MENCIUS AND HUTCHESON ON EMPATHY-BASED BENEVOLENCE

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Mencius and Francis Hutcheson are often interpreted as "moral sentimentalists" since they argue that emotions and affections are the source of moral distinctions. In the standard interpretation of their texts, benevolence is the most fundamental moral virtue and benevolence is rooted in feelings rather than reason. Hutcheson's philosophy constructs benevolence as the ultimate principle of morality; an action can be called morally good only if it was motivated by benevolence. In Mencius' view, the heart-mind of the human being has four sprouts that, if properly cultivated, will grow into four virtues. The sentiment of compassion is the sprout that grows into benevolence. Both philosophers therefore share the idea that benevolence (as a virtue) comes from a natural sentiment in human beings, although this sentiment must be properly cultivated in order to grow into full-fledged benevolence.

Many scholars have noticed the similarities between Mencius and Hutcheson, but there has been only one paper written about them in detail.[1] The purpose of the present paper is to clarify that, although Mencius and Hutcheson are interpreted as "moral sentimentalists," benevolence may not be rooted *purely* in feelings and sentiments. On my reading, Mencian-Hutchesonian thought experiments invite us to use our rational capacity and engage in cognitively elaborated forms of empathy, which refer to complex processes that require simulation, perspective taking, and initiation on behalf of the agent herself. These types of empathy require the agent to actively reconstruct the other's subjective experience instead of merely "catching" the emotion of the other person. As such, we should not overlook the role of reason and cognitive empathy in benevolence for Mencius and Hutcheson. Through these types of empathy, we are able to understand the other person *holistically* as a being with a past and a future, as a united temporal continuum—that is, a whole package of beliefs, values, emotions, desires, and past experiences. By showing how empathy facilitates the reader's understanding of the texts, I want to suggest that reason does contribute to the cultivation of benevolence because reconstructing others' subjective experiences requires reason.

My approach is to incorporate contemporary discussions of empathy into Mencius' and Hutcheson's texts to illustrate *how* their respective thought experiments work and *what* they demonstrate about the connection between empathy and benevolence. In the first section, I articulate the main difference between Mencius' and Hutcheson's views on benevolence to set

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up my comparative thesis. In the second section, I analyze two passages from Mencius to illustrate a novel way of understanding the role of empathy in his thought experiments. In the third section, I analyze a passage from Hutcheson to show how his thought experiment also invites the reader to practice cognitive empathy. I will focus on the content as well the method employed in the two philosophers' thought experiments. My analysis will show that for Mencius and Hutcheson, natural sentiments *do* motivate, but they may not be sufficient to motivate in all cases where benevolence is called upon. Thus, there are times when we need to practice cognitively elaborated forms of empathy (where reason is required) to strengthen our motivations.[2] Reason, therefore, also plays a role in moral cultivation.

I. Mencius versus Hutcheson on Benevolence

Although my claim is that empathy functions similarly in both Mencius' and Hutcheson's thought experiments, I will first clarify the difference between them in order to do justice to their moral theories. Mencius and Hutcheson are similar in that benevolence is the basis for enabling morality, but their accounts of benevolence are established toward different goals. While Mencius' account focuses on moral cultivation, Hutcheson's account of benevolence largely focuses on moral evaluations. Thus, Hutcheson's moral sense does not function in the same manner as Mencius' *ceyin zhi xin* 惻隱之心 in the development of benevolence.

Mencius argues for the centrality of benevolence, or *ren*, in his ethics. His discussion focuses mainly on cultivating our natural inclinations into benevolence through self-examination, since Mencius' goal is to argue for the existence of natural moral emotions. In Mencius' view, there are four sprouts of the heart-mind, which are natural sentiments in human beings. When these four sprouts are properly cultivated, they will give rise to the four core virtues of *ren* 仁, *yi* 義, *zhi* 智, and *li* 禮.[3] *Ren* grows from a natural inclination to love humankind. *Ren* is the concept in Chinese that is usually translated as benevolence or humaneness. More specifically, Mencius argues that *ren* comes from *ceyin zhi xin*, which is the heart-mind's feeling of pity and compassion. In 2A6 Mencius says,

> The mind's feeling of pity and compassion is the sprout of humaneness *[ren]*; the mind's feeling of shame and aversion is the sprout of rightness *[yi]*; the mind's feeling of modesty and compliance is the sprout of propriety *[li]*; and the mind's sense of right and wrong is the sprout of wisdom *[zhi]* . . . .
>
> Human beings have these four sprouts just as they have four limbs . . . . For one to have these four sprouts and yet to say of oneself that one is unable to fulfill them is to injure oneself . . . . When we know how to enlarge and bring to fulfillment these four sprouts that are within us, it will be like a fire beginning to burn or a spring finding an outlet.[4]

Out of the four sprouts, the most distinctive trait is *ceyin zhi xin* because our special sensibility toward the suffering of others guides our moral thinking. Thus, benevolence plays a key role in Mencius' moral theory insofar as *ceyin zhi xin* is the sentiment that grows into benevolence and benevolence inclines one to love all humankind. Furthermore, Mencius argues in the text that benevolence is triggered primarily by the sight of the suffering of others. Mencius asks us to imagine the following scenario:

> Here is why I say that all human beings have a mind that commiserates with others. Now, if anyone were suddenly to see a child about to fall into a well, his mind would be filled with alarm, distress, pity, and compassion. That he would act accordingly is not because he would hope to use the opportunity to ingratiate himself with the child's parents, nor because he would seek commendation from neighbors and friends, nor because he would hate the adverse reputation [that could come from not reacting accordingly]. (Mencius 2A6)

This example intends to illustrate that "all human beings have a mind that cannot bear to see the sufferings of others." Although not everyone will take the same action to save the falling child, everyone will feel a moment of pity, and that is proof for the existence of our natural compassion. That feeling of pity, moreover, is void of any self-interested considerations, such as praise from the community, or obtained favor from the parents or even relief from the cries of the child.[5] Mencius' emphasis is that everyone will feel a spontaneous feeling of pity, regardless of whether he or she is capable of acting *out* of this feeling.

