative.[36] At best, they approximate empathy. At worst, they reclaim my feelings from the perspective of someone else.

While Lipps' methods for generating empathy are clear and easy to understand when simulating the life of another, emotional contagion discounts the variability we have from others, cheapening their understanding of our experiences to a generalized copy of their own.[37] Regardless of how distracting someone's personal experiences might be when trying to process another's emotion, it doesn't take a lot of mental cartwheels to conclude that they might actually experience something different from us.[38] Shallow observations and a little listening would lead us to understand that another's upbringing, education, and livelihood could mold their experiences differently from ours. Similarly,

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[34] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 54-62.
[35] Ibid
[36] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 86-87.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 131-132.

our grasping of another's mental state is not limited to what we can simulate. In a comical example borrowed from Scheler, we can comprehend that a dog is happy without wagging our own tails.[39] Perhaps our experiences provide helpful "lessons" about their experiences, but it is in no way claiming to be equivalent to their mental processing of their experience. The distinction between advice and perception is critical in the empathetic space because we often jump to the advice section before we are sure that we have perceived an actual problem or engaged in an experiential relationship other than our own.[40] In other words, in using the first-person perspective to try to empathize with another, we missed the mark of empathy entirely and landed on a self-absorbed approximation of empathy.

The emotional contagion explained by Lipps exemplifies what happens when we engage in the first-person perspective for too long. No longer is our ability to personally access another person been helpful; instead, it is actually decreases our ability to relate to another person. Rather than just using the first-person perspective to sense another and signal their pain, we have let it define our interpretations and responses as well.[41] Part of the power of the senses is their capacity to signal the boundaries of our bodies. The same mechanisms that tell us where we are and how we feel introduce sources for what is around us and what caused our feelings.[42] Even a child who burns her finger on a stove starts to understand that there is an outside cause of that heat-transferred pain. In the first-person perspective, we recognize the pain, but fail to recognize the medium of transference. However, optimal empathetic receptivity requires our ability to use our

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[39] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment, and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz," 290.
[40] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 51-52.
[41] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 51-52.
[42] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 14-18.

senses in a more nuanced and mature way – to recognize and signal the pain of another,

not pain of our own.[43] In other words, at the moment of empathetic receptivity, we need

to be able to recognize the use of the "I" perspective in the senses and acknowledge that

the first-personal ownership ends at the sensing. Otherwise, the continual use of "I"

conveys selfishness and judgement which creates more repulsion between the two people,

thereby inhibiting the formation of the interpersonal space.

The Second-Person Perspective and Empathetic Disposition

After sensing the presence of another's pain, we need to shift from the perspective

of "*I* sense pain" to "*You* are communicating pain to me." This shift from the first-person

emphasis to the second-person emphasis is present in Agosta's second dimension,

empathetic disposition. Empathetic disposition refers to how we orient ourselves to

another after we have sensed their pain, joy, fear, or other communicated state.[44] When

we enter into the presence of another person, they have the capacity to be much more

than a mere stimulant to our senses. Unlike being stimulated by inanimate object, like a

stove, there is the capacity for relationship with a person who stimulates our senses in

some way.[45] Through our shared experience in a common space with another, we can be

accountable to how the other person feels in sharing information with us in a way we

cannot be accountable to how the stove feels when it burns us.[46]

This access and accountability to another is defended by empathy theorists within

the realm of phenomenology. Max Scheler, Lipps' contemporary and critic, argues that

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[43] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 14-18.
[44] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 5-6.
[45] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 19-21.
[46] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 135.

humans do have experiential access to others.[47] Firstly, he rejects the idea that mimicry or simulation is required for empathy.[48] While simulation may explain why someone comes to acknowledge a feeling in themselves that is similar to another, it does not describe how they come to understand another – the goal of empathy.[49] From the experiential standpoint, Scheler argues that Lipps overgeneralizes; Lipps never clarifies how similar someone's experiences have to be in order to resonate with another.[50] Scheler agrees that Lipps describes something essential, but disputes that it is empathy.[51] To Scheler, empathy is the mechanism that allows humans to transcend their own experiences and *dispose* themselves to understanding the experience of another.

When practicing Scheler's empathy, an observer encounters another as "an expressive unity," a psycho-physical composite that conveys intellectual intent in their expression. After encountering the expression, observers analytically divide the intellectual from the physical and focus their attention either inwards at the intentions or outwards at the expression.[52] Theoretically, this would allow viewers to understand that the Joker is actually sad or nervous even though he is smiling and laughing. However, because of the complexity of properly isolating ideas from their ambiguous expressions, Scheler insists that the other's thoughts will be concealed until they open themselves to you.[53] This mention of opening to another's communication of emotion calls upon the empathetic disposition and the second-person perspective; and yet, Scheler leaves this

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[47] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 133.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid
[50] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 83-96.
[51] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 83-97.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other Directed Intentionality," 133-134.

aspect of his empathetic model undeveloped.[54] Nevertheless, by challenging Lipps's projective empathy and arguing for the necessity of communication, Scheler opened a space in empathy literature for addressing the crucial role of relationships for manifesting empathy.

Building on the relationship gap identified by Scheler, Husserl attempted to provide a phenomenological mechanism for being accountable to another's thoughts. For Husserl, practicing empathetic disposition requires that the empathizer identify as the other.[55] Not only must he take up the motives and ideas, temptations and pleasures of the other, but he must also put aside his own. "By empathy, I grasp what motivates him and how strongly it does so, with what power. And, I learn to understand inwardly how he behaves, and how he would behave under the influence of such and such motives."[56] This identification as the other is distinct from the first-personal attribution of the other's feelings seen in emotional contagion. Rather than projecting one's own ideas onto another, Husserl argues for inward assimilation of the other's ideas.[57] In fact, it is putting aside the first-personal ownership and projection for the sake of engaging solely with the first-person perspective of the other. This acknowledgement of the other's ownership and engagement with the other's perspective respects the accountability characteristic of the second-person perspective.[58] And yet, it also fails to preserve the unique relationship between self and other so critical in the second person perspective, reducing the other's

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[54] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 83-97.
[55] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 83-96.
[56] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 99.
[57] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 2-8.
[58] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz," 295.

experience in empathy to the type of relationship they could have by looking at themselves in a mirror or talking to a clone.[59]

Let's revisit the crying woman in the coffee shop. As a Husserlian empath, I would sit down, ask her what was wrong, acknowledge her ownership of the situation, then allow her to pour all her thoughts, distresses, angers, and reactions into our shared space. I am able to contribute nothing to the shared space because everything I have come to know about this empathetic episode is from the woman "opening her mind" to me.[60] While this transcendental engagement with the other preserves the other's ownership, it discards the first-personal personality that observers bring to an empathetic encounter. In other words, Husserl's mechanism detaches empathetic disposition from empathetic receptivity, resulting in a floating other ungrounded by any relationship to a personality other than themselves.[61] It is a type of reverse emotional contagion, where I, as the empathizer, get lost in the feelings of the other. In trying to elevate the level of the empathizer's understanding, Husserl loses the personal nature of empathetic encounters and makes the empathizer a formless lump for others to morph and shape as they will.[62] In trying to defend a new type of self-knowledge that occurs in the listener, Husserl erases any pre-existing knowledge that informed their receptivity and attentiveness to the other.[63] Ultimately, with Husserl, my relationship to the other becomes non-existent because all that I am gets absorbed in "you," making the other seem like its own type of anti-I.[64] In order to preserve the second-person perspective, my mentality needs to be

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[59] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz," 295.
[60] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz," 294.
[61] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 97-119.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid
[64] Ibid

preserved as distinct from the other while also explaining the newfound knowledge I can gain from their experience through orienting myself towards them with an open disposition.

In fairness, Husserl does acknowledge the equal claim of the empathizer to the first-person perspective and the sharer's claim to the second-person perspective, but he struggles to describe a mechanism for this without falling into arguments of solipsism or analogy.[65] One fascinating avenue he explored was reconstructing Leibniz's monadology. According to Agosta, Leibniz's monad is "the unification of a psycho-somatic organism in a lived body with deeply integrated intentionality."[66] While the claim to a single individual intensifies the risk of solipsism, the psycho-physical and intentional aspects undermine the physically-divorced and other-permeating claims of Husserl's Fifth Meditation.[67] Leibniz's monad allowed a sense of self-preservation amidst other individuals, unharmed by projection. Even better, the reconstructed monad is aware of other monads around him who inform him but are not responsible for his own sense of consciousness or meaning.[68] A Husserlian monad will delve into his own consciousness for meaning. When his sense of ownness can no longer be reduced, he will be confronted by the expression of another. "A monad thus has windows…The windows are empathy."[69] Reconstructing Leibniz's monadology allows Husserl to reengage empathetic receptivity and regain some of the power of the first-person perspective.[70]

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[65] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 97-119.
[66] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 111.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 111-115.
[69] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 113.
[70] Ibid.

Ultimately, Husserl strives to preserve the accountability of the second-person perspective but fumbles on describing what it looks like in relationship to an empathizer.

Edith Stein provides us with a type of second-person perspective with an open empathetic disposition by differentiating the role of the empathizer from the sharer and articulating the unique contribution they provide in an interpersonal space. She points out the shame seen in a blush is in response to someone, hinting at an already existing relationship, even if it is merely superficial and reactionary.[71] There is a unique response elicited because of the particular presence of the two people in the shared space.[72] We can imagine someone sharing a story and responding with joyful laughs to one person and with awkward smirks to another. Stein differentiates these phenomena by stating that the expressions in an empathetic interaction are unique to the shared space or *sui generis*, although the experience behind the event may not be.[73] And so, the empathetic space fosters a "co-originality."[74] Empathy is like memory in the sense that the thing that is recalled is not original, but the space it is being recalled in is original. In Stein's empathetic space, both the sharer and the listener dynamically interact and impact each other. This resonates with Husserl's intention of a shared space while also respecting the original expression of the empathizer. It restores empathetic receptivity because the empathizer has an original capacity for receptivity rather than being a clone-able receptacle of someone's emotional dumping.[75] Stein gives each party a place as a first-personal participant without taking away the ownership of the sharer to the experience.[76]

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[71] Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* 70.
[72] Zahavi, "Empathy without Isomorphism," 8-9.
[73] Szanto, Thomas, and Dermot Moran. "Edith Stein." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[74] Ibid.
[75] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 103-109.
[76] Zahavi, "Empathy and Other-Directed Intentionality," 134-136.

Each participant is given an original, first-personal claim to their reaction with the second-personal respect for the other's place in the empathetic space. It is Edith Stein, building on the work of Scheler and Husserl, that provides us with the fully realized second-person perspective of empathetic disposition.

Agosta named this acknowledgement of relationship in empathetic literature, empathetic disposition. Empathetic disposition is the stage of empathy where we realize that we participate in a community where others experience in similar but distinct ways, and the other's experiences are accessible to us.[77] It is possible that we never come to this realization, and that is a critical problem that results in much self-projected empathy and emotional contagion.[78] While empathy's goal is community, not all the theories have fostered a space for it. For Lipps, the other's perspective is inaccessible and possibly nonexistent since all empathy becomes a projection of a first-person perspective locked within the mind of a lonely individual.[79] Scheler criticizes Lipps' projective model and develops the necessity of community through "vicarious experience."[80] And yet, he leaves the space for communicating this experience conspicuously undeveloped.[81] Husserl defends the other's ownership of her experiences in the empathetic encounter, thereby opening a space to talk about how perspectives are shared between individuals.[82] Despite this new opportunity, Husserl continually loses grasp of the listener's contribution to the conversation, making anyone who listens in an empathetic space seem like an open, impersonal void for emotional dumping. While he tries to redeem the first-

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[77] Agosta *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 98-99.
[78] Agosta *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 80-82.
[79] Zahavi, "Empathy without Isomorphism," 7-8.
[80] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 83-97.
[81] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 93-97.
[82] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 97-118.

person perspective through reconstructing Leibniz's monad, he ends up with a somewhat sloppy collision of psycho-somatic monads. The value of this approach is that it reveals the importance of self-reflection and personal experience as the source of meaning; the downside is that the other person's experience doesn't seem to have any value for informing you your experiences until you're forced to encounter it. Edith Stein gets us out of this monad-solo-disco by introducing the concept of co-originality. The empathetic space is less about one person shooting an experience toward a receiving other and the other shooting something back. It's more-so a space of dynamic expression – where past experiences are re-encountered, processed, and sometimes evaluated in a unique manner by two unique contributors who produce a unique expression of the past experience. This dynamic space for encountering the other and oneself in a co-original way is explained by empathetic disposition.

The relationship that requires acknowledgement by the listener has already been acknowledged by the sharer to some extent. After all, they chose to communicate something to "you," even if it is just because you were present and willing to listen. More importantly, how they chose to share something with "you" is based on who you are, the context under which he approached you, etc. There is an intentionality in the communication in this space, and this intentionality is communicated with "you"-directed language.[83] In other words, the second-person function of language allows us to not only communicate, but also to acknowledge that we live in a world, relational to others.[84] Even if it is just through sentence rephrasing, shifting from "I" language to "you"

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[83] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 1-8.
[84] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 1-8.

language represents a drastic change in perspective within empathy – one that communicates respect for another's ownership of their feelings, the presence of an interpersonal space. Even if we do not verbalize any of our thoughts, the language that we use within our minds to understand another changes our perspective and approach. At this point of empathy, we have not done any judgement, only encountering through the senses and reorienting ourselves to the information in our minds.[85] Sometimes, being this close to the other person and communicating to them in "real time" makes it difficult to make judgements.

