

Shaun Nichols, "Sparks of Benevolence: The Varied Emotional Responses to Suffering in Others" from Sentimental Rules

I. Definitions:

- A. empathy = vicarious sharing of affect (having same affect as other)
- B. perspective-taking = imagining oneself as having another's mental state
- C. emotional contagion = being caused by the other's mental state to have the same mental state; "catching" the other's mental state
- D. personal distress = self-oriented feeling (e.g. upset, alarm, anxiety, distress) caused by other's distress
- E. mindreading = knowing what other's mental state is; attributing a state of mind to another

[LB: this definition of empathy does not capture its being a feeling *for* or *toward* another—a feeling that has another person as its object]

II. Goal of chapter: determine cognitive and affective mechanism underlying altruistic motivation (33)

[LB: SN is not consistent in his definition "altruism." Usually he means helping behavior/beneficence; but sometimes he means helping behavior motivated by concern for other person {footnote 1, 31}.]

III. Core cases of altruistic motivation ["core" means same behavior/motivation in children as in adults (35)]

- A. in children (34)
- B. in adults (34-35)

IV. Theory that no mindreading is necessary for altruism (35)

- A. Emotional contagion theory (35-38)
- B. Sympathy theory (Sober and Wilson): feeling toward other that does not require same feeling in subject (so not empathy)(38-39)
 1. can there be sympathy for an "objective situation" of other without knowledge of her mental state? (39)
 2. (a) S&W give no evidence for this. (b) even if it existed, such sympathy would not explain child cases

V. Theory that sophisticated mindreading is necessary for altruism

- A. perspective-taking (Goldman)(40): pretend to have mental state of target; this triggers unpleasant affect
- B. Batson: imagine how other is feeling (40-41)
- B. Blum's view (41): recognition that other might have different feeling than oneself in same situation

VI. Nichols's "minimal mindreading" account (41)

SN asks question: Why do people stay and help when they could escape? (42)

- A. "enduring mental representation" view—escape would not rid subject of personal distress
 1. but minimal cues can trigger emotional contagion (42-43)
- B. So need mindreading to avoid minimal cues problem and have accurate view of other's state of mind

[LB: Is this a solution to problem of why a person engages in helping behavior; or what psychological mechanism underlies altruistic motivation?]

VII. How SN's account applies to children: Do they attribute distress? (44) They exhibit comforting behavior that seems to appreciate what the other's distress is about

VIII. Argument for perspective-taking (again: see V): Batson's argument (46): "High empathy" subjects much more likely than "low empathy" to help rather than escape (in easy escape condition). High empathy achieved through asking subjects to take perspective of other. Also achieved through making victim similar to subject.

- A. Former does not show perspective-taking is required for empathy, only that it facilitates it (46)
- B. Latter shows nothing about perspective-taking, only relation between "similarity" and willingness to help (47)