Scholars debate about how to understand the nature of *ceyin zhi xin* and I will address this in more detail in the next section. For the present purposes, we only need to note that in 2A6, the moral sentiment in *ceyin zhi xin* hardly entails any sentimental approval or motivation for proper actions—and this is the key difference between Mencius and Hutcheson. *Ceyin zhi xin* denotes the feeling of not being able to endure other people's suffering, even when one is not directly responsible for their suffering. On Kim's translation of *ceyin zhi xin*, "not only does one find it unbearable to inflict harm on others oneself, but one cannot bear to see others suffer no matter what the cause of their suffering."[6] In 2A6, it is clear that the agent going to rescue the child is not at fault for the child's crawling into the well in the first place, but the agent cannot bear to see the child suffer. Mencius aims at proving that we are all naturally born with a heart that cannot bear the suffering of others (through the manifestation of *ceyin zhi xin*). With proper cultivation via self-examination and reflection, the sentiment will grow into benevolence.

On the other hand, for Hutcheson, the focus is on moral approval. Hutcheson argues that benevolence is the foundation of morality since it completes all other virtues, but his moral sentiment is the evaluative standard of benevolence, not the natural seed of benevolence.[7] Universal

benevolence is achieved only after our evaluation of other people's actions and their approval: "If we examine all the Actions which are counted amiable anywhere, and enquire into the Grounds upon which they are approv'd, we shall find, that in the Opinion of the Person who approves them, they always appear as Benevolent . . . whether the Approver be one of the Persons belov'd, or profited, or not."[8] In other words, universal benevolence determines whether we approve an action as morally right or wrong through a feeling (sentiment).[9]

More importantly, Hutcheson's moral sense is not the same kind of psychological mechanism as Mencius' *ceyin zhi xin*, which grows into benevolence through reflection. Hutcheson's benevolence comes from the moral sense, which is an evaluative faculty by which we make moral judgments. We discover benevolence through the *effects* of moral sense—through moral approval and disapproval of our own and other people's actions. The moral sense is that "by which we perceive virtue and vice, and approve or disapprove them in others."[10] However, the moral sense is not itself cognitive nor does it have any innate ideas about morality, because it is merely "a Determination of the Mind, to receive any Ideas from the Presence of an Object which occurs to us, independently on our Will."[11] When the moral sense is not cultivated, it is more prone to making mistakes, but the moral sense itself is not the problem.[12] The culprits are "the violent passions that may blind us or the 'false opinions' that reason presents to [the moral sense] regarding the tendency of actions."[13] Therefore, to make the moral sense stronger, we need to become capable of governing our violent passions by strengthening our universal calm benevolence, which has a reflective element.[14]

When reason tells us that the agent's motivation is benevolent, our moral sense responds and we experience a distinct and unique pleasure, which is the moral approbation itself. In order to understand our feeling of approbation, we must also form the idea of moral goodness (i.e., virtue) based on the pleasure we feel.[15] In other words, our knowledge of moral goodness consists of both our judgment that it is indeed benevolent and of our being pleased by the benevolence.[16] Although many actions appear pleasant to us, only benevolent actions are pleasing to the moral sense, which is guaranteed by divine providence.[17]

A further way to clarify the relation between benevolence and the moral sense is to understand the latter as a second-order faculty for judging benevolence.[18] This means that "human beings not only have a desire for the happiness of others, but approve of this desire, i.e., take pleasure in benevolence and believe that benevolence is itself desirable."[19] The moral sense not only recognizes benevolence (when informed by reason); it also makes judgment on this benevolence. The perception of the moral sense, in Hutcheson's picture, is therefore necessarily evaluative. The moral sense is responsible for perceiving both the moral approval and the idea of moral

goodness—so the moral sense passes a judgment on the feelings it perceives as "good" or "bad." The perception of the moral sense involves simultaneously the perception (of an action) and the judgment of it (virtue or vice).[20]

In summary, although Mencius and Hutcheson are similar in holding that benevolence is the basis for enabling morality, they structure their accounts of benevolence differently. Mencius focuses on moral cultivation and cultivating *ceyin zhi xin* through self-examination. Hutcheson focuses on moral approval and strengthening our moral sense through raising our benevolent desires. With these points in mind, I move on to analyze how the thought experiments of the two philosophers work and what they reveal to us about the connection between empathy and benevolence.

II. Mencius, Ren *and* Ceyin Zhi Xin

As stated in the introduction, I want to argue for the importance of empathy in Mencius and Hutcheson by examining how their thought experiments work. In my interpretation, both philosophers construct thought experiments that encourage the subjects to mentally simulate a perspective before arriving at a judgment within it.[21] This means that their thought experiments may not work thoroughly unless the reader simulates a perspective—by recruiting cognitively elaborated forms of empathy: in-their-shoes and simulation-based empathy. The connection between empathy and benevolence for Mencius and Hutcheson cannot be inferred solely through logic; they also need to be affectively *felt* by the reader. Thus, the psychological process that the texts ask the reader to engage in (namely empathy) is built into the argument that empathy is crucial for benevolence. There is something unique and novel about the way that empathy is introduced to the reader via the text.