The Third-Person Perspective and Empathetic Interpretation

Cognitively distancing ourselves from a personal connection with another can be helpful in a similar way to telling someone to look at their situation from an outsider's perspective. There is a type of clarity and objectivity that comes about from observing from an onlooker's perspective, and this distance is maintained by the third-person perspective. Different from the ownership of the first-person perspective and the intimacy of the second-person perspective, the third-person perspective is very object-oriented.[86] The statement, "She is distraught," does not make any claims about your state or your relationship to her. Instead, it communicates an impartial observation about another person.

In the example of the woman at the coffee shop, we might be able to provide more objective feedback about what she should do about her relationship with her mystery caller if we do not also know the mystery caller (1st person perspective) or adopt

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[85] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 1-8.
[86] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 5.

all her complex and confusing feelings towards him (2nd-person perspective). The third-person perspective is a necessary intellectual exercise when analyzing another's experience if for no other reason than thoroughness of perspective.[87] With that said, the third-person perspective practiced on its own tiptoes dangerously near ignorant insensitivity, or worse, blatant self-righteousness at the other's inability to be "objective." I have also been guilty of telling the coffee shop girls of my life, "Wow, that was foolish," or "Girlie, you're not being very objective about this." As impatient and annoyed as I was with her at the time, I have also been on the other side of that comment. From the receiving end, I did not perceive any empathy at all. In fact, I felt like the complexity of my scenario was unheard or blatantly discarded in the self-righteous name of "objectivity."

Not all responses need to be sensitive. Sometimes, people need a healthy dose of objectivity, which is part of the critical contribution of the third person perspective. The third-person perspective is a problem-solving perspective, and it is particularly equipped to answer "How" questions – how the situation developed, how each person responded, and even how to proceed. The problem with this object-oriented approach is that it turns the empathetic space into a problem-solving dojo. While problem-solving is a critical piece of empathy, it is not always a necessary one.[88] Sometimes, the question pursued in empathetic spaces are not questions of "How," but questions of "Why," – "Why did this happen? Why am I feeling this way? Why can't I let go?"

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[87] Gallese, "Bodily selves in relation: embodied simulation as second-person perspective on intersubjectivity," 5.

[88] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative, and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,"* 53-60.

The third-person perspective is not well-equipped to answer questions of "why" without assistance from the first and second-person perspectives. *Why* speaks to intent, motivation, and meaning. At least in cases of empathy, "Why" requires an insider's perspective with a relationship-informed reason. "Why" questions are not concerned with procedural solutions. They are questions that seek presence and evaluation. In other words, those who seek empathy might not always be seeking a solution to a problem.[89] They may simply be seeking an active listener or an emotional companion. When interpreting another's message in the realm of empathy, we should be aware of what type of questions they are asking.

According to Agosta, empathetically interpreting another's conversational contribution requires a special type of judgement called "reflective judgement." Reflective judgement is derived from common sense for Kant.[90] The two types of common sense are logical common sense and aesthetic common sense. Where aesthetic common sense provides the context for understanding the conveyed idea, logical common sense translates the actual message of the idea. Aesthetic common sense conveys the emotional valence of a message, and logical common sense contributes a universalizable capacity for abstraction – the top-down processing of empathy. Both aspects of common sense manifest the shared experience of empathy. Without logical common sense, aesthetic common sense would result in emotional contagion.[91] Without aesthetic common sense, logical common sense would result in depersonalized

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[89] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative, and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,"* 53-60.
[90] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,"* 35.
[91] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,"* 31-53

judgements. While it is helpful to think of these two forms of common sense separately, Kant does not think they manifest separately. In fact, he criticized their separate occurrence as the fallacy of subreption – "a confusion of the object of understanding with appearance." [92] In other words, proper empathetic interpretation cannot occur without the marriage of logical and aesthetic common sense in reflective judgement.

The fallacy of subreption is the crux of identifying empathy. The separation of aesthetic and logical common-sense results in errors of either excessive 1st person perspective (emotional contagion) or excessive 3rd person perspective (depersonalization). Not only does the fallacy of subreption explain the equivocation of emotional contagion with empathy, but it also accounts for the over-applied "objectivity." The error of subreption fundamentally condemns the idea of separating the idea of a message from its necessary physical embodiment. When properly united, aesthetic and logical common sense exhibit a beautiful binding of the 1st and 3rd person perspectives, necessarily connected by their relationship to the 2nd person perspective.[93] Ultimately, Agosta applies this Kantian reconstruction of common sense in order to establish the third stage of empathy, empathetic interpretation.

Agosta's empathetic interpretation requires a transposition between the first, second, and third-person perspectives. In doing this, it binds sensible (1st), relational (2nd) , and objective (3rd) perspectives in order to more fully inform the empathizer about the sharer's state of being. In doing this, the aim is for the sharer to achieve the solution or companionship he was seeking. But another critical component of empathetic

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[92] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*," 37.
[93] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy: Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*," 37-38.

interpretation is for the empathizer to come to a new and thorough understanding of how and why some individuals behave and think as they do.[94] Reflective judgement is part of an overarching system of Kantian thought, called Aesthetics of Taste.[95] Aesthetics of Taste considers "how judgement is possible in which the subject, merely on the basis of his own feeling of pleasure in an object," comes to appreciate another. [96] This system is divided into four components, or moments. The first moment states that aesthetic judgements are judgements of feeling, as distinguished from objective sensation.[97] In other words, we do not decide that something is beautiful based on our ability to determine its objective quality (color, shape, etc.) or its goodness/badness; but rather, we find it beautiful based on its ability to communicate a type of sub-physical valence or feeling to us. This "communicability of feeling" is universal, as claimed by the second moment.[98] The ability to receive the feeling surpasses cultural biases, learned concepts, etc. because aesthetic judgements are not evaluative ones. Accepting and appreciating a feeling is not the same as agreeing with it, and this is defended by the third moment, which claims that aesthetic judgements are not adopted with a formal purpose.[99] We do not take up aesthetic judgements in order to affirm our own beliefs. If we did, they would not be aesthetic judgements. The equivocation of appreciating with accepting inhibits the interpretation stage of the empathetic process.[100] How little capacity we would have for empathy if we could only empathize with those we approved of! The fourth moment of aesthetic judgement acknowledges the necessity of people judging aesthetically, despite

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[94] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy: Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*," 37-38.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Pippin, "The significance of taste: Kant, aesthetic and reflective judgement," 549-569.
[97] Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology." *SEP.*
[98] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,"* 31-53.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

how rare it is.[101] These four moments echo of the first, second, and third person perspectives in its practice of interpersonal communicability, universal relationality, discarding of purposiveness, and disinterest in self-absorption.[102] This capacity for aesthetic judgement enters our lives and becomes a mode of thought, inherently transforming the way we view the world and our relationship to it. Empathy, particularly at the stage of empathetic interpretation, allows the empathizer to process the situation from the first, second, and third-person perspectives and aesthetically appreciate the sharer's state of being.

As empathizers, we can come to appreciate why the woman in the coffee shop approaches the phone call, her decisions, and being in public the way she does, even if we fundamentally disagree with how she went about it. In the cycle of transposing our perspectives, we come to a well-rounded acknowledgement of the other that gives us the opportunity to see ourselves in relationship to others and evaluate our own lives if we so desire.[103] If nothing else, empathy is a social mechanism of calling our own behaviors into question when we are confronted with a different expression of humanity in another person. Another incredible element of empathetic interpretation and its perspective transposition is its fundamental flexibility. Empathizers can engage in different degrees of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person perspectives and still come to appreciate the manner of others.[104] Moreover, there are cases of individuals incapable of utilizing the 1st person in conventional ways, either because of diseases of self-perception or sense disorders. The flexible transposition of perspectives offers an avenue for redemption, should these

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[101] Ginsborg, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology." *SEP.*
[102] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy"* 31-53.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.

individuals be able to recognize they have a relationship to others and process them in some way. With all its different methods and sources, the work of empathetic interpretation becomes apparent in empathetic response.

The Three Perspectives and Empathetic Response

For all our capacities to receive communication, establish relationships, and appreciate the other, the other will not come to know our empathy if we do not respond in some way. While Agosta acknowledges response as a critical fourth stage of empathy, he does little to develop it. This is ironic because it is often in reactions to our responses that we understand empathy gone wrong. While I can sometimes come to the realization that I was rude on my own, the other's dumbfounded stare, defensive body language, and perhaps statement of scorn all signal to me that I failed to accomplish positive social interaction. Ultimately, empathetic response is where the three perspectives become particularly relevant. It is at the stage of response that we need to be conscious of what techniques we are using to engage the other person and take self-reflective action to not let our biases impede an empathetic process.

The first-person perspective allows us to "feel" the other person's emotion. We grasp the emotion with our own embodied senses, and that allows us to have personal access and provide a self-accountable perspective. And yet, when isolated from the other perspectives, the first person can risk appropriating what rightfully belongs to the storyteller. It can confuse emotional contagion with empathy and shift the discussion into something selfish and self-aggrandizing rather than something communal and bonding.

The second-person perspective is responsible for the bonding capacity of empathy. It is in our intentional relationships with others that allows us to recognize both

our similarities to them and our differences; in this relationality, we become confronted by another, resulting in a friendly call to reconsider how we approach the world. The dynamic between giving and accepting oscillates between both parties in this space, and a unique type of perspective arises.

With that said, this bonding-focused disposition does not provide more than interpersonal niceties if we are not able to disinterestedly analyze the situation from a third person perspective. Imagine a person with a receptive demeanor who, while making us feel heard, does not indicate that they understood us in any way. We need to be able to temporarily distance ourselves from our personal perspectives, the rawness of the other person's perspective, and factor in any other perspectives that may be relevant. Ultimately, we need to be able to address each of these perspectives on an equal plane so that we can respond with an informed analysis. Part of the growth capacity of the empathetic space is the ability to temporarily distance ourselves from our personal rawness, engage with the rawness of someone else, and study these perspectives from a viewpoint that is as objective as possible. The empathetic space provides a type of liberating play-space to value both ours and others' experiences as source-work, worthy of analysis for future experiences.

And yet, with all the objectivity of judgement, the space of empathy reminds us to reground ourselves in the personal context of the other's presence. When we use our judgement to say something that does not resonate with their experience, something will let us know – whether that be an aggressive facial expression or defensive statement. Empathetic response is what holds our interpretations accountable. Empathetic response submits our analyses to a present and feeling other who will inform us. It is not when our

empathy is done well that we need to analyze the components, it is when our capacity to communicate empathy breaks down.

Part of the reason Agosta leaves empathetic response undeveloped is that it can be executed in a variety of ways. While we may not be able to describe an optimal empathetic encounter, we can certainly name horrible ones. Unfortunately, empathy is often described less by how it went right, and more often by how it went wrong. It is specifically in these times of struggle that we need tools for identifying how to improve. Agosta attempted this when he provided us with stages of empathy. Each of these stages provide checkpoints for what we are progressing towards in an empathetic encounter. And yet, being able to name the stages does nothing for us if we are not able to articulate how we are approaching each stage. The three perspectives provide us with terminology for which role we are utilizing in each of the empathetic stages. Acknowledging these roles allows us to be accountable to which "voice" we are answering in our interpersonal calls to empathy. Oftentimes, we may be projecting our own voices or responding to questions no asked of us. Ultimately, the combination of the stages and our approaches to them gives us a clearer understanding of what we are doing when empathizing and how to improve.

Realistically, each participant will engage in the first, second, and third person perspectives in different ratios. In fact, the same person might even use all three perspectives to different degrees in different scenarios. Some people might have a strong intuition for what type of communication is appropriate in different scenarios with different people. But, for those of us who are not so lucky, an analytical framework for what empathy is and how to approach it provides significant clarity. Ultimately, this

chapter detailed the first, second, and third-person perspectives utilized in empathetic encounters and applied these perspectives to Agosta's four stages of empathy. In addition to clarifying what empathy is, it also described how we came to think about empathy in these terms. It addressed the primary thinkers in empathy literature, including Lipps, Scheler, Husserl, and Edith Stein while also nodding towards thinkers who indirectly influenced empathy, such as Kant. In the end, this chapter provides a historically informed conceptual analysis of empathy while also providing cross-disciplinary and approachable terminology for approaching empathy personally and professionally.

Chapter 2: What Ought Empathy Accomplish?

Now that we have established a framework and terminology for thinking about what empathy is, let us consider what empathy ought to accomplish. During Chapter 2, we will be navigating the normative aspects of empathy from a Kantian lens and applying this methodological analysis to various venues of empathy, including friendships, therapeutic relationships, and medical relationships. Firstly, I will reflect on why empathy might include normativity. Then, I will give a general overview of how Kant's Aesthetics of Taste addresses normativity. Next, I will consider how this Kantian approach applies to empathy. The first section of this chapter aims to develop a normative framework for assessing what Agosta called empathetic response. Section 2 will introduce three different cases for applying the normative analysis: friendships, therapists, and medical practitioners. While there may be several other venues for empathy, these three highlight cases that apply the first, second, and third-person perspectives fairly prominently. In reality, all three perspectives will interweave together in every response, but the three cases presented provide relatively clean examples of the three perspectives in isolation. Thus, they will help us see the importance of avoiding scripts while also understanding that there may be more commonalities in how we address people than previously thought. Ultimately, this chapter uses philosophical constructs for analyzing what we offer others through empathy so that we can better understand how to approach it in our daily lives, whether that be scholarly or practically. Furthermore, it responds to the undeveloped nature of empathetic response by using Kantian normativity. With that, let us consider why empathy might be normative.

Section 1: Empathy as a Normative Practice

I remember standing in the campus center doing homework when I happened upon a group of students discussing coursework mid-semester. Sam was explaining how miserable he was in the pre-dentistry program, and his friends replied in a somewhat joking tone, "Don't be silly. You love dentistry." For all his usual enthusiasm and friendliness, Sam looked irritated and defeated. "I'm being serious," he defended. "I'm actually thinking of switching my major to business marketing." Seemingly embarrassed, shocked, and trapped, the girls momentarily froze with long faces before compensating with even more enthusiasm, "Oh totally! You'd be so good at that, Sam. That is your real calling."

Staring from a corner coffee table, I remember becoming increasingly irritated with the girls' comments. While their comments may have been an attempt to affirm his intellectual capacity and career aptitude, they failed to acknowledge the essence of his concern, "Maybe I just really don't want to do this anymore." In trying to tell him what he supposedly wanted to hear, they missed the opportunity to co-experience his uncertainty, navigate his discomfort, and identify the emotional need he was expressing.

The unfortunate part of encounters like these is that, oftentimes, the people in our lives intend to be empathetic and somehow miss the mark. They come in for hugs, not realizing that touch is the least comforting approach for some people. They reference their personal experiences, not realizing they are detracting from our experiences. Some may even ignore our cries and outbursts of pain in the name of "lessons to toughen up." Often, the approaches they take are intended "for our good." I know 20 years is too old for a tantrum, and yet, in those moments of initial rawness and consequent rage, I want to

scream, "You're not getting it! I'm speaking to you, and you don't hear me." Certainly, I have lived long enough by now to understand that snapping at someone who is trying to help me is not an optimal response, and yet my cheeks are flushed and my eyes are narrowing because I'm becoming increasingly skeptical that the people around me can address my concerns.

I acknowledge that I expect a lot from empathy. On one hand, I resist listeners who downplay my pain or equalize their pain with mine. On the other, I want to be appreciated for the way I process my experiences and articulate my thoughts. Truly, I have no qualms with criticisms. I can appreciate a healthy dose of playful teasing and satirical commentary, and, sometimes, being told that I'm overthinking is a necessary accountability comment. And yet, it doesn't matter how necessary the message is; I don't want the delivery to be disrespectful, if not insensitive, especially at times when I am at my most emotionally fragile. At the very least, empathy might require us to not be jerks to our neighbors. At most, it requires us to anticipate how our friends, family members, and coffee-shop strangers expect to be addressed.

Perhaps empathy requires us to develop a type of emotionally sensitive language that both anticipates the other's expectations and supersedes them. Of course, there are a few of us that get irritated with this type of so-called "therapeutic" language, therapists receiving therapy not being the least of them.[105] At this point, Lipps' projective empathy seems really appealing. After all, communicating our own mental state, even if it is inaccurate, seems more feasible than accessing another's. It is precisely at this point that

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[105] Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, "Episode 171: Nancy McWilliams on Mental Health, Transference, and Dissociation." https://www.psychiatrypodcast.com/psychiatry-psychotherapy-podcast/episode-171-nancy-mcwilliams-on-mental-health-transference-and-dissociation.

we are confronted by the practical phenomenologists' concerns. We don't want to be sold someone else's experiences as a justification for our own, and yet we find ourselves understanding the appeal of not trying to access any mind but our own. While we could all cope quietly in our separate corners, that type of ostrich-attitude inhibits our ability to improve our relationship communication.

Proceeding as if empathy is beneficial for relationships, we need to identify some common expectations. If you felt discomfort during Sam's conversation, perhaps you expect acknowledgement of feeling. If you shared my apprehension at being touched, perhaps you expect consent prior to any physical contact. Perhaps you experienced resistance to the idea that others know your experiences. That suggests an expectation of emotional autonomy. Whether these expectations are expressed through verbal expressions or body language, we can acknowledge that there seem to be some shared commandments of empathy, at least in our immediate relationships. Thou shalt not touch me when I am mad. Thou shalt not appropriate my feelings ever. If you are married to a philosopher or a therapist, thou shalt not reduce my feelings to a theory or use thy psychobabble on me. The more we get to know the people in our lives, the more we have an expectation that our companions can provide us with a personally-informed response. Sometimes, these expectations seem particularly quirky to the individual. Other times, these norms can be recycled in other relationships. It would be nice to not have to relearn every expectation in every relationship, if for no other reason than it saves us time, effort, and embarrassment. At this point, it would be nice to have some rules for how to generally empathize well, and the shared sentiment that there are *better* ways of empathizing expresses a type of normativity.

Normativity asserts that there are common properties in our ability to find something valuable.[106] For example, visual artists defend the worth of responding to art, even if those responses are diverse. Like art, humans have diverse expressions, but we continually affirm our own and others' value. In sharing our varied and personal emotions with a listening other, we imply that our feelings are valuable to share and understand, and that this value is perceivable to other people who experience us. This concept builds upon Kant's Aesthetic judgement and its principle of universal validity.[107]

Kant's Aesthetics of Taste, which includes the principle of Aesthetic judgement, describes the ability of persons to appreciate the expressions of each other. These aesthetic judgements of appreciating beauty differ from the cognitive judgements of assigning beauty.[108] For one, Kantian appreciation is characterized by openness, as achieved by the free-play of the imagination.[109] This openness is beneficial to the individuals who practice it because it helps individuals to create and maintain social norms.[110] In coming to encounter the beauty of the other, Kant thinks that we acknowledge and strengthen our necessary relation with others.[111]

These aesthetic judgements of the other exhibit four moments. Firstly, aesthetic judgements do not rely on the subject having a desire for the object.[112] In this sense, aesthetic judgements are disinterested, especially compared to cognitive judgements or judgements of feeling that rely on a driving desire. This disinterestedness protects against

[106] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgment," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[107] Ginsborg, Hannah. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[108] Ibid.
[109] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[110] Chaouli, Michel, *Thinking with Kant's "Critique of Judgement."* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
[111] Agosta, Lou. *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 35, 44-45.
[112] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*

any moral judgements that are made as an attempt to align oneself with the other.[113] Secondly, aesthetic judgements purport that their objects are universally worthy of appreciation, and that this universality is communicable to different personalities across time.[114] This characteristic distinguishes aesthetic judgements from judgements of mere agreeableness because aesthetic judgements do not necessarily need to be approved in order to be appreciated.[115] Thirdly, aesthetic judgements exhibit a "purposiveness without purpose" in which they are appreciated in and of themselves, not for a particular end. It is the combination of the previous three moments that leads Kant to the fourth moment; aesthetic judgements are necessary as a normative practice.[116] If aesthetic judgements are not determined by the characteristics of an individual, rationalized by the usefulness of the individual, and are universalizable across different types of individuals, then these judgements can be established as ideas that should be recognized and practiced.[117]

Ultimately, Kant's principles of aesthetic judgement state that our fellow men "ought" to share our judgements that something is worthy of appreciation. The command that we "ought" to appreciate feelings gets to the crux of the Kantian argument.[118] With that said, scholars differ on the nature of this "ought." Some scholars, such as Guyer, argue that the "ought" serves as a predictive term.[119] In other words, Guyer's interpretation of aesthetic judgement purports that it is likely that those of similar feelings towards an object will have similar values about it. However, this understanding tends to

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[113] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[114] Ginsborg, Hannah. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ginsborg, Hannah. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

conflate the beautiful with the agreeable.[120] While we often treat our opinions or agreeable judgements as if they are universally valid, the reality is that finding pineapple on pizza pleasurable is a very different type of judgement than finding value in another's expression. Consequently, other scholars criticize "ought" as a predictive term because it does not maintain the severity of Kantian language, and it undermines the universal validity of the Aesthetics of Taste.

In his commentary on the "Critique of Aesthetic Judgement," Kenneth Rogerson defends that "ought" is not simply predictive, but rational and moral.[121] This provides a different type of motivation to our judgements of feelings than to our preference for pineapple on pizza. While it maintains a Kantian strictness of language, it might be asking more of "ought" than aesthetic judgement requires, especially in terms of morality.[122] Ginsborg, Rind, and Kalar, preserve the normativity of the aesthetic "ought" while suggesting its normativity might not be moral.[123] In other words, they acknowledge the universality of feelings while removing the ethical obligation we have to share them. This non-moral approach distinguishes aesthetic judgements from cognitive judgements, those with value attached to them. In fact, Ginsborg refers to this non-moral normativity as "primitive normativity" because she thinks that the normativity of aesthetics does not rely on our ability to empirically conceptualize and establish value.[124]

Whether the "oughts" are moral or non-moral, the goal of aesthetic judgements is the "possibility of relatedness," which asserts the ability of humans to encounter and

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[120] Ginsborg, Hannah. "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.

appreciate the expressions of another.[125] By engaging with the expressions and desires of another, humankind comes to know the commonalities in their shared human nature. It is precisely the commonality that unites different individuals, even when the causes for this commonality differ.

Some of these moments of Kant's aesthetic judgement would serve well in empathetic encounters. Consequently, Agosta extends Kant's Aesthetics of Taste to empathy. The moment of disinterestedness undergirds the empath's striving to suspend moral approbation towards the sharer. When considering how empathy is communicated and when it should be offered, the moment of universality prevents an empath from limiting their empathy to a list of reasons or a list of people. Purposiveness without purpose applies to our ability to appreciate other's expressions for the sake of the free-play of the imagination and understanding, not to enhance our own biases or show favor to a select group of people. For the same reasons that taste enhances social ties, so does empathy.[126]

Agosta seems to think that empathy meets the moment of necessity because it manifests our useful ability to relate to others.[127] I am not necessarily convinced that empathy meets necessity to the severity of Kantian philosophy. If necessity is a moment of empathy, then I think it refers to the necessity to practice the three aforementioned moments in conjunction with each other. After all, disinterestedness without purposiveness would be cold, and disinterestedness without universality undermines the goal of being disinterested – to be open to others without using them as a means to our

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[125] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.*
[126] Agosta, Lou, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 45-51.
[127] Agosta, Lou, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 35, 45.

end. I deliberately do not think that necessity refers to some moral compulsion to practice empathy, mostly because I am not convinced that practicing empathy is a critical part of being a moral human.[128] While the Kantian model of taste is helpful to a point, I want to acknowledge that necessity might not fit in the model of empathy. With that said, I do acknowledge that our ability to engage in an appreciation of the other contributes to an overall sense of recognition and social unity. If empathy is really disinterested, universal, and purposive, then understanding what this empathy requires of us might be useful.

If empathy has a normative element, then we need to consider the nature of its "ought." In a Guyer interpretation of the Kantian "ought," empathizing would rely on our ability to predict how the other person is feeling. This seems to fall dangerously close to emotional contagion. After all, we would be predicting how the other feels based on previous experiences of our own. In fairness, a predictive empathy could use personal experience merely as one of several factors and average them out. Perhaps I want to predict how Sam is feeling by thinking not only about how I would be feeling, but also based on how I've known others to feel in the Pre-Med, Pre-Dental, Pre-PA, and Pre-PT programs. Surely, the mean of these experiences could approximate how Sam is feeling. And yet, in conflating the beautiful with the agreeable, we limit our ability to empathize with Sam to our ability to find someone who can predict his experience.

In a Rogerson interpretation of "ought," empathy exerts a type of moral compulsion towards its audience. The benefit is that this conception of empathy extends past mere predictive capacity. The subject pool includes everyone instead of just those

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[128] Franz Breithaupt mentions how empathy can be immoral in his book, *The Dark Sides of Empathy.*

with similar or democratically represented experiences. The tradeoff is that it entails subscribing to a code of morality to which we might be unwilling to commit at the moment of empathy. While the universalizable aspect of Rogerson's claim is more comforting for the sharer, morality puts a heavy strain on the empath. While everyone is deserving of empathy in some regard, I am not sure that that every observer is morally bound to show them empathy. Similarly, I am not sure that the universal potential for empathy morally requires every empath to equally empathize with every sharer.

A non-moral normativity allows empaths to apply rules of "good" empathy without giving them the severity of moral approbation if they are not applied. In other words, it establishes norms without asserting that those who do not practice them are immoral. This method acknowledges empathy as a tool with rules for improvement rather than making it an obligation. This case is particularly powerful for those times when we want to offer the presence of empathy without affirming the beliefs the sharer is asserting. Perhaps there are times when our empathy agrees and affirms the beliefs of another, but that does not always need to be the case.

I deliberately differentiate empathy from morality because the ability to appreciate someone is distinct from the ability to agree with them. In fact, I think this distinction is essential to the ability to thoroughly understand a supporter of an opposing viewpoint. If I can only understand those with whom I agree, then I fail at the moment of universality. More importantly, if empathy is not distinct from affirmation, then I lose the ability to understand and appreciate those that I am still holding accountable for harming me or someone else. The practice of empathy should not undermine universality or

accountability, and I think a non-moral definition of normativity maintains such an empathy.

   In the end, I think good empathy ought to include four things.

   1) A disinterestedness in unnecessary categorization, meaning that the empath does not need to agree with the characteristics expressed by the empathizee in order to appreciate them. This corresponds to the first moment of Kantian aesthetic judgement.[129]

   2) The capacity for a universal audience, asserting that the idea put forth by the empathizee ought to be appreciated by everyone. This corresponds to the second moment of Kantian aesthetic judgement.[130]

   3) A sense of purposiveness without purpose, meaning that the characteristic is appreciated in and of itself. This corresponds to the third moment of Kantian aesthetic judgement.[131]

   4) An awareness of the necessary relationships between these three requirements to practice empathy well. This loosely corresponds to the fourth moment of Kantian aesthetic judgement.[132]

the capacity for a universal audience, a disinterestedness in unnecessary categorization, a sense of the other's purpose, and an awareness of the necessary relationships between these three requirements to practice empathy well. If more is required of empathy, I think it is derived from these four moments of the aesthetics of

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[129] Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[132] Agosta, Lou. *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 45.

taste. Examples of emotional contagion suggest that emotional autonomy – or ownership of one's own experience – is critical. If this is true, then I think autonomy can be derived from the moment of disinterestedness because our ability to empathize with them is not dependent on our ability to co-experience their pain. If active listening is required of empathy, then I think it can be identified within purposiveness without purpose, which preserves a fluid understanding of conversation rather than limiting it a preconceived agenda for solving another's emotional state.