Before I proceed, I give a brief overview of contemporary debates in empathy. Let me start with the most general definition of empathy: the capacity for "understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present."[22] Through empathy, we identify with another person's pro-attitudes by feeling *with* the person with whom we are empathizing. Sympathy, on the other hand, although it includes feeling concern *for* another person, does not necessarily involve feeling *with* the person that the agent is caring for. Empathy therefore "plays the same structural role in practical deliberation with regard to other people's pro-attitudes as the agent's self-awareness does with regard to his own desires."[23]

Most scholars agree that empathy has both emotional and cognitive components, but there is no consensus on how cognitively sophisticated empathy should be. The most primitive form of empathy—and what we typically mean by empathy in our everyday usage of the word—is to

experience an emotion similar to what the other person is experiencing. Scholars call this "contagion-based empathy" or "emotional contagion." Emotional contagion is an involuntary process because it involves fast and reflexive subcortical processes.[24] Elaine Hatfield, John Cacioppo, and Richard Rapson define emotional contagion as the "tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person, and, consequently, to converge emotionally."[25] All the processes involved in emotional contagion are automatic and involuntary: facial, vocal, and postural mimicry and the activation and afferent feedback triggered by mimicry. Thus, emotional contagion is the "catching" of another's emotion that results in us being directly influenced by another's emotion. There is no cognitive evaluation of another's emotion, as the emotion is simply "transmitted" from one person to another.

Furthermore, emotional contagion is a unique process that should be distinguished from higher-order processes (referred to as empathy) for three reasons.[26] First, emotional contagion has a causal story. It is triggered only by a direct sensory engagement with another person expressing an emotion. This means that the stimulus must be directly perceivable either visually or aurally. Second, emotional contagion is automatic and involuntary, like a reflex action. Third, emotional contagion has the ability to generate an emotional state in the subject without altering the subject's previous cognitive evaluations and prior beliefs about the world. As such, emotional contagion does not provide its subject with an understanding of the target individual.[27]

Cognitively elaborated empathy, on the other hand, refers to empathy that requires perspective taking, and therefore the empathizer must employ cognitive effort and reasoning abilities. I will discuss two types of cognitively elaborated empathy: in-their-shoes empathy and simulation-based empathy. In-their-shoes empathy (Goldie 2011) is more sophisticated than emotional contagion because it requires the agent to see herself from her target's perspective to see how she would feel if she were in her target's shoes.[28] Coplan calls this "self-oriented perspective taking empathy," which is a process in which we imagine how we ourselves would think and feel if *we* were in the target individual's situation. For example, suppose that my friend Sam tells me that she was very scared when she found a mouse in her kitchen. Sam is afraid of mice but I am not, so when I imagine myself in her shoes (as myself), I do not feel scared. Some scholars have excluded self-oriented perspective taking empathy as real empathy because we often assume greater similarity between self and other, especially when we are trying to imagine how others feel. Coplan argues that self-oriented perspective taking is not empathy proper because we are still confined to our own subjective perceptual experience. Thus, we have not put aside our own beliefs and feelings when trying to imagine the target's situation. Coplan notes that there is a difference between self-oriented and other-

oriented perspective taking because "one individual's response to a set of circumstances is rarely a reliable indicator of what another's will be."[29] Emotional contagion is a bottom-up process that allows us to catch others' emotions but fail to account for their "character, emotions, moods, dispositional tendencies, and life experiences."[30]

The next level of empathy is the most cognitively sophisticated type, where the empathizer tries to imagine what it is like to be in the other person's shoes *from that person's perspective*. In the literature this has been called other-oriented perspective taking empathy (Coplan 2011), or re-enactive empathy (Stueber 2006) or simulation-based empathy (Goldman 2011). This form of empathy is voluntary because it requires the agent to re-enact or imitate in her own mind the thoughts of the other person.[31] Here we do not put ourselves in the target's situation; instead we imagine what it is like to be her in *her* situation. We simulate the target's perspective by actively re-constructing her thought processes and past experiences. It is "a process through which an observer simulates another's situated psychological states, while maintaining clear self-other differentiation."[32] Here, if I successfully empathize with my friend Sam, I would feel scared upon seeing a mouse in the kitchen because she is scared of mice.

Coplan argues that other-directed perspective taking empathy is difficult to achieve but is the only way we can experientially understand another person.[33] Other-oriented perspective taking should be difficult to achieve because it requires us to find out information about the target and reconstruct her subjective experience. Therefore, the less we know about the target's background, the harder it is to truly empathize with her.[34] Conversely, the more familiar we are with the target individual, the more the likelihood that we succeed at simulating her perspective. Thus, other-oriented perspective taking is a voluntary and controlled process—the agent must take the initiative to generate it from within.[35]

With the various types of empathy in mind, let us turn to the thought experiment in Mencius 2A6: Mencius wants to demonstrate the difficulty in "extending" *ceyin* and show the inadequacy of emotional contagion. Passage 2A6 recruits self-directed perspective taking empathy because we are asked to place *ourselves* in a situation (where we are about to see a child fall into a well). The conviction that the reader is supposed to feel is that we all possess *ceyin zhi xin*, or a natural feeling of compassion, and therefore the seed for benevolence is inherent in us. We are all supposed to "feel" this moment of compassion by simulating the given perspective. However, Mencius does not specify that any action will occur; he is only illustrating that we will have that feeling when we see a child falling into a well. Thus, Mencius does not logically argue for the inadequacy of emotional contagion. Rather, the reader is supposed to feel this inadequacy through perspective taking—to realize that it is possible to experience a moment of compassion without taking an action.

As the reader, we have a compassionate feeling invoked but we are also aware that not every one of us will actually save the child. When one is falling into the well oneself, one would have the instinct to save oneself, but whether every one of us would be motivated to engage in any action (even though the compassionate feeling is there) upon seeing a child fall into a well is uncertain.[36] Furthermore, saving the child by an automatic response cannot properly be called benevolence.[37] The feeling of *ceyin* by itself is an instinct, but an instinct itself is not sufficient to guarantee that the agent has virtue. The capacity to feel another's pain is therefore necessary, but not sufficient to consider it as a virtue because spontaneous reactions cannot account for the motivational purity of a truly benevolent person. Mencius' point in 2A6 is that by imagining ourselves in this situation we would realize that (1) human beings all possess a natural feeling of compassion, but (2) this natural feeling does not have sufficient motivational power in all human beings in instances where an action is required.[38]

Scholars have debated extensively regarding the translation of *ceyin zhi xin*.[39] In *Mengzi* 2A6 and 6A6, Mencius says that the emotional characteristic of benevolence is *ceyin* 惻隱. "*Ce*" and "*yin*" refer to some sort of feeling of pity and sympathy, presumably at the sight of the child in danger in 2A6. The characters together would mean "grieving the suffering of others and delighting in the happiness of others."[40] Thus, *ceyin* is "the feeling that directly emerges from the heart-mind of *ren*."[41] *Ceyin* is a characteristic of *ren* because "the person with *ren* should be able to appreciate, or transfer into oneself, others' aspirations, desires, ideals, and preferences, and then try his/her best to help them achieve their goals."[42]

Regardless of how exactly we translate *ceyin zhi xin*, most scholars will admit that *ceyin zhi xin* by itself is the seed of benevolence and therefore not-yet-benevolence (as a full-fledged virtue).[43] Although Mencius himself states that "*ceyin zhi xin* is *ren*," this is a metaphysical claim regarding the origin of benevolence. My point here is not that the metaphysical connection between *ceyin zhi xin* and *ren* does not exist, but rather that the *success* of Mencius' thought experiment in 2A6 requires the reader to practice in-their-shoes empathy. I do not hold the view that *ceyin* itself is empathy or sympathy. My interpretation does not require me to take a stance on the precise metaphysical status of *ceyin zhi xin* since my aim is to show how the thought experiments work, regardless of whether it is a concern-based construal or some other psychological mechanism. When we imagine ourselves witnessing a child in danger of falling into a well, we arrive at the conviction that we do in fact feel a moment of compassion. This conviction is argued (and felt) through the mechanism of in-their-shoes empathy. *Ceyin* needs to be further cultivated to become benevolence—and this realization requires the reader to recruit some level of empathy and see that not all of us would be motivated by this natural instinct.

Next, on my reading of 1A7, the passage is meant to function by asking the reader to engage in simulation-based empathy. Passage 1A7 is a more complex thought experiment that recruits other-directed perspective taking empathy because we are asked to imagine what it is like to be *someone else*—that is, the King. First, the King is asked to imagine how he would feel if he were the ox (or the sheep) in that specific situation. Second, we, the reader, are asked to imagine what we would do and how we would feel if we were the King in that specific situation. Mencius hopes to illustrate the problem of extending *ceyin* from two different perspectives.

Passage 1A7 is related to 2A6 in the broad sense that they illustrate the motivational difficulty of natural compassionate responses. Let us first examine the King imagining himself to be the ox (and the sheep). In the passage Mencius recounts an account that he heard about the King:

> I have heard Hu He say that while the king was seated in the upper part of the hall someone led an ox past the hall below [in the courtyard]. On seeing this, the king asked where the ox was going and was told that it was being taken to serve as a blood sacrifice in the consecration of a bell. The king said, "Spare it. I cannot bear its trembling, like one who, though blameless, is being led to the execution ground." Asked whether in that case the consecration of the bell should be dispensed with, the king said, "How can it be dispensed with? Substitute a sheep instead." Did this actually happen?[44]

Based on Zhu Xi's commentary, this passage is linked to the child-falling-into-a-well passage since this is also a moment of pure compassion where we learn that "the heart of compassion is the tip of benevolence."[45]

I interpret that in 1A7 the King experienced emotional contagion with the ox but not the sheep because he had been exposed to the suffering of the ox. *Ceyin* manifests itself in this example because the King is able to feel what the ox feels based on its frightened appearance. The King "caught" the suffering of the ox, contrary to what he had expected, because it was an automatic process.[46] As such, the King experienced the ox's pain without having a cognitive evaluation about whether or not killing animals is morally permissible, and therefore failed to extend *ceyin* to the sheep.[47] The ox and the sheep are both going to die, yet the difference is that the King saw the ox in person but not the sheep. When the suffering was far away, he did not have sufficient motivation to end the suffering. *Ceyin* is therefore limited when there is no direct encounter with suffering. *Ceyin* gives us the capacity to be compassionate toward suffering we can see, but it needs to be cultivated so that we can extend it to beings not in our immediate experience. Fully extended *ceyin* would allow us to transfer the pain of one animal to another in the same situation, and thereby generalize the reason for our actions.