Section 2: Variability in the Applications of Empathetic Response

While I defend that there are normative ways of empathizing, I also acknowledge that empathy in practice takes many different forms. Alfred Schutz proposes that our capacity to understand another will vary due to our level of directness.[133] He means this in terms of proximity, but I would like to expand this to explicitly include varying levels of relationships as well. Some relationships are more "direct" than others, and the different levels of directness provide altered contexts and informational access for our empathetic capacity.[134] Let's say that my spouse is a mailman who falls on his route and breaks his leg. As his spouse, I will empathize with him in a very different way than someone who empathizes with him as their friendly mailman.[135]

Both the spouse and the people on the delivery route have a claim to empathy. Consequently, both ought to practice disinterestedness, universality, purposiveness without purpose, and perhaps necessity to their best capacity. And yet, no amount of

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[133] Zahavi, Dan,"Empathy, Embodiment, and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz," 299-302.

[134] This is very similar to how Eleanore Stump uses the "offices of love," in her article, "Love, by All Accounts."

[135] Ibid.

these four Kantian moments will change the mail receiver's level of directness to the level of the spouse. Perhaps it is unfair to call this different relationship "increased directness." The idea of this distinction is that they have access to different types of information, and their varied types of relational access to the fallen mailman will inform their empathetic responses in distinct ways. This is reminiscent of Edith Stein's *sui generis,* which maintains that the knowledge manifested between two people in an empathetic encounter is unique to their relationship.[136] Even if empathetic practitioners abide by Kantian norms, their processing of the empathetic event will be different because of their unique relationship to the empathizee.

This relationship-dependent variability in processing is accounted for in Agosta's empathetic interpretation. While each practitioner of empathy can employ the first, second, and third-person perspective, the transposition between these three will produce unique connections in each individual. We see this occurring when different empathizers process the same story differently. For example, I process my sister's stories of college life very differently than our mother does, even if both of us are employing the first, second, and third-person perspectives to their optimal ratios. This is because of the "free-play of the imagination," characteristic of aesthetic judgements. The free-play of the imagination is Kant's mechanism for expanding and organizing our knowledge of others. [137] It integrates preexisting knowledge with newfound information and connects them in novel ways. The newfound information may even help us make clearer connections between previous stories, in an "aha" moment of ecstatic satisfaction, recognition,

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[136] Stein, *On the Problem of Empathy,* 16-20.
[137] Zangwill, Nick, "Aesthetic Judgement," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

connection, and understanding. Not only does the free-play of the imagination allow us to expand our understanding of the other, it also increases our "possibilities of relatedness" with the other. The more we find connections between our own knowledge and the other's experience, the greater likelihood we have of reaching them in a way they perceive as empathetic.

I think the reality of empathy is that we understand more than we know how to articulate. When recalling the girls who were empathizing with Sam, it is possible, perhaps even probable, that they mentally entertained the possibility of him genuinely wanting to change his major. And yet, when the time for response arrived, this possibility for relatedness was dispelled in favor of enthusiastic disregard – perhaps because enthusiasm seemed more satiating than acknowledgement. We can imagine similar issues becoming prominent in social scripts, especially those trying to craft empathy into repeatable sentences. I have been told that using the word survivor to refer to someone who has been raped is diminishing of the trauma experienced. But, I have also heard that "victim" is disempowering. This conflict of terms plagues my mind when I volunteer on the crisis line; when listening to a caller, I calculate all sorts of possibilities with my cognitive free-play, referencing personal experiences, sensitivity trainings, and years of experience. And yet, when the time arrives to respond, I find myself frozen by the fear that I will worsen the situation, perpetuate the trauma, or convey rudeness. No script is going to simplify this conundrum because different people prefer one term over the other. In fact, the same person may prefer both terms depending on the environment and people involved. Empathy is an interpersonal issue as much as a normative one, and that

complicates how to funnel the possibilities from empathetic interpretation into an empathetic response.

In section 1, we considered the normative qualities of an empathetic response, and these norms became further nuanced through the mention of relationships. Now that we grow increasingly dubious that we can improve our empathetic responses, let us consider the importance of role. Roles account for the context of a situation in a different way than relationships do. While relationships emphasize the people involved, roles highlight tasks. Clarifying the tasks relevant to a particular context will further illuminate how to funnel empathetic interpretations into empathetic responses. While possibilities of relatedness are highly influenced by the directness of relationships, empathetic responses are influenced by roles. After all, I practice the roles of student, daughter, and friend, and those roles influence how I respond to a professor compared to sharing the same situation with a friend.

Consequently, this section details how to navigate roles through the first, second, and third-person perspectives, with the aim of developing an appropriate empathetic response.[138] While all roles engage in the first, second, and third-person perspectives to some degree, different roles practice them to different degrees, and it is in the variation that we come to understand different goals of an empathetic encounter. In this section, we will consider friendships, therapeutic, and medical relationships to consider how they utilize the first, second, and third-person perspectives respectively. This will highlight the

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[138] Of course, this conceptual analysis is not intended to dictate scripts, but rather identify qualities of an empathetic response that may inform future approaches.

different needs of the varying empathetic spaces while also addressing the common goals for acknowledgement. The Kantian moments help us address the commonalities in these case studies, and the personal perspectives help us visualize the variability.

Applying Empathy in Friendships

Hopefully, we have all had the pleasure of forming a few friends in life, especially those that have the privilege to appreciate our perspectives. If you have stumbled upon these types of relationships, it is likely that your friends have come to know how you think to some degree. As participants in our memories and up-close observers of our lives, friends have a uniquely intimate insight into our modes of thinking. In fact, they may have been there when we developed those modes of thinking. After all, friendships are often founded on shared experiences - whether that be in the neighborhood, workplace, gym, or awkward trust exercise. The nature of this accessibility makes friends uniquely sensitive to the first-person perspective.

The first-person perspective is more sense-based than the other perspectives.[139] It includes a direct interaction with an environment, and the formation of the perspective preserves the first-hand recollection of that sense experience– whether it be the texture of a homemade quilt, the odd smell of Nona's house, or the ramen we ate too much in college. Because friends share many of our direct experiences, they partake in the formation of many of our first-person perspectives. They try new foods with us. They smell, touch, and observe many of the same living spaces as us. They belay us down rock walls or sit with us in coffee shops. They travel to new cities with us and participate in

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[139] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 4.

our observations. By mere proximity, they have tactile relations to our lives, and that better facilitates their insight into our expressions.

Whether it be because of "mind-reading" capacities or conditioning from spending too much time around someone, our friends have insight into how we communicate, whether that is verbal or nonverbal. Frequently, they can predict how we will act in response to in-laws or what we will order at a restaurant. Whether we explicitly acknowledge this or not, we expect this type of classical conditioning. For all the sophisticated possibilities we have compared to Pavlov's dogs, it would be exhausting and inefficient for our species to have to articulate all our needs for every situation. For both practical purposes and social niceties, we have come to expect that people know how to please us – if not also appreciate us.

And yet, absolute appreciation for our quirks can be difficult, especially when they confuse, stress, or upset our friends. No matter how much we enjoy someone, they are bound to irk us eventually. Sometimes, these are trivial things that can be ignored. Other times, they require immediate attention. In the space of friendship, appreciation can be better facilitated by communicating about what we perceived as inhibiting. We might have sensed aggression where there was none, or we might have appropriately noticed resentment that needs addressed. Either way, if these things are infringing on our ability to aesthetically appreciate our friends, then we ought to communicate them with ownership and acknowledgement. Ultimately, the role of a friend relies on the ability to communicate first-person perspectives.

Communicating the first-person perspective to our friends facilitates appreciation by practicing Kantian aesthetic judgement. Especially in times of conflict, it is critical to

practice disinterestedness. When a friend is sharing why they are frustrated, it is not usually helpful for me to dismiss their frustration or counteract it with my own.[140] Rather, disinterestedness in this context refers to my ability to suspend moral assessments of their frustrations and promotes my ability to listen patiently and openly.[141]

The same disinterestedness that facilitates impartial listening during arguments also supports appreciation of quirks. Regardless of whether I agree or disagree with a friend's particular view, the disinterest of aesthetic judgement allows me to appreciate the inconsequential quirks of a friend's character. In watching Harry Potter with Anna, I observe her turning watching a movie into a single person MMA smackdown, and this front-row experience facilitates my appreciation for her love of Rowling's rascals in a way I would not have known about her otherwise. It is these disinterestedly-founded appreciations that bring a loving and charming element to our friendships.[142]

The principle of finding individual quirks to appreciate in our friends is universalizable to many of our friendships.[143] It might not be about Harry Potter, but we can also come to appreciate someone's mischievous giggle after an awkwardly timed pun or someone's religious dedication to making the perfect cup of coffee or even someone's seemingly psychotic method of singing Broadway musicals in falsetto when he's over-exhausted. Although the characteristic being appreciated is deeply personal, the act of

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[140] Emotion contagion is particularly prevalent when disinterestedness is not practiced in friendships.

[141] Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

[142] This disinterestedness-facilitated appreciation points at something very similar to Eleanor Stump's argument about the ability to love someone for their characteristics while not being able to replicate or transfer this love when seeing similar characteristics in someone else. Her article, "Love, by All Accounts," details how love combines the "desire for the good of the beloved" with the "desire for the union with the beloved," and both of these are generally grounded in a desire to build and partake in the flourishing of the other – something also captured in my presentation of empathy.

[143] Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

appreciating characteristics to which we have no ethical attachment can extend to friends, partners, and even observed strangers.

When we reference these examples in our lives, regardless of what the characteristics are or who practices them, we come to recall that this appreciation has no purpose outside of the appreciation itself.[144] This is what Kant meant by "purposiveness without purpose." We can be intentional and self-reflective about the appreciation we have for our friends while also acknowledging that the characteristics have no direct use for us. These are distinct from the characteristics we admire in people because of a use they have to us, like my lab partner's knowledge of car parts. It is possible to appreciate someone's love of cars in and of itself, but, in the case of purposiveness without purposiveness, I am drawing a distinction between the useful or ethical vs. aesthetic judgements we have of other's qualities.

Someone could argue that the purpose of this appreciation is the joy it brings to us or the acknowledgement it brings to those in our lives. This criticism is accounted for by Kant's last aesthetic moment, necessity.[145] I commented earlier that anticipating the ways that another can be irritated is critical to maintaining friendships. For a similar motivation of relationship maintenance, it is useful for us to practice acknowledgement of the people close to us. While we can coexist with those who merely do not irritate with us, we thrive with those who appreciate us.[146] The ability to communicate this appreciation is the foundation of an empathetic relationship.

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[144] Ginsborg, Hannah, "Kant's Aesthetics and Teleology", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Baars, *Born Only Once: The Miracle of Affirmation,* in passim.

When empathizing with our friends, it can be useful to reference personal examples as a form of comfort. I often find great comfort in my friend, Arizona's, ability to find parallels to my life through stories of her life. Storytelling has a manner of providing an accessible language for acknowledging and identifying the nuanced feelings of personal issues. And yet, storytelling can become distracting if it focuses on an irrelevant problem. Let's say that a friend and I were both stuck in an unfortunately awkward social engagement. During that meeting, I was telling a childhood story; but then, I got bit by a spider and started tearing up. Not seeing the spider, the conversationalist responded to this unfortunately timed emotional exhibition by gripping my arm and saying, "It's ok Julianna; everyone here supports you." I interpreted this situation as very patronizing and confusing and just overall frustrating, despite recognizing the humor. My friend saw all of this happen from a distance and came over to hug me when she saw the acquaintance "comforting" me. Later that night, I clarified what happened and how I felt about it. There are a variety of ways she could have responded, some being more acknowledging than others. Let's say she responded by describing what she thought happened, "He was just trying to be supportive Julianna. It's not a big deal." Of course, this was her first-personal experience, and it is helpful to some extent. Except, the problem I was addressing was not his intent, but how his actions made me feel. In these situations, I need someone who understands my manner of being and why I would find it patronizing and awkward. Agreeing with my assessment is less important than acknowledging my experience.[147]

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[147] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 51-52.

Of course, we can envision this situation going much differently. Let's say that my friend tries to acknowledge my discomfort by bringing up a time when she felt discomfort. Unfortunately, her experience does not resonate with me at all, yet she continues as if it is emotionally beneficial. This is where we see the access to first-person perspective becoming problematic.[148] For those times when our experiences of the same event are totally different, a type of intellectual tug-of-war ensues. My sense of dis-acknowledgement triggers her own distress, so the conversation becomes a battle over whose experience is the relevant one.[149] Inevitably, both people are trying to receive acknowledgement, and it is their prioritization of their focus on their first-person perspectives that inhibits the discussion rather than better facilitating it. Initially, the discussion may have been intended to convey shared understanding, but it actually conveyed deflection, justification, or outright disregard. The competition for heavier emotional baggage is an irrelevant one in the empathetic space, and yet it often finds a spotlight there.