Next, in 1A7, Mencius' example also invites us to imagine ourselves *as the King* in that specific situation (although this may not have been the sole

intention of Mencius). Most of us, upon reading the text, would arrive at the conclusion that the King's decision to save the ox but not the sheep is ridiculous because the sheep would also be in distress and pain on its way to the execution ground. But how is it that we arrive at this conclusion? It is through empathy: we say to ourselves, if *I* were the King, I would have been able to see that there is no difference between sacrificing the ox or the sheep because either way there would be an animal in pain. Nonetheless, although we would have compassionate responses toward both the ox and the sheep, it is not necessarily the case that all of us would actually save both animals. If we imagined ourselves as the King in his shoes, maybe some of us would understand why it was inevitable that one of the animals has to be sacrificed. This does not entail that we think the King made the right decision by sacrificing the sheep, but it allows the reader to understand why Mencius excused the King's callousness. We, the reader, come to understand why the King's *ceyin zhi xin* could not be extended properly by *empathizing with the King*. By imagining what it is like to be the King (and seeing how he failed to practice empathy), the reader gains an understanding of how instinctual responses need further cultivation in order for an agent to be truly benevolent. We come to the conclusion that Mencius' position (to excuse the exchanging of an ox for a sheep) is questionable because we have participated in perspective taking.

Therefore, on my reading, Mencius' fully extended *ceyin* is a rich psychological-emotional mechanism that involves the practice of simulation-based or other-oriented perspective taking empathy, which is "a complex, imaginative process through which an observer simulates another's situated psychological states while maintaining clear self-other differentiation."[48] My analysis here is *not* an interpretation of Mencius that states that we can cognitively empathize with non-human animals and simulate their psychological states. Rather, my point is to shed light on how the thought experiments could work most effectively on the reader—beyond ways that Mencius may have solely intended. Mencius' excuse for the King's exchanging the ox for a sheep is an explanation, but not necessarily a justification, for Mencius' position.[49]

By emphasizing the importance of cognitive empathy in the reader, I may seem to suggest that he is leaning toward universal caring, since in-their-shoes empathy requires us, in theory, to care for all humankind equally by simulating their perspectives. Nonetheless, my focus on cognitive empathy does not lose the important insight of differentiated love in Confucianism. The focus on universal benevolence does not ignore the Confucian principle of differentiated love, since the ability to empathize with another person naturally corresponds to the intimacy of the relationship between subject and object. That is, we are more likely to empathize with someone whom we know very well than with a stranger. Simulation empathy is hardly plausible if one has no prior relationship with the object

of empathy. Without prior knowledge of the other's personal characteristics (and shared history), it will be not be easy to achieve simulation empathy. It would also be impossible for us to have a relationship with everyone on earth (for the sake of universal benevolence). Thus, my reconstruction here is consistent with the thought that one ought to care most for the people with whom one has close relationships, that is, family and friends, and gradually expand one's circle to practice empathy. My view encourages us to work on extending our natural instinctual responses but does not claim that we should go against them (or deny them for the sake of universal caring).

III. Hutcheson, Benevolence, and Empathy

For Hutcheson, his text also invites the reader to engage in cognitively elaborated forms of empathy.[50] I will analyze a passage in the second section of the *Inquiry* where Hutcheson invites us to contemplate what we think should happen to a group of pirates that have done us wrong.[51] In this example, the focus is on cultivating benevolent desires by simulating another person's perspective. Hutcheson wants to show that even toward people who have done us wrong, we *can* be motivated to act benevolently on the premise that we introspect and practice simulation-based empathy.

Before I proceed, recall again that Hutcheson's moral sense is not the same kind of psychological mechanism as Mencius' *ceyin*, which leads from empathy to benevolence by reflection. Nonetheless, Hutcheson thinks that benevolence arises not from reason or meditation, but from a universally shared feeling that is triggered by the sight of pain and suffering.[52] Hutcheson defines it as

> A fellow-feeling, by which the state and fortunes of others affect us exceedingly, so that by the very power of nature, previous to any reasoning or meditation, we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and sorrow with them in their misfortunes; as we are disposed to mirth when we see others cheerful, and to weep with those that weep, without any consideration of our own interests. By means of this sympathy and of some disinterested affections, it happens, as by a sort of contagion or infection, that all our pleasures . . . are strangely increased by being shared with others.[53] (Hutcheson [1747] 2007, p. 33)

Based on this passage, Hutcheson holds a universal shared feeling of "sympathy" that appears to resemble Mencius' *ceyin zhi xin*, as they are both triggered by the sight of the pain and suffering of others. However, Hutcheson's usage of sympathy refers to an immediate contagion of feelings antecedent to any moral reasoning, and therefore should be distinguished from the notion of sympathy (which has a cognitive element built into it) that Adam Smith later develops in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.[54]

Hutcheson expresses the immediacy of this universal sentiment at the sight of others' suffering and pain:

> We may here observe how wonderfully the constitution of human nature is adapted to move compassion. Our misery or distress immediately appears in our countenance, if we do not study to prevent it, and propagates some pain to all spectators; who from observation, universally understand the meaning of those dismal airs. We mechanically send forth shrieks and groans upon any surprising apprehension of evil; so that no regard to decency can sometimes restrain them. This is the voice of nature, understood by all nations, by which all who are present are roused to our assistance, and sometimes our injurious enemy is made to relent. (Hutcheson [1726] 2004, pp. 159–160).

As such, both Mencius and Hutcheson think that benevolence arises out of a primitive compassionate feeling. Hutcheson's thought experiment reveals to the reader that the primitive feeling can grow into benevolence with proper cultivation, even though the moral sense itself is not the seed.

Now let us proceed to the targeted passage.[55] Hutcheson writes:

> Every one at present rejoices in the Destruction of our Pirates; and yet let us suppose a Band of such Villains cast in upon some desolate Island, and that we were assur'd some Fate would confine them there perpetually, so that they should disturb mankind no more. Now let us calmly reflect that these Persons capable of Knowledge and Counsel, may be happy, and joyful, or may be involv'd in Misery, Sorrow, and Pain; that they may return to a State of Love, Humanity, Kindness, and become Friends, Citizens, Husbands, Parents, with all the sweet Sentiments which accompany these Relations: then let us ask ourselves, when *Self-Love* no longer makes us desire their Destruction, and when we cease to look upon them, under the Ideas suggested by fresh Resentment of Injuries done to us or our Friends, as utterly incapable of any good moral Quality; whether we would wish them the Fate of Cadmus's *Army*, by plunging their Swords in each others Breast, or a worse Fate by the most exquisite Tortures; or rather that they should recover the ordinary Affections of Men, become Kind, Compassionate, and Friendly; contrive Law, Governments, Propertys; and form an honest happy Society . . . . I fancy the latter would be the Wish of every Mortal . . . .[56]

Hutcheson's passage raises two questions: (1) What kind of action would our moral sense approve of as benevolent toward these pirates? (2) How can we be motivated not to retaliate, but instead act benevolently toward them? First, Hutcheson's universal benevolence entails that we would be concerned about the pirates' well-being for their own sake: it means we wouldn't wish them to be tortured but rather that they restore the natural affections of kindness and compassion and live happily ever after. Thus, the moral sense will approve actions that aim at caring for the pirates' well-being. Second, when we practice simulation-based empathy, we are able to imagine the pain and suffering that the pirates may have gone through in the past. By simulating the pirates' past experiences, we gain an understanding of what made them who they are today. We would not wish misery upon

them because benevolence motivates us to study the happiness of others—and forgive them. Our genuine moral love for the wrongdoers *as* human beings overrides their wrongdoings, so we are able to overcome our desire to retaliate against them. Hutcheson's point is that a truly benevolent person would not merely refrain from harming the pirates, but instead actively do something good for them.

Another way to explain how simulation-based empathy works is to understand it as relating to another person *holistically*. This means that we see the object of our empathy as a *whole* person—not just according to the particular emotion that she feels at the moment—but as a temporal being who has her own set of beliefs, values, preferences, and so on.[57] In order to truly understand why she is feeling what she is feeling at a certain point in time, we have to understand her *beyond* that particular moment, and hence the heavy cognitive burden that is imposed on this kind of empathy. "Reconstructing" another person's subjective experience presupposes that we transcend our current conscious experience so that we can relate her current emotion to her past and her future from her perspective. In other words, we seek to understand that person as a *subject* in itself, rather than an object in our perceptual experience. In contrast, in emotional contagion, we fail to posit that there is a unity behind a person's many particular slices of mental states. We "catch" the emotion that the other is feeling at the moment, but there is no understanding because we *confine* the other to a particular point in time. When we limit the other like this, we cannot have a full understanding of her emotions because the meaning of her emotions is connected to her past and her future.

Now let me link this back to Hutcheson's discussion of benevolence. To act benevolently is to understand the other person's mental states in relation to her past and her future. In benevolence, we see the object of our empathetic experience as a *subject* in itself, with a past and a future. From Hutcheson's example, he is asking the reader to view the pirates as human beings like you and me. It is significant to point out that the reader is asked to consider the *relations* that these pirates may have (as friends, citizens, husbands, parents, etc.) and character *traits* that they may develop (kindness, compassion, and friendliness). This is significant because the reader must go beyond her present perception of the pirate at a certain point in time. The reader must use her rational capacity to reconstruct the pirates' subjective experience by learning more facts about them—for example, to imagine that these pirates, when they were born, were innocent and good kids like most of us, and it is only due to circumstances that they grew up to be such villains. In other words, the reader reconstructs the pirates' lives as a temporal unity over time—where events are causally linked and have meanings. Most importantly, when the reader perceives the pirates as human beings with a distinct and unique past, she gains an understanding of their *motivations* and *desires*—a deeper under-

standing of why they did what they did. Benevolence goes beyond experiencing an emotion, because the mere absence of not wishing bad things onto others is not benevolence. Benevolence would require us to care for the pirates by doing something *good* for the pirates such as building shelters for them and trying to rehabilitate their humanity.

The cultivation of primitive compassionate feelings into genuine benevolence therefore involves a complex level of cognitive activity. Hutcheson argues that we should always work on strengthening our benevolence in order that our self-interest does not overpower. *Strengthening* one's benevolence, as I have shown, means that one actively engages in simulating another's subjective experience (and diminishing one's own ego-related desires). A truly benevolent agent would consciously take the initiative to adopt someone else's perspective, reconstruct her subject experience, and understand her as a human being with a past. This resonates well with the simple definition that benevolence means to love humankind for its own sake and to be kind and humane to one another. True benevolence requires empathy that goes beyond the automatic process of "catching" someone else's emotion. Being benevolent consists of the willingness to understand other people and making the effort to care about their well-being.