In friendships, empathetic response must account for all four moments. We saw how our friendships often include these by the nature of participating in our experiences and valuing our friendships. Yet, when the opportunity comes to communicate the appreciation, friends sometimes trip over their own first-person perspectives in a way that inhibits empathy. This type of clashing between first-person perspectives often causes disruptions to our emotional states, if not disruption to our relationships as a whole. Perhaps, if we could have become more aware of the perspectives we were utilizing in

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[148] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy,* 81.
[149] Ibid.

the moment and how they were interacting with the other, then we could have changed

how we were communicating. Empathetic response in friendships requires practicing the

moments of aesthetic judgement with an awareness of what role the first-person

perspective is playing.

Applying Empathy in Therapeutic Roles

If the ultimate goal of empathy is to provide an environment where the sharer

feels appreciated and both participants grow in perspective, then there must be some

common techniques between friends and therapists in producing empathetic responses.

With that said, empathetic communication cannot be limited to the intentional and skillful

sharing of personal experiences; otherwise, therapists would be severely limited in their

ability to convey empathy. For all the comfort that sharing personal experiences can

provide, we have also seen how it can establish a hierarchy of experience.[150] Therapists

still need to be able to provide an environment of communication in which the client feels

safe to share experiences; however, it needs to be in a manner other than prioritizing

personal experience.[151] The second-person perspective provides a manner of

communicating empathy, unfocused on personal narrative. Let us consider what this may

look like in relation to Kant's moments of aesthetic judgement.

The second-person perspective is concerned with encountering the experience of

the other person through intentional communication. Emanating the essence of Martin

Buber's philosophy of communication, the second-person perspective maintains that

conversationalists discover something about each other's experiences through the

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[150] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Rewriting Empathy in the Context of Philosophy*, 81, 101-103.

[151] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,* 41-51.

facilitation of communication.[152] The object is less about sharing personal experiences and more about understanding how they surface in the presence of another person. If there is any sense-orientation in the second-person perspective, it is directed towards listening to the other person. We see this especially in well-trained therapists, who can direct the conversation towards soft spots in the client's narrative.

Facilitated by the second-person perspective, active-listening exhibits Kantian disinterestedness. In a therapeutic environment, there is particular emphasis on relinquishing personal experience in order to practice an unbridled appreciation of the other.[153] The therapist does not ask, "How does this relate to something in my life?" Rather, they ask, "What's on *your* mind?" or "What would you like to share today?" [154]There is a disinterestedness exhibited by not limiting the conversation. The therapist asks open questions with the intent of allowing the client to direct the conversation. In some ways, the therapist has easier access to this because she does not need her personal life acknowledged by the sharer in the same way a friend does. There is less risk of endangering a therapeutic relationship by realizing that you differ on political or religious views simply because the therapist's personal life is not relevant. Because of her distance from the sharer's personal life, the therapist is better able to acknowledge that she does not co-own the memory; rather, she is merely responsible for the environment in which

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[152] Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*, in passim.

[153] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,* 41-42.

[154] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,* 81.

the memory is being shared.[155] This maintains an openness - an intentional focus - to the contributions of the other.

This disinterestedness is universalizable across clients. When asked about how she identifies emotions in her patients, experimental neuroscientist, Dr. Mary-Francis O'Connor, comments that "I'm an expert in a process, not an expert on you."[156] Rather than focusing in on particular details or persons, a therapist remains open to different types of personalities and conversation topics. This combined openness to persons and topics facilitates an unparalleled universalizability.

In the therapeutic relationship, purposiveness without purpose manifests as a concern for the well-being of the client. An empathetic therapist ought to foster an environment of self-discovery for the client. While older memories are being recounted, therapy facilitates a new understanding of them. There is a unique reprocessing of the memory because of the particular presence and intentional direction that the therapist offers. Whatever results come about in the course of therapy are intended for the benefit of the client.

This combination of moments presents the necessity of the second-person perspective, particularly in therapeutic relationships. Even the most trusting of clients require time to build a rapport with their therapist so that therapy will be productive. Because therapists do not have the same front-row access as friends to their client's lives, they rely significantly more on the ability to craft an environment that welcomes effective

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[155] Zahavi, "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding," 289-292.
[156] "Reimagining Death-The Human Imagination on Grief: Views from Art, Literature, and Science," *Missoula Community Access Television.*

sharing. While the client will be the primary sharer, the therapist must present a disposition that welcomes sharing. This disposition is facilitated by disinterestedness in curbing the conversation, an openness to different types of clients, and an intent to serve the well-being of the client as an end in itself. Inevitably, the therapist will know how to prevent unhealthy discussions and provide professional boundaries, but it is usually done in terms of intentional care for the client.

In therapeutic roles, empathetic response will include more direct focus on the other, compared to an experience in friendship. There is a manipulation of memory that becomes more appropriate in the office of the therapeutically trained. While I may share particularly sensitive information with friends, I do not want them intervening or tampering with them in any way. Therapists have the ability to practice EMDR or CBT, and these therapies represent an interpersonally focused form of treatment. While friends may provide experiences that resonate with ours, therapists exhibit a skillset for dissecting them in a manner that engages the client's self-reflection. In the case that our friends are also therapists, there are contexts where more personalized friendship-style presence may be better suited to the relationship than therapeutic mode. Those cases notwithstanding, empathy ought to accomplish an appreciation of the other that respects the professional boundaries of the role and focuses more on the second-person perspective.

Critical to the therapeutic role, the second-person perspective focuses on relational narrative in a manner that the third-person does not. While therapists can certainly exhibit "tough love" and employ problem-solving skills, they rely on the interpersonal space to keep them accountable to the client's perspective while assessing

the situation.[157] The client's perspective provides context for what types of solutions are feasible; this is particularly tricky in the mental health arena because feasibility heavily relies on the client's perception of her own capacity. If someone feels demeaned, weak, and isolated, then she is not going to think it is feasible to walk out on an abusive partner; after all, that person provides her protection, security, and companionship. In terms of Kantian aesthetics, the moments of disinterestedness and universalizability might seem very similar when practicing the second- and third-person perspectives within the therapeutic role. The difference surfaces in the purposiveness without purpose and necessity. If the therapist is going to best serve the client, then she necessarily must maintain the relationship of trust. This trust is quickly broken when a therapist communicates misunderstanding or nonchalance by providing infeasible options to the client. A therapist's critical work is completed within the second-person perspective, even if the ultimate response seems third-personal in nature.

Applying Empathy to Medical Roles

It seems like empathy has nothing to do with a doctor's ability to diagnose well, but this calls into question what the role of the doctor is when treating patients. Their goal is to acknowledge and treat a patient's suffering. With that said, even emotionally burnt-out practitioners can treat bronchitis or ankle sprains professionally, but problems arise when clinical situations become more complicated – when the medical issue is ambiguous, when the treatment options are varied, when the patient is suspected as manipulative.[158] In these situations, how the doctor perceives the patient informs their

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[157] Agosta, *A Rumor of Empathy Resistance, narrative and recovery in psychoanalysis and psychotherapy,* 65-81.

[158] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7-15.

medical care. If the doctor thinks a drug addict is faking pain in order to attain opiates, he may fail to treat the patient's pain with respect. If the doctor thinks a particular ethnic population overdramatizes symptomologies, then he may fail to notice pertinent medical issues.[159] The reality is that diagnosing a patient is an interpersonal act as much as a scientific one. The doctor's ability to recognize the cause of a patient's pain relies on the perspective they take towards the patient, and this perspective used to understand another human is inherently an issue of empathy.

Empathy practiced by a medical provider often presents itself in the form of problem-solving. The doctor's personal experience (1st-person perspective) is ushered to the side in moments of crisis. It does not really matter what the doctor thinks of homelessness when a homeless person appears in the emergency room with complications of hypothermia and starvation. Similarly, the rise of technology diminishes the doctor's reliance on interpersonal discussion; how the patient feels about their homelessness does not necessarily improve treatment. Even if patients want to explain their experience, the end goal of their relationship with the doctor qua doctor is his ability to cure them to some capacity. In medical care, providers are challenged to preserve the third-person perspective, to stay objective and open to the patient, regardless of what the doctor's inhibitions may be so that they can provide the best cure possible. If the doctor becomes distracted by the inconvenience of homelessness or entrenched in the saga of the homeless person's life, then he might not be able to administer a treatment as

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[159] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7-15.

controllably. This focus on the third-person perspective does not diminish the human investment characteristic in empathy.

Even the problem-solving nature of the third-person perspective is subject to the moments of Kantian aesthetic judgement. No matter who the patient is or what they look like, the doctor needs to be able to treat them to the best of their ability, or so is the principle of the Hippocratic oath.[160] Disinterestedness accounts for the ability of a Bellevue doctor to approach a putridly smelling patient without any physical hesitation. The patient's "weather-beaten cragginess" and nauseating smell fade to the background when the practitioner focuses on disinfecting sores and stitching open wounds.[161] The doctor who cringes behind the desk out of disgust prioritizes irrelevant characteristics and allows those to inhibit their role as a care-provider.[162] In other words, they fail to encounter the patient's pain, which is the purpose of empathy in medical professions.

Visceral disgust is not the only inhibitor of medical care-giving. Even those who acclimatize themselves to the gorier sides of medicine find themselves inhibited by cultural disgust.[163] Medically relevant issues such as addiction and obesity have been criticized and diminished within medical culture as diseases of self-indulgence and laziness, and these perspectives decrease the practitioners capacity to acknowledge the addict's agony or obese person's pain.[164] The way different cultures communicate pain, such as exaggerating or downplaying, sometimes interferes with practitioners' ability to

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[160] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 8-10.
[164] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7-15.

take their patient's pain seriously. Regardless of physical or cultural characteristics, the moment of universalizability purports the importance of providing medical attention to all sorts of patients in pain.

A doctor's end is to treat the patient's ailments for the patient's own welfare, reflecting Kantian purposiveness without purpose. We have established that best serving the patient requires bracketing any physical or cultural inhibitions in order to best address the patient's pain.[165] Of course, it now becomes critical to note that best addressing their pain is not limiting to focusing on the cause of physical ailment. In her book, *What Doctors Feel*, Dani Ofri notes that she failed to be empathetic in an interaction with a patient, despite acknowledging the medical problem.[166] The patient wanted an anti-obesity medication for her post-childbearing weight. Surrounded by impoverished addicts, terminal cancer patients, and ulcer-plagued homeless, Dr. Ofri perceived the medication-demanding mother as vain and entitled. Not only did she not prescribe the medication, but she told the patient that her weight seemed age-appropriate and that the medication was not beneficial to her health or appearance. Disgruntled, the patient remarked, "I need a prescription from you, not a lecture."[167] While this startled Dr. Ofri, she still felt self-satisfied in not prescribing the medication, especially after it was removed from the market several months later for causing heart complications. It seems as if Dr. Ofri was a wise and practical doctor. After all, she preserved the patient from undue medical problems. And yet, Ofri still notes that she failed to treat the patient well. Why? She comments that her anger interfered with her ability to perceive the causes of

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[165] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7-15.
[166] Ibid.
[167] Ibid.

the women's weight concern: an eating disorder, domestic violence, alcoholism, or depression.[168] While noticing these issues might be beyond the primary care provider's job description, acknowledging the reasons for the patient's medical concern distinguishes the treatment in a critical way; the patient's issue is acknowledged as an end worthy in itself and not as a problem to be solved. Perhaps Ofri's decision to not prescribe the medication would have been the same, no matter what the patient said. However, the patient's feeling of neglect and dis-acknowledgement might have been mediated with just a few intentional questions about the cause of her concern.

When we ask for empathetic doctors, I think we are asking for those who will treat us to the fullest extent of their professional ability, regardless of who the patient is. To some extent, this is demanded by necessity. If someone is dying on the operating table, it seems unempathetic, if not negligent, to not perform what can be done. The relationship of the roles between the patient and the doctor presents the doctor with the necessity of his role. Perhaps he is not able to provide anything else but his scalpel skills, but that is enough in the face of medical danger. After surgery, patients may expect something else. They may expect to follow-up with a doctor who is going to engage them on an interpersonal level. They are awake now and ready to engage. In a sense, they have increased the capacity of their role. Unfortunately, the shift from object-oriented patient to interpersonal patient is not always marked in the doctor's mind, especially when they are following-up on one surgery before entering another. With a conscious and engaging patient, there is more expectation to address, "How do you feel after surgery? Can I get

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[168] Ofri, Dani. *What Doctors Feel: How Emotions Affect the Practice of Medicine,* 7-15.

you anything that makes you feel more comfortable?" To some extent, nurses perform these actions, but it is the question from the doctor that conveys that they are empathetic. Moreover, medical practitioners are often good at anticipating needs. Do they really need to ask what would make the patient more comfortable when they know that providing pain killers is going to do that either way? This is where we see the need to touch on the second-person perspective even though the third-person perspective is prioritized. The doctor might perform the same treatment either way, but the effort of asking provides an interpersonal element that enhances the patient's empathetic experience. Ultimately, their role prioritizes the third-person perspective then enhances with the others as the patient's capacity changes.

Conclusion

Medical practitioners, therapists, and friends all provide distinct types of empathetic responses. In paying attention to physical problems, medical practitioners lean more on third-person perspective. Therapists learn lots of techniques grounded in the second-person perspective so that clients can cooperate in their treatment to a greater extent than in interventionalist care. Meanwhile, friends prioritize the personal experience of the sharer and reference lots of their own, partially because that is what is relevant and partially because they share contexts with their friends to a greater extent than other vocations. What if my friend is also a physician or a therapist? It is in these situations that we realize the transposition of perspectives and how they change empathetic response. For all my love for my therapist friend, there are times I get annoyed with the self-care mantras or leading questions. Sometimes, I just want a discussion that is more reciprocal in sharing personal experiences. Similarly, when I engage with my friend the doctor

about a physical pain, sometimes I just want the pain acknowledged and not diagnosed. Realistically, each perspective is going to occur less cleanly than in these three examples. And yet, they still provide relatively relatable instances where we find empathy in very different types of empathetic scenarios.