One may worry that my way of framing Hutcheson's benevolence (by focusing on universal caring) would render his view indistinguishable from the Mohists, given that Hutcheson has been credited with the famous remark of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." I address this concern by noting that many scholars have provided arguments for a non-consequentialist reading of his ethics.[58] One way to understand this is to think of Hutcheson's theory as having different criteria of moral evaluation at different levels: at the most fundamental level, benevolence is the only approved motivation. That is, the first criterion we use to assess an action is the agent's motivation. We only approve acts that maximize happiness insofar as they are the kind of acts that agents motivated by universal benevolence would perform.[59] The pursuit of morality is aimed at caring for individuals so the greatest happiness for greatest number is "more as a heuristic ideal rather than a practical goal."[60] Furthermore, it is clear that Hutcheson endorses the image of concentric circles in morality (i.e., graded benevolence). For Hutcheson, not only is it natural for us to care more for those closer to us; it is also the best way to achieve (the greatest) happiness.[61] It is therefore not a contradiction in Hutcheson's system to maintain both partiality and universality. As seen in my interpretation, cognitive empathy is not natural in us, but we ought to pursue it for the sake of universal benevolence, not because those close to us are not important, but because it helps us extend our natural empathy to more beings in the world.

Conclusion

By showing how their thought experiments work, I hope to have illustrated that for both Mencius and Hutcheson the process of cultivating benevolence involves reason—because it involves a complex level of empathy that goes beyond merely catching the emotion of another person. This conclusion is significant because it draws a distinction between empathizing and empathizing through *action*. Most of us have the capacity to empathize in the most basic sense—to catch someone else's emotion—but this is not sufficient to motivate in cases where we cannot directly "feel" the suffering of the other (whether visually or aurally). The level of empathy therefore drops when we cannot actually see and hear the pain. For example, most people are aware of starving children in Africa through pamphlets or news articles, but most people do not leap to their phone to make a donation (or do something about it). Mencius and Hutcheson both believed that true benevolence requires action, as shown through their thought experiments. I therefore conclude that we should understand Mencian-Hutchesonian benevolence as involving a certain level of cognitive empathy in order to effectively promote the good of others (exactly because it is against our natural instinct to care for those we don't know well). We will find it easier to care for those with whom we have no close relationship if we can relate to each one of them holistically *as a person* with a history of thoughts, beliefs, values, desires, and so on. This is quite an intuitive way to formulate benevolence: to love humankind for its own sake is to put an effort into understanding where each one of us comes from.

Notes

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1 – I refer to Mancilla's article "The Bridge of Benevolence: Hutcheson and Mencius" (2013).

2 – It is beyond the scope of this essay to give an elaborate argument for the definition of empathy. There is a lack of consensus among philosophers regarding the definition of empathy, and the most common approach in the literature is to keep it very broad. In my view, philosophers cannot reach an agreement on this issue because

different philosophers focus on different aspects of the process of empathy—depending on the objective of their analysis of empathy. There is also an alternative way of defining empathy as pluralistic in nature; see Fagiano 2016.

3 – The translation I am using (by Irene Bloom) translates *xin* 心 as "mind," but it is also translated as "heart-mind" by other scholars. The word *xin* in Chinese literally means the heart, but it is not purely affective. The Chinese *xin* is the organ of both our affective and intellectual capacities.

4 – Bloom 2009, p. 35.

5 – Mancilla 2013, p. 63.

6 – Kim 2010, p. 412.

7 – Hutcheson (1726) 2004, p. 157.

8 – Ibid., p. 116.

9 – Hutcheson writes: the "springs" of those actions which are counted as virtuous are "*some Determination of Nature to study the Good of others; or some Instinct, antecedent to all Reason from Interest, which influences us to the Love of others, even as the moral Sense*, above suppos'd, determines us to approve the Actions which flow from *this Love* in ourselves or others" (Hutcheson [1726] 2004, vol. 1, p. 112).

10 – Ibid., p. 89.

11 – Ibid., p. 90.

12 – Carrasco 2011, p. 523.

13 – Ibid., p. 523.

14 – Radcliffe 2004, p. 634.

15 – This draws on Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities. Moral approvals and disapprovals are primary qualities, which are simple ideas, while ideas of virtue and vice are secondary qualities, which are complex ideas. We cannot understand our ideas of moral approvals or disapprovals (feelings) unless we form ideas of virtue and vice. We cannot understand the feelings we have unless we actively form the idea of virtue as a power in the agent's action to procure the sentiment of approval (Winkler 1985, pp. 181–183).

16 – Sprague 1954, pp. 797–798.

17 – Ibid., p. 796.

18 – Hutcheson explains the evaluative functions of the moral sense in the last section of *Inquiry*. See McGregor 2015, p. 751.

19 – Ibid., p. 751.

20 – Ibid., p. 752.

21 – Ramirez defines a perspectival thought experiment as one that requires the subject of the experiment to occupy a perspective different from her occurrent one, and the force of the experiment depends on the feelings or judgments the subject makes from her perspective (Ramirez 2017, pp. 505–506).

22 – "Empathy." n.d. In *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. Retrieved from http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/empathy.

23 – Schmid 2010, p. 236.

24 – Based on the discovery of mirror neurons in sensory and motor cortices, many scholars have concluded that low-level mirroring responses such as emotional contagion generate understanding. Remy Debes challenges this claim. See Debes 2010, and also Coplan 2011, pp. 45–48.

25 – Hatfield et al. 1994; Coplan, 2011, p. 46.

26 – Coplan argues that emotional contagion involves a different neural architecture from empathy (Coplan 2011, pp. 45–47).

27 – Ibid., pp. 49–50.

28 – Ramirez 2017, p. 510.

29 – Coplan calls this "pseudo-empathy"; see Coplan 2011, p. 54.

30 – Ibid., p. 53.

31 – Stueber 2006, p. 21.

32 – Coplan 2011, p. 58.

33 – Simmons criticizes Coplan's view for creating a false dilemma between perspective taking and emotional contagion. Simmons argues that there can be a middle ground between these two forms of empathy that does not require perspective taking but is also distinct from emotional contagion (Simmons 2014, p. 99).

34 – Coplan 2011, p. 58.

35 – Ibid., pp. 58–59. A Shamay-Tsoory et al. study (2009) revealed that there are conflicting evidences for thinking that empathy is a bottom-up process. There is evidence that correlation exists between empathy scores and mirror activity, but there is also other evidence that suggests that high emotional contagion is linked to lower capacity of empathy. There is another category of empathy called "theory-theory" empathy that is affectively cold. I disregard this as a genuine form because we

theoretically predict the target's mental states but we have no understanding of her affective state. We merely end up predicting how she ought to feel based on normative theory and folk psychology. For more see Battaly 2011 and Ramirez 2017, p. 511.

36 – Mower 2016, p. 476.

37 – Ibid., p. 477.

38 – Ibid., p. 476.

39 – *Ceyin* can be translated as "commiseration" (Legge 1992), "distress" (Dobson 1963), "sympathy" or "compassion" (Ware 1960), and "compassion" (Lau 2003; Hinton 1998). According to Darwall, King Xuan's feeling of distress at the ox's suffering should be considered as sympathy because sympathy entails a concern for the well-being of the target object. Darwall argues that empathy alone would indicate that the King saved the ox because he did not like the uneasy feeling at the sight of it being led away. Sympathy, on the other hand, would indicate that the King cared about the ox and the caring is the motivational force of his action rather than a self-directed painful feeling. Luo Shirong argues that we should read *ceyin zhi xin* as empathy because King Xuan's feeling of pain at the sight of the ox's fear is triggered by *both* primitive and advanced forms of empathy. In Luo's reading, King Xuan feels distressed by the ox's pain because he associated the ox with an innocent man being wrongly put to death (Van Norden 2007, p. 50).

40 – Although the literal translation of *ceyin* seems to suggest sympathy, based on the examples that Mencius gives in his text, Van Norden concludes: "to be benevolent is to be pained by the suffering of others and to take joy in the happiness of others, whether the suffering or joy is contemporary or prospective" (Van Norden 2007, p. 249).

41 – Wong Wai-ying 2012, p. 136.

42 – Wong Wai-ying 2005, pp. 201–204.

43 – Many scholars, including Kwong-loi Shun (1997), emphasize its spontaneity untainted by the agent's ulterior motives while others consider *ceyin zhi xin* "as a kind of vicarious knowledge or perception of the suffering of another sentient being combined with a judgment of what is the right thing to do in that situation." Kim rejects reading *ceyin zhi xin* in these two traditional ways because he thinks *ceyin* is distinct from spontaneous reactions of alarm and surprise—and consequently is not that kind of "affect program" that can provide compassion with its motivational purity (Kim 2010, pp. 414–415).

44 – *Mengzi* 1A7.4, 8.

45 – Van Norden (2007), p. 235.

46 – Mower compares the King's affective response to sympathy contagion in Hume's work, a process in which "the emotions of another are a kind of contagion that spreads from emotionally infected beings into those around them" (Mower 2016, p. 478).

47 – According to Coplan's analysis, emotional contagion provides no understanding of the target individual's emotions or mental states more generally (Coplan 2011, p. 48).

48 – I am not stating the claim that empathy requires the narrower conceptualization that Coplan has argued for. However, I am endorsing the claim that there is a difference between the three different processes described by Coplan, which are supported by current neuroscience findings. I am indifferent to whether we should narrow the concept of empathy, but I do agree that empathy may come in different levels, and my purpose here is to point out that Hutcheson and Mencius are referring to a more sophisticated level of empathy.

49 – Mancilla 2013, p. 65.

50 – Carey 2007, p. 281.

51 – There are a number of these "thought experiments" in Hutcheson's *Inquiry*, but I will not be able to analyze all of them under the constraints of limited space here.

52 – Mancilla 2013, p. 62.

53 – Hutcheson (1747) 2007, p. 33.

54 – Ibid., p. 62. Carrasco has proposed that the Smithean concept of sympathy is a construct of the fusion of the three "noblest" senses in Hutcheson: the moral sense, the public sense, and the sense of honor (Carrasco 2011, p. 530).

55 – Hutcheson's other goal in this passage is to show that human beings have no innate hatred ([1726] 2004, p. 105).

56 – Ibid., pp. 105–106.

57 – My view draws upon Taipale's analogy between empathic experience and music perception. Taipale argues that we ought to perceive the empathic object as a temporal continuum in order to fully understand where he or she is coming from (Taipale 2015).

58 – Michael Slote (2007), Jeffrey Edwards (2006), and Scott Gelfand (2019) have all argued for interpretations of Hutcheson that do not promote utilitarian thinking.

59 – Gelfand 2019, pp. 488–489.

60 – Mancilla 2013, p. 68.

61 – Ibid., p. 69.

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