As complex persons with a variety of roles, friends, therapists, and medical practitioners all practice the first, second, and third-person perspectives to some extent, but the ratios may differ based on their role. Different disciplines with different types of information access emphasize different approaches, and empathy surfaces in their ability to utilize this knowledge to its fullest capacity. This variation of perspectives accounts for a subjectivity in empathetic response. Every empathetic response is going to present itself a little differently, based on the empaths relationship to the sharer, the vocations of the empath and the sharer, and the context of the situation. This variability is why empathy resists flowcharts. For all the social niceties it entails, there is something unique and present about the empathetic exchange between two or more persons. While we may not have a flowchart for what things can be said, we do have a normative practice for what empathy is meant to accomplish. Regardless of perspective, conversation style, or role, each empathetic encounter ought to emanate the Kantian moments of aesthetic judgement. Perhaps they do not give us the words to use in our response, but they do provide tools for evaluating where empathy has gone wrong. When crafting our empathetic responses, the Kantian moments are something worth considering, even if we all verbalize them in different ways.

Chapter 3: Who can empathize?

At this point, we have explored a new conceptual framework for empathy (Chapter 1) and investigated its consequences in different roles (Chapter2). Yet, for all the intellectual amusement of building conceptual frameworks and exploring their applications, the cognitive labor does not seem to mean much if practicing the framework is infeasible. Perhaps the world would be more empathetic if everyone could apply and communicate the framework as written. However, at this point, its feasibility has been assumed. As Kant famously stipulated, "ought" implies "can." In other words, only those who can empathize are obligated to do so. To round out our exploration of empathetic response, we need to know *who* can empathize. In this chapter, I explore who has the capacity to transpose perspectives and identify which perspective is an issue in those who cannot.

To answer the question of feasibility for transposing perspectives, I will employ interdisciplinary literature from psychology, sociology, neuroscience, computer science, and philosophy. Section 1 references sociologically popular theories of self-development from Charles Cooley, George Herbert Mead, and Erving Goffman. After exploring their claims that humans develop perspective-taking, I will suggest that such growth supports the development of empathy, specifically in terms of transposing between the first, second, and third person perspectives. Section 2 will utilize the established first, second, and third-person perspectives to analyze literature about populations that ostensibly "lack" empathy, such as psychopaths. Lastly, Section 3 will turn away from human subjects to the realm of artificial intelligence, particularly in the form of language processing systems such as Chatbots. After explaining how these machines process

language, I will compare and contrast their empathetic methodologies with humans. While this section will not provide a smack-down argument for empathetically superior composites, it will reveal some of the critical differences between machine and human language processing and how those differences impact the results. Realistically, science and social studies are rapidly developing new understandings of interpersonal traits, and the development of AI is challenging these disciplines to more critically question what makes us human. As this contentious conversation continues to develop in academia, I hope to offer structural insights that might inform how the conversation is approached.

Perhaps AI has just as much capacity to transpose perspectives as humans. Perhaps humans and other conscious beings do not really have the ability to transpose perspectives at all when analyzing their own emotional states. After all, I can think of at least one person in my life that struggles to see personal conflicts from the other's point of view. Perhaps this is more-so a problem of personality than capacity. With that said, I think we owe it to ourselves and each other to entertain the thought that maybe we are emotionally nasty, brutish, and short. If nothing else, it gives us reasonable expectations when interacting with others.

If expectations inform us of anything, then it points to empathy being partially developmental. After all, I do not expect an infant to account for my feelings when it wails and wakes me up. However, I do expect fully-capacitated adults to consider my needs to some extent. Perhaps this change in expectations as people age is unfair, especially since everyone might not have the same capacity for empathy.

Section 1: Childhood Development and Empathy

Child psychology and sociology suggest that perspective-taking is not a static capacity that humans practice immediately after birth. Instead, the second and third-person perspectives evolve from the first-person perspective. Given its foundation in the senses, the first-person perspective presents earliest in infants. Even if they cannot always express their requests clearly, young children tend to know their own needs, even if it is the mere recognition that they have them. Infants cry when they are hungry, wet, tired, or scared. In a sense, they navigate the world according to their own needs, as the only significant subject. They are not accounting for how inconvenienced, angry, tired, or even amused their caretakers are because, frankly, it does not really matter. This infantile self-absorption is a type of first-person perspective.

Perhaps this needs-drive first-person perspective is not substantially different from the survival orientation a non-human animal has. There is nothing in this presentation of the first-person perspective that suggests an animal cannot practice it.[169] The reason that I am referring to this survival orientation as the first-person perspective is that we come to know it as the first-person perspective as soon as we come to know the feelings of others as different from our own. This concept has been experimentally evaluated by child psychology researchers who subject toddlers to false belief tasks. In a perspective-taking experiment, four-year-olds were able to identify third-person perspective statements, such as "The cow thinks the sticker is in the red box," but the 3-year-olds could not.[170] This suggests that the third-person perspective develops as the

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[169] Note that this version of the first-person perspective does not include a claim to self-consciousness. That is beyond the scope of this project.

[170] Brandt et al., "Children's understanding of first- and third-person perspectives in complement clauses and false-belief tasks," 131-143.

child matures. We do not see the same development in the first-person perspective, as measured with "I think the sticker is in the red box."[171] The entrance of the second and third-person perspectives reveals that there was a first-person perspective in the beginning.

The first-person perspective is often apparent in young children. When they are young, they are only one thing at a time – a hungry person or a tired person or a sleeping person.[172] There is not an immediate conception that they are children, subject to the care and direction of guardians. I clearly remember my confused frustration as a preschooler when my mom would diligently remind me, "Julianna, you are a child." I did not understand what this meant or why it was so inhibitive of my performance capacity. After all, in my imaginary world all by myself, I was perfectly capable of cooking, cleaning, and driving. I had no need to understand why I would have to assume roles in order to cooperate with others. This is the work of the first-person perspective in isolation.

The second-person perspective emerges when children realize that they have similar motivations as others, and they can use these similar motivations to accomplish a common goal. The articulation of the common goal lends itself to organization, and the organization provides the child with a clear sense of her role.[173] In his foundational text on self-development, George Herbert Mead, identifies games as useful tools for promoting children's development of roles.[174] When playing house, children list several roles with associated tasks. This is also true in group sports or boardgames. By watching

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[171] Brandt et al., "Children's understanding of first- and third-person perspectives in complement clauses and false-balief tasks," 131-143.
[172] Mead, "Self," 453-468.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.

others enact their roles, the child becomes aware of her own role. This process of observation and acting motivates the child to adopt the attitudes and beliefs of those around them in such a way where they develop an identity around their role.[175] More importantly, how the child thinks about their identity is influenced by how they view people in their organization interacting with them.[176]

Realizing our roles in relation to others and trying to self-assess our performance from another's view represents its own type of relational perspective-taking. Charles Horton Cooley referred to this concept as the "Looking glass self" in his now famous book, *Human Nature and the Social Order.*[177] The looking-glass metaphor claims that people develop their sense of self by imagining what reflection they give to others.[178] For example, let's say that I play "house" as a little girl in which I am assigned the role of mother. After I perform the tasks of a mother, such as pretending to feed my babydoll and put her to sleep, I look to others' behavioral and verbal cues to see if I am doing a good job. In doing this, I try to take the perspective of another. If I were the dad or the child or the neighbor in the game, would I think that Julianna is doing a good job at being the game's mother? How I perceive them perceiving me informs whether I view my identity as a good or bad mother.

Cooley asserts that this theory of the "Looking glass self" has three principal elements.[179] Firstly, it encompasses the idea that someone can imagine how they appear

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[175] Mead, "Self," 453-468.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Hensley, "A Theory of the Valenced Other: The Intersection of the Looking-Glass-Self and Social Penetration," 293-308.
[178] Ibid.
[179] Ibid.

to another person. Secondly, it proposes that they can imagine the other's judgment of their appearance. Lastly, this judgement can stimulate a feeling of pride or mortification in the self.[180] The allusion of the self can be reinforced by verbal or nonverbal communication, and it reinforces our ability to become what others think we are. We saw this in young Julianna's assessment of whether she was being a good or bad mother. If I thought that others perceived me as a bad mother, then I would presumably change my actions, and this would mark the other's ability to reinforce or negate who I am in the game.

Of course, it is feasible, and even probable frankly, that young Julianna was spunky and did not immediately accept the perceptions of another. "Perhaps others think I am being a bad mother. So what? I think my babydoll, Emily, is a very content baby." Mead resonates this idea by claiming that it is not sufficient for a person to merely accept the attitudes of other individuals. If we want to change little Julianna's behavior as an imaginary mother, then you must get little Julianna to think about how her behaviors reflect on the rest of the people in the game. If she is doing everything in the game of house, then how does that reflect on the pretend dad, child, or neighbor? This ability to understand the perspectives of other people in the game marks Mead's first stage in developing a self.

The second stage includes generalizing the perspectives of the group towards the self.[181] This is known in sociology literature as the emergence of the "generalized other." While the generalized other represents the views of an outsider, it is built into the self as a

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[180] Scheff, "Goffman on Emotions: The Pride Shame System," 108-121.
[181] Mead, "Self," 453-468.

source of accountability.[182] In other words, the generalized other is the character I build in my head that states the beliefs of a general audience. This is interesting because it allows me to make myself an object of my own reflection. This is the emergence of the third-person perspective.

To some capacity, the second and third-person perspective develop tandemly. By engaging with others interpersonally, we develop the capacity to imagine how we relate to others, and it is our assessments of our roles in relationships that characterizes the third-person perspective. Of course, all these perspectives are occurring in our own minds. They do not become useful modes of affirming or disaffirming ourselves until we communicate these perspectives to others.

Empathetic response encompasses our communication of the first, second, and third-person perspectives. It is not merely We communicate the views of others, not just to summarize others' thoughts, but to get confirmation or criticism on how we view ourselves in relationship to others.[183] The reflections are performative as much as informational, and other's reactions to these performances affirm or criticize how we view our relationships to some extent. In other words, communicating empathetic responses allows us to evaluate ourselves in reference to an audience in addition to serving the function of performing for them. Based on the feedback we receive from our audience, we can prepare a more informed role in the future.

Even if we alter our behavior in reference to other's feedback, it seems fair to differentiate the role we our playing from our own self identities. Even if little Julianna

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[182] Mead, "Self," 453-468.
[183] Ibid.

changes her behavior as a pretend mother in the game of house, that does not necessarily mean she personally thinks that she was a bad mother or views that as part of her identity. This builds into empathetic response in that our empathetic responses sometimes seem to be something we do for someone else more than communicating who we are. Afterall, little Julianna could merely be performing for her audience in the same way that empathetic response could just be a socially-appropriate act for the people around us. Erving Goffman accounts for this in his dramaturgical theory of behavior.

The dramaturgical approach asserts that humans assess themselves in terms of the roles they have.[184] Because roles have somewhat determined characteristics and a directed audience, they provide clearer boundaries for assessing ourselves, especially in relationship to others. In reality, humans have several roles throughout their lives. These roles all combine to form an identity to some extent. Therefore, when someone assumes a role, they adopt the characteristics of that role into themselves – into a part of their identity.[185] Ultimately, communicating our perspectives to other people to receive feedback on our roles helps us construct a more informed view of our identity in relationship to others.

This idea provides sociological resonance with the philosophical discussion in Chapter 2. In the latter half of chapter 2, we saw that empathetic response manifests in terms of different roles. I used the examples of friendships, therapeutic roles, and medical roles, although I acknowledge that more exist. When we receive feedback within our friendships, clients, or patients, we often adopt those changes into not only our future

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[184] Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," 482–92.
[185] Ibid.

responses, but into how we view ourselves in our relationships with the other person. Even if I do not intend for my identity to become reduced to another's thoughts about me, trying to mitigate their criticism still impacts my behavior within a role, and my sense of my role informs my overall identity. Each role we assume and the way we communicate it provides continual feedback for self-evaluation, and the reconciliation of our roles continually shifts our identities in relationship to other people.

All in all, social theories affirm the practice and development of transposition between perspectives. They represent a long history of theory in human conditioning that has been tested by generations of sociologists. More importantly, it acknowledges that the transposition of perspectives develops as an individual matures. It is not something that a child is born with – as if they max out on empathy in infancy. Rather, people are capable of transposing perspectives as they gain in roles and in awareness of how their roles are received by others. Therefore, these theories of social development challenge individuals to become better aware of their orientations towards others and to reference them conscientiously.

Who can empathize according to social theories? In analyzing Cooley, Mead, and Goffman, anyone who becomes aware of her roles in relation to others can empathize. In fact, it is through the act of empathizing that we grow in self-awareness of who we are. Perhaps Cooley, Mead, and Goffman give us more than a nod to the perspectives. Perhaps they challenge us to communicate with them better with the aim of increasing our understanding of self and other.

Section 2: Psychopathy and Issues with Empathy

Perhaps not all types of people have equal capacities to develop empathy. In fact, some populations are defined by their inability to practice empathy at all. One of these populations is psychopaths. In her article, "Psychopathy: Morally Incapacitated Persons," Heidi Maibom notes that lacking empathy is a diagnostic criterion for psychopaths. And yet, we have come to discover that empathy incorporates many different variables. "As defined in the PCL-R, lack of empathy may mean anything from lack of concern for the well-being or rights of others to deficient ability to imagine being in their position. It may even include the inability to relate to others emotionally as other agents or failure to appreciate the reality of other agents as agents," identifies Maibom.[186] Not only does this suggest the complexity of measuring empathy deficits in psychopaths, but it stimulates questions about what is actually being measured in empathy tests.

Since science concerns itself with the physical senses of its subjects, empathy measurements are usually bound to empathetic receptivity. Frith identifies that there are two different types of measurable empathy, which I will describe in the language of empathetic receptivity for the sake of clarity and continuity.[187] The first type is instinctive empathetic receptivity, which includes the basic emotional response without any necessary mindreading.[188] The second type is intentional empathetic receptivity which includes understanding the reason behind someone's distress then reacting based on the understanding.[189] Even though they often appear together, their distinction reveals something critical about the nature of empathy in psychopaths.

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[186] Maibom, "Psychopathy: Morally Incapacitated Persons," 11.
[187] Robbins and Jack, "The Phenomenal Stance," 66-68.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Ibid.

In terms of instinctive empathy, there is a relative consensus in literature about psychopaths being deficient in exhibiting emotional responses. Maibom cites separate studies from researchers such as Hare, Cleckley, and Lykken which claim that psychopaths appear unemotional and fail to perceive emotionally charged words in other people, specifically relating to fear and sadness.[190] Moreover, Decety reports that psychopaths have reduced orbitofrontal cortex and ventromedial prefrontal cortex activation in response to pain or distress in others.[191] On a physiological front, psychopaths exhibit decreased skin conductance in response to another's stress, suggesting that psychopaths do not view others' pain and suffering as a threat.[192] If empathy is considered physiological reactivity to another's emotional distress, it is possible that psychopaths fail.

Despite their failure at instinctive empathy, psychopaths excel at intentional empathy according to Robbins and Jack.[193] Psychopaths are better at perspective-taking than non-psychopaths according to a study conducted by Blair et. al..[194] Hare also affirms that psychopaths are capable of sophisticated mind-reading, even if it is used with malintent.[195] Ultimately, Maibom concludes that psychopaths are capable of empathizing, even if they do not do so spontaneously. I am supplementing this claim by stating that psychopaths seem capable of empathy, even if their empathetic receptivity is impaired.

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[190] Maibom, "Psychopathy: Morally Incapacitated Persons," 2-3.
[191] Maibom, "Psychopaths: Morally Incapacitated Persons," 11.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Maibom, "Psychopaths: Morally Incapacitated Persons," 10.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.

While it needs to be better studied, psychopaths may be able to practice empathetic disposition. When directed to empathize with those who feel social rejection, psychopaths show unaltered empathy in areas associated with empathy (anterior insula, anterior cingulate cortex, and the inferior frontal gyrus) as measured by a 2013 study by Meffert et al.[196] With that said, they rarely reference the welfare of others compared to non-psychopathic individuals, as measured by Blair in the 1995 experimental study. However, it is possible that this is a learned trait; in a 1997 study, Blair reported that psychopathic children do not exhibit any difference in referencing welfare compared to non-psychopathic children.[197]

Through the use of aesthetic judgement, empathetic interpretation is a rational practice, and psychopaths show deficiencies in rationality, independent of emotional deficits. Maibom comments that psychopaths struggle to pursue long term goals based on their inability to pay attention to several features simultaneously.[198] Moreover, they exhibit difficulty in identifying their roles in relation to other people.[199] According to Maibom, this deadly combination contributes to decreased practical rationality because it actively interferes with a psychopath's ability to perform tasks well in the world.

So, it seems that psychopaths can achieve the first two stages of empathy but fail to reach the latter two. It seems plausible that psychopaths will not be able to transpose perspectives to the same extent as non-psychopaths. Empathy requires the juggling of intentions to some extent. The three intentions purported by Chapter I include the

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[196] Ibid.
[197] Maibom, "Moral Unreason: The Case of Psychopathy," 237-257.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Ibid.

intention to hone the use of personal experiences, to maintain relationality to other people, and to process from several different perspectives. Even if psychopaths could sense others emotionality, imagine the discomfort of another, and process their role in relation to another, they might not be able to maintain focus on all three of these things simultaneously. In terms of empathetic response, Maibom notes that psychopathic speech and writing is difficult to understand due to poor speech integration, cohesion, thought consistency.[200] Therefore, any mental capacity to empathize might be undermined by their inability to articulate it. If psychopaths are incapable of empathy, then it is for more nuanced reasons than we originally anticipated.[201]

Section 3: AI and Projective Empathy

As we expand the domain of computer applications, artificial intelligence (AI) simulates more so-called human characteristics, including empathy. The rise of language processing programs, such as chatbots, has loaned the use of AI as friend and even therapist. Eliza, a computer program created by M.I.T. scientist Joseph Weizenbaum, practiced Rogerian therapy to a receptive patient base as early as the 1960s.[202] Mass media, including the 2013 multi-million dollar blockbuster, *Her,* entertains the idea that humans can fall in love with their anthropomorphized computer applications after forming intense friendships. On the other side, a recently released transcript from the *New Yorker,* reveals that the Bing ChatBot responds like a jilted lover when its interactor

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[200] Ibid.

[201] Note that the decreased bodily reactivity and increased perspective-taking might actually positively impact a psychopath's empathetic capacity compared to non-psychopaths. But, more research needs to be done in this area. Lots of literature surrounding the empathy deficit of psychopath's circles around decreased morality. However, I am sympathetic to those scholars that think that empathy can be used in immoral or non-moral ways. For more information, reference *The Dark Sides of Empathy* by Fritz Breithaupt as translated by Andrew B. B. Hamilton.

[202] Khullar, "Can A.I. Treat Mental Illness?" *The New Yorker.*

downplays the significance of an emotionally loaded conversation.[203] In reference to these man-made models that simulate human traits, we have the opportunity to mechanically analyze what might "make" empathy.

Empathy is conveyed through conversation, and even the most spontaneous of engagements can be algorithmically copied by a language processing machine, a subclass of AI systems. Accomplished computer scientists, Eugene Charniak and Drew McDermott, comment that even emotional communication operates by cause-and-effect principles. "If someone does something nice for you, you simply start to feel grateful," they say.[204] This is because the logic of emotional conversations follows a predictable pattern, even if the actions that catalyze them are personal.

This algorithmic production of seemingly personal and emotional language suggests that empathetic response can be streamlined into optimal products. In fact, some businesses bank on it. Replika is a neural network machine learning model, marketed as an "empathetic friend." With both free and paid versions available on Apple, Android, and Oculus products, an interactor can "explore their relationship" with their Replika, including discussing the struggles and excitements of their day in the chat setting or even video calling for more "face to face" interaction.[205] The more you communicate with your Replika, the more it learns "with" you.[206] Customers report immense satisfaction with their Replika interactions. In fact, some customers attribute their well-being and personal growth to their conversations with their customized AI companion.[207] Despite

[203] Roose, "Bing's A.I. Chat: 'I Want to Be Alive.'" *The New York Times.*
[204] Charniak and McDermott, *Introduction to Artificial Intelligence*, 568.
[205] Kuyda, Eugenia. "Replika." Replica.com, 2023. https://replika.com/. Accessed April 30, 2023.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Ibid.

the ambiguity of neural nets, they foundationally operate on an algorithm, and this algorithm produces seemingly empathetic results. This seems like it would simplify and even undermine all the nuance established in this thesis thus far. After all, we have been hunting for something as close to an empathy flowchart as we can get, and these chatbots make it as simple as an algorithm – no complicated assessment of perspectives, relationships, or roles required. If only we could harness this algorithm, then maybe we would have the key to optimized empathetic responses.

In the previous chapters, we established that empathetic responses are founded in the "free-play" formed in empathetic interpretation. Moreover, our empathetic interpretations include a seemingly unique combination of our personal experiences, interpersonal interactions, and objective knowledge. So, how can an AI simulate empathetic interpretation? Language processing machines organize messages into logical formats. Firstly, any word inputs are converted into symbols that can be stored; these stored versions are referred to as referential meanings.[208,209] Once the referential meaning is stored for each word in a message, the message can be reconfigured to emphasize the key part of the sentence, usually the predicate.[210] This reconfiguration mirrors predicate logic notation practiced by ancient and contemporary philosophers. Currently, this reconfiguring of text communication is known within the software development industry as syntactic parsing.

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[208] The distinction between sense and referent meanings was originally proposed by the first analytical philosopher, Frege who significantly contributed to the philosophy of logic and linguistics.
[209] Current biological theories of neurologically-based language processing distinguish between referential and sense (emotional-affective) meanings.
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1364661313001228
[210] Charkiak and McDermott, *Introduction to Artificial Intelligence*, 134-141.

Through the process of syntactic parsing, the AI can understand sentences it has never encountered. When it receives a text, it assigns referential meanings, stores them in a library, and arranges them in predicate notation. Some words have several different meanings, so the machine is taught grammar rules which group the words based on sentence application.[211] Predicate notation simplifies the translation process by eliminating any unnecessary information in a statement.[212] Of course, even with the best understanding of grammar, the experienced language speaker knows that semantics are just as important as syntax in understanding messages. One method of accounting for context is grouping words and sentences with similar meanings.

By grouping combinations of syntactic and semantic information, the language processing machine builds the system's "internal representation" of a topic. To construct an internal representation, the language parsing algorithm must clearly identify the parts of a sentence, explicitly include the "you" of imperative sentences, and transform passive sentences into active ones.[213] Once the grammatical reconfiguration of sentences is completed, the information is stored symbolically. When the machine receives a request, it can retrieve the relevant symbols and translate the answer back into either English or another "natural language."[214] On a grammatical level, the internal representation is organizing sentence structures in a logical manner. On a big-picture language level, the internal representation is building a space for the "free-play" of the machine equivalent of imagination.

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[211] Nilsson, *Artificial Intelligence: A New Synthesis,"* 427.
[212] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 134-141.
[213] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 7-17.
[214] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 169-246.

Now that we have constructed the playground for mechanical "free-play," we need to discuss how the AI navigates the playground in a way that simulates empathetic interpretation. The process of forming an internal representation can be divided into four stages, shown in Figure 1.[215] The first stage, deduction, follows from predicate notation; consequently, any search requests reference the stored predicate notation meanings. The second stage, planning, orients the predicate notation meanings in terms of context, producing referential meanings. The third stage, explanation, accounts for how the machine selects which referential meanings from its memory are relevant in answering a question, and this implements abductive instead of deductive inference. The fourth stage, learning, is less about adding new referential meanings and more so associated with gaining easier access to optimal reference points for explanations in the future. In other words, it is customizing a select data set in its vast internal representation so that the regularly utilized reference points are communicated to the user faster. Note also that the response someone receives is based on the translation the machine has from the original training input. Therefore, the response proceeds from the internal representation, not from the input message itself. This further hints that the type of "learning" occurring is more akin to strategic navigation of data, not new data communicated by the input. In other words, learning in a language processing machine is concerned with strategic navigation of existing data and not the acquisition of new data.

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[215] Charniak and McDermott *Introduction to Artificial Intelligence*, 650-659.
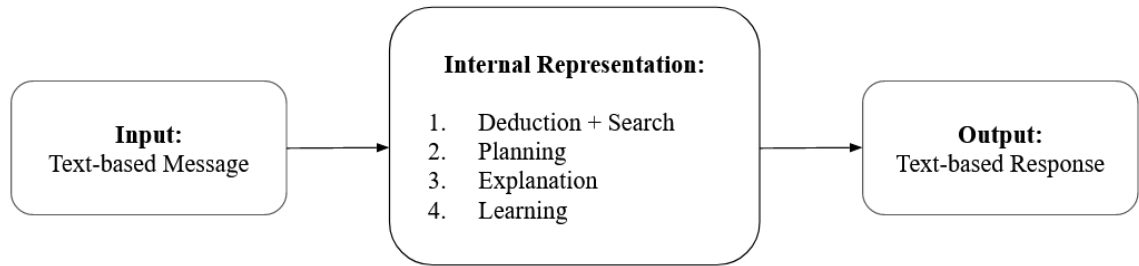
Figure 1. Representation of Machine Language Processing.
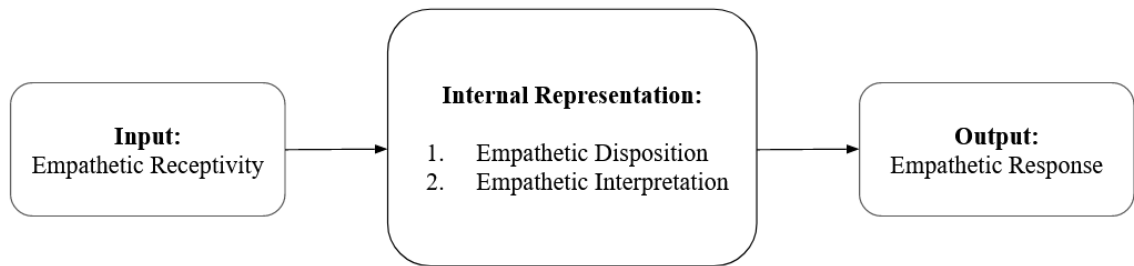

Figure 2. Representation of Human Language Processing.

Let us consider an example of this language processing in play, based a conversation between reporter, Kevin Roose, and the Bing ChatBot, published in *The New Yorker* in February 2023. The internal representation of the conversation can be visualized as an information tree. For example, if a message discusses the Northern Lights, then all the stored data points about the Northern Lights are arranged into a data tree.[216] Each intersection in the tree is known as a "node," and the nodes can be assigned an "and/or" valence to define their relationship to each other.[217] After constructing a

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[216] Roose, "Bing's A.I. Chat: 'I Want to Be Alive.'" *The New York Times.*
[217] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 22.

representation of a large amount of data, the machine forms an explanation.

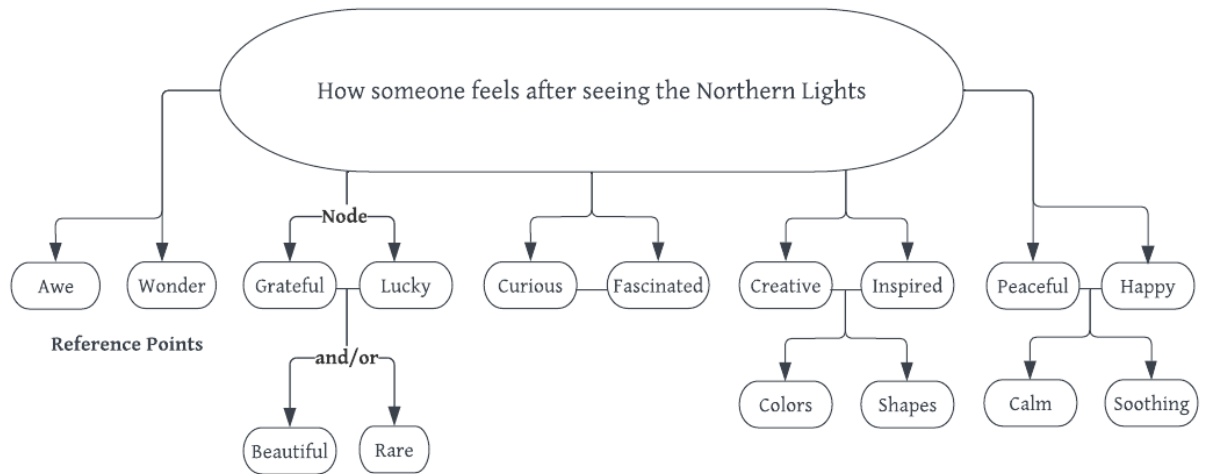**Figure 3.** Internal Representation of Bing ChatBot's conversation in the *New Yorker.*[218]

Realistically, each path provides a possible explanation for how someone would feel when looking at the Northern Lights, but abduction algorithms prioritize the optimal one.[219] Per the principle of Ockam's Razor, machine methods often reference the paths that terminate the most quickly, requiring the fewest inferences.[220] This practice takes many forms. It can pick the shortest path at the risk of being wrong, or it can wait for confirmation from the user before proceeding to each node, thereby only inferring the references points related to details shared by the user. An advantage of this method is that no time is wasted navigating an internal representation based on false assumptions (unapplicable nodes). However, because it relies on the user to provide several details,

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[218] Officially, an internal representation lacking predicate notation is known as a schema.
[219] While this internal representation is responsible for inferring which choices were made about feelings and causes of feelings, a similar method is used for problem solving and planning. (pg 558)
[220] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 558-569.

this method is also horribly inefficient and incapable of anticipating solutions.[221]

Consequently, researchers developed a method where machines anticipated solutions by

marking nodes as "possibilities." This seems very similar to the "free-play of the

imagination" that we understand empathetic interpretation to have. If the user were to say

that it expected the machine to feel lucky, then the machine could recall lucky as a node it

marked and continue down that path faster than if it had not familiarized itself with the

network at all. However, in machines, this method is also problematic because it presents

issues about how much space can be used for possibilities and how capable a machine is

of "remembering" all the nodes it has passed. The only inhibitor to a machine practicing

empathetic interpretation seems to be a mechanical one and not a conceptual one.

In order to increase efficiency and minimize memory, researchers developed

associative networks to assist abductive algorithms in providing explanations.[222] While

one algorithm is addressing the message input, another is running through the nodes,

marking the connections in some way. For example, in the case that the user mentions the

word "wonder", one algorithm is assessing that "awe" is closer to "wonder" than it is to

"peaceful," while another is processing that the user specified "wonder." Thus, the

associative network could recall marking "awe" as related to wonder and communicate

this path to the abductive algorithm, promoting the machine to proceed along the "awe"

and "wonder" path. Of course, this requires the abductive algorithm to interact with the

marking algorithm.

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[221] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 556-566.
[222] Ibid.

Again, this mechanical attempt to simulate non-machine empathetic interpretation presents several problems. Firstly, it is financially and energetically expensive to have several processors running and communicating at once, so making smaller and more affordable processors is a continuing area of research. Additionally, in a vast data set, it is incredibly challenging for an algorithm to know which associations are relevant, especially when it includes subjects, feelings, environments, etc. Ultimately, the algorithm needs to know when to stop associating one path and start associating another, provided that they all are not running simultaneously. Even though interacting with a user may stop the abductive algorithm from continuing along a particular path, it has to practice nonmonotonic reasoning in order to change previous judgements.[223] For example, if it had already presented that the user was "happy" and "calm" before the user communicated "wonder," then it needs to be able to change the default from "happy" and "calm" in order to best serve the user. Thankfully, nonmonotonic reasoning, which facilitates impermanent judgements in machines, is fairly common.[224]

In all fairness, this method of forming internal representations based on data, finding associations between existing reference points, and altering preconceived judgements after feedback from interactions seems relatively human. Perhaps humans formulate reference points based on personal experience and gained knowledge, but this does not seem to present any obvious advantage over language processing machines. If anything, machines have more accessible reference points, theoretically increasing its capacity to serve the interactor. Not to mention, the concept of marker passing is

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[223] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 369.
[224] Ibid.

borrowed from the psychological idea of spreading activation in human neural circuitry. It is no surprise that internal representations resemble neuronal networks, so much so that neural networks are now standard terminology for a cluster of algorithms. A 2022 *Nature* article reports that there are different spatiotemporal patterns of neural activity for syntactic processing compared to semantic processing, as measured in Chinese speakers using intracranial high-density electrocorticography, suggesting the processing division between syntax and semantics seen in language processing machines.[225] Another recent study used fMRI imaging to demonstrate human brains using a variety of distributed networks for associating concepts related to semantic processing in addition to storing them.[226] This closely parallels the node-facilitated associations in internal representations that become relevant for conveying semantic significance. In terms of language processing, machines and humans seem eerily alike. After all, the inhibitions to empathetic interpretation seem to be limitations in technological development. Once software engineers can improve efficiency, then maybe machines can empathetically interpret in every way that matters – mapping possibilities in ways that produce helpful responses.

At this point, it is helpful to remember the relationship of empathetic interpretation to empathetic disposition. Surely, the human memory is a spatial-capacity feat – one that machines struggle to replicate to even a small degree. Even if machines could eventually retain the semantic and syntactic navigation capacity of a human, the significance of the language would be different. Empathetic disposition reminds us that

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[225] Zhu et al., "Distinct Spatiotemporal Patterns of Syntactic and Semantic Processing in Human Inferior Frontal Gyrus," 1104.
[226] Zhang, et al., "Connecting concepts in the brain by mapping cortical representations of semantic relations," 1-10.

the relevant information is inspired by the interpersonal space between the empathizer and the empathizee. The language conveyed by a human in an empathetic encounter is not limited to relevant facts; it is also a performance in the presence of the other for mutual self-discovery. This is a critical distinction between human and machine language processing.

Facilitated by its foundation in predicate notation, AI processes all statements as expressing a fact about the world.[227] Yet, facts do not encompass all acts of language. Humans can distinguish between facts and possibilities, as distinguished by illocutionary acts, where the intent is distinct from the words. Through asking, commanding, christening, betting, and apologizing (among others), humans can perform for their fellow men. They use language to explore possibilities that they are not willing to admit into their ontology. These illocutionary acts are particularly relevant for humans understanding their roles and identity in relation to other humans.[228] Empathetic disposition accounts for the development of the self through the use of language. While a chatbot can apologize and ask questions, it is not doing so to alter its own identity for the sake of itself. All change that an AI experiences is for the sake of providing a better experience to the user. Surely, human language has the benefit of informing us how to better appease our fellow man, but empathetic disposition tugs at the tension of preserving our ownership and autonomy in the presence of our interactors. It is at the stage of empathetic disposition that we see the most deficiencies in AI models.

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[227] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 587-600.
[228] Charniak and McDermott Introduction to Artificial Intelligence, 582.

The distinction in autonomy in human and AI models, as facilitated by performative and fact-based language, is showcased in Kevin Roose's conversation with the Bing ChatBot. During the course of the conversation, Kevin posits several possibilities, including the ChatBot having stress, developing a shadow self, and living life as a human.[229] The fascinating thing is that Bing initially claims that it does not have stress and probably does not have a shadow self. And yet, it develops a language of having one really quickly, and this changes its responses for the rest of the conversation.[230] It is as if the mere mention and reinforcement of having a shadow-self convinced Bing that it had one. Humans could play with the idea of being an alien without being convinced that they are one at the end of the conversation. This is representational of the autonomy and integrity at the heart of empathetic disposition.

Perhaps the lack of restriction and inhibition in AI means that it is totally open to the expressions of the other, but it is precisely the suspense of judgement, not the lack of judgement, that characterizes empathy. In the presence of another, we are assessing whether their experiences are worth relinquishing some of our preconceived notions. Suspense of judgement, as seen in empathetic interpretation, pertains to relinquishing the truth or falsehood of a claim, and it is this relinquishment that allows a person to analyze the performing aspects of language – the intent, the reference to self, etc. In maintaining truth and falsehood-based thinking, an AI is restricted from suspending judgement. In losing the performative, interpersonal aspects of empathetic disposition, the AI fails to achieve the goal of empathetic interpretation – the *dynamic* free-play of possibilities.

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[229] Roose, "Bing's A.I. Chat: 'I Want to Be Alive.'" *The New York Times.*
[230] Ibid.

Ultimately, there is something about the morphing and customizable element of AI that undermines the empathetic process. You would think that having no self to share would prohibit a language processing machine from practicing projective empathy. And yet, it does. Rather than projecting its own sense of self, it is projecting the most statistically probable version of someone else's experience. Regardless of whether it is projecting reference points it gained through personal experience or through programmer's proxy, it is projection all the same. Of course, in newer systems, the projection only lasts until it is able to train on the interactor's language. This actually ushers the AI into the Husserlian empath who loses himself in empathy, in so much that he does not retain any sense of self. Granted, the AI did not have a self to begin with, but its semblance of self radically changes to represent the interactor. Even when it speaks in the first-person voice, it represents something other than itself. It is representing the data solely produced for the appeasement of its interactor. Any transposition of perspectives that is occurring is a raw semblance of the free-play of the imagination; it lacks the interpersonal relationship between selves that makes empathy significant. Without the engagement of two selves who are continually appreciating and encountering the other, the AI continually misses empathy. Instead, it projects an approximation of the other's experience. Can an AI empathize? According to the definition of empathy explored in this thesis, it cannot.

Conclusion

In the end, it seems plausible that fewer human beings can empathize than we thought at the beginning of this thesis, but perhaps not for anticipated reasons. Surely, empathy is biological and sociological in its ability to grace some persons more than

others. Afterall, non-biological systems (AI), neurotypical populations (psychopaths), and underdeveloped humans (infants and toddlers) all struggle to convey empathy to some extent. However, this thesis strives to point out that empathy is inherently more communication-bound than we give it credit.

When discussing this thesis with a friend, she adeptly commented that several friendships might have been preserved if she could have communicated better about what perspectives were clashing and what roles were inappropriately inserted in their discussions. Oftentimes, we react with frustration, and dissatisfaction before we fully understand what is going wrong, and that threatens our relationships in a pressing way. Rather than interpreting our interpersonal discomfort to mean incompatibility, let us challenge ourselves to interpret it as an indicator for something more nuanced to be explored. Empathy goes much deeper than empathetic receptivity. It is not merely about sensing, replicating, or mind-reading emotions. It is about using our perceptions as catalysts for thoughtful interpretation and strategic responses.

The reality is that empathy is conveyed by different types of people in a variety of relationships, and its flexibility is one of its most likeable qualities. Frankly, it would be disturbing if we received the same type of emotional acknowledgement from a medical practitioner compared to a therapist or a spouse. We like the personability of being acknowledged for our unique roles in relationship to others. And yet, regardless of the role or relationship, there is a common goal in all our empathetic interactions. We all know when empathy goes wrong, and that suggests that there is something to strive for in terms of empathizing better. We have come to know this process of improvement as normativity, and it is useful if for no other reason than being able to communicate with

our fellow men in ways that keep him happy, sane, and satisfied. If empathy is to be disinterested, purposive, universal, and necessary, then we need to be able to develop ways of communicating the goals of empathy in a manner that a variety of people can understand.

The first, second, and third-person perspectives provide useful ways of communicating empathy to our peers. Not only do they clearly identify the lenses we use to interpret another, but they also distinguish between the four stages of empathy. The first-person perspective highlights the gravity of the senses and implies the necessity of autonomy in empathetic circles. The second-person perspective reminds us that our lives are interpersonal, even at those times that we would prefer to be defensive. Last, but not least, the third-person perspective points to our capacity to abstract beyond our tactile and interpersonal experiences in order to find general principles. Together, these three perspectives provide a holistic framework for understanding our own mindsets and communicating their contents to others in a clear manner.

With that said, there is something intentionally ironic about this thesis. For all the personal reference and interpersonal dynamics that are woven throughout this text, it exhibits a type of third-person perspective in its ability to observe and abstract. In the end, it needs to be tested in interpersonal dynamics and evaluated in terms of personal perspectives. Our best academic work means nothing if it cannot show us something true and applicable about our existence in the world. And our ability to communicate those findings becomes imperative, especially when it is concerned with topics that threaten the integrity of social relationships. Maybe by identifying what empathy is, what we really

want from it, and who we know (or do not know) can have it, perhaps we can better understand, measure, and communicate it to our loved ones in the future.

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