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ESTUDO DAS EMOÇÕES  
*Study of emotions*

# The empathic bases of moral behaviour\*

As bases empáticas do comportamento moral  
*Las bases empáticas del comportamiento moral*

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**Abstract:** This article aims to examine the possibility to explain the basis of moral behaviour in natural terms consistent with evolutionary theory. The defense position begins with the clarification of the concept of empathy, as done by Hume and Darwin, plus contemporary research in the areas of neuroscience, evolutionary psychology and ethology. My argument points in favor of the hypothesis that socially relevant emotions are regulators of social behaviour, being a criterion for distinguishing between moral and purely social relations. What should be understood is in that bases psychobiological mechanisms of sociability, particularly empathy and social instincts, operate as regulators of normative behaviour in small groups and how this relates to the way moral distinctions are made in everyday life. The focus of this investigation will be to identify the elements that are at the root of such behaviour and explain it without resorting to metaphysical concepts. I will present empathy as the candidate to answer the question of how these mechanisms developed within the evolutionary process and how to add an intersubjective element to social relevant emotions, so that they have the strength to inhibit socially relevant behaviours.

**Keywords:** Empathy. Social Instincts. Moral behaviour.

**Resumo:** O presente artigo se destina a analisar a possibilidade de explicar as bases do comportamento moral em termos naturais compatíveis com a teoria evolucionista. A defesa dessa posição se inicia com a clarificação do conceito de empatia a partir de Hume e Darwin, acrescida de pesquisas contemporâneas nas áreas da neurociência, psicologia evolucionista e etologia.

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O argumento se dirige em favor da hipótese de que emoções socialmente relevantes são reguladoras do comportamento social, sendo um critério de distinção entre relações morais e meramente sociais. O que deve ser compreendido é em que sentido mecanismos psicobiológicos de sociabilidade, em particular a empatia e os instintos sociais, operam como reguladores do comportamento normativo em pequenos grupos e como isso se relaciona com o modo como são realizadas distinções morais no cotidiano. O foco da investigação está em identificar os elementos naturais que estão na base desse comportamento, de modo a explicá-lo sem recorrer a elementos metafísicos. Apresenta-se como candidato a responder a essa questão o modo como esses mecanismos se desenvolveram dentro do processo evolutivo e como agregam um elemento intersubjetivo às emoções, de maneira a que elas tenham força de inibir comportamentos socialmente relevantes.

**Palavras-chave:** Empatia. Instintos sociais. Comportamento moral.

**Resumen:** El presente artículo se destina a analizar la posibilidad de explicar las basis del comportamiento moral en terminos naturales compatibles con la teoria evolucionista. La defensa de esta posición se empieza con la aclaración del concepto de empatía de Hume e Darwin, más las pesquisas contemporáneas en las áreas de la neurociência, psicologia evolucionista y etologia. El argumento es en favor de la hipótesis de que las emociones son reguladoras del comportamiento social, sendo um criterio de distinción entre relaciones morales y meramente sociales. Lo que debe entenderse es en que sentido mecanismos psicobiológicos de sociabilidade, en particular la empatía y los instintos sociales, operan como reguladores del comportamiento normativo en pequenos grupos y cómo esto si relaciona con el modo como son realizadas distinciones morales en la vida diaria. El foco de la investigación es identificar los elementos que están en la raíz de este comportamiento, para explicarlo sin recurrir a elementos metafísicos. Se presenta como un candidato para responder a la pregunta el modo cómo estos mecanismos se desarrollarán dentro del proceso evolutivo y cómo agregan un elemento intersubjetivo a las emociones, para que tengan la fuerza necesaria para inhibir los comportamientos socialmente relevantes.

**Palabras clave:** Empatía. Instintos sociales. Comportamiento moral.

In day-to-day life, it is common to regard empathy as a necessary condition to normative behavior, resulting in the general belief that it is intimately linked to morality. However, defining this relationship

has proven complicated for two main reasons. The first is that empathy has been defined in different ways, and according to Batson et al. (1995), this makes it difficult to differentiate it from other socioeconomic characteristics. The second is the fact that the empirical evidence of the role of empathy in morals is disputed. In this sense, while theoreticians such as Hauser (2006) defend the importance of empathy, others such as Prinz (2011) maintain that only emotions play a central role in morality.

Within the philosophical tradition, there are three distinct ways to regard empathy as necessary to morals. The first is distinct to the study of metaethics and discusses its necessity in carrying out moral acts. The other two, namely whether it is necessary to the development and motivation of a conduct of a kind, converge as much for a normative approach to the question as it does for a descriptive approach. In regards to this, the focus of this article is to understand if empathy participates in the process as the phenomenon of morality and its role in the motivation to ordinarily carry out acts of this nature.

Although it is a relatively recent term, the concept of empathy has been widely studied along the history of philosophy. According to Smith (2002, p. 5) “whatever is the passion which arises [...] an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator”. In turn, Darwall (1998) realizes a distinction between sympathy and empathy. While the first is characterized to the author as an emotional response to a third party, the second is configured as the ability to put oneself in another’s place. In the words of Darwall (1998, p. 261) “empathy consists in feeling what one imagines he feels, or perhaps should feel (fear, say) or in some imagined copy of these feelings, whether one comes thereby to be concerned or... not”. Ultimately to the author, empathy is feeling what one imagines another feels or should feel.

Though empathy may be associated with imagination, it appears problematic to define this element as necessary to the realization of the empathic process. If it operated solely along these lines, it can be an overly-cognitive mechanism, since it needs the capacity of the individual to realize a complex mental act. In fact, from the patterns indicated by Hatfield et al. (1994) and Hoffman (2000), Darwall recognizes that empathy can exist, in its most simple form, solely in an emotional contagion. Prinz (2011) agrees with this position, defending that

empathy requires a kind of emotional mimicry. He argues that it may appear as much in its simplest form as it does as a complex cognitive process. However, the author makes an exception as there exists a difference between experiencing what the individual should feel and what he could be feeling, as only the second case would have an empathic process.

Although disagreeing with the hypothesis that empathy is the mechanism which adds moral force to emotions, Prinz (2011, p. 3) concedes that without it “we wouldn’t be grasping the judgments that such sentences have the function of expressing”. In other words, it would be possible to express sentences such as “action X is good” or “action Y is bad”, but without empathy, one may not comprehend the weight of its meaning. This position can be associated with Humean thought in two ways. The first is that a good action is that which intentionally brings pleasure to another being, while its opposite is considered bad. The second addresses the capacity of emotional ties to an agent or target of actions of this nature, which will incite emotional responses of approval or censorship. These emotions make up part of the motivational force to consider actions as morally good or bad.

The problem with philosophical approaches as much as scientific research on the relationship between empathy and morals is that both operate within the scope of traditional concepts that constitute morality.<sup>1</sup> If the ethnological definition of morals is taken into account as much as its sociobiological aspect, then it also makes sense to understand empathy from its social functionality and value during evolutionary adaptation. In an effort to advance this question, I will present the relationship between empathy and social connection, relating to its contribution to the development and maintenance of social conviviality in small groups. Clarifying this question should help in establishing the characteristics that distinguish social and moral behavior and its origin in culture or in nature.

Darwin (2004) elaborated on a theory on the development of the species through what he defined as the process of evolution. Therefore, natural phenomenon must be comprehended and explained from an

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<sup>1</sup> The defense of the functional concept of morals was previously defended in the article *Moralidade, empatia e dinâmica social de lobos* (2014), from where I maintain this stance.

evolutionist standpoint. This way appears to be correct, since repeated success in research in the area of natural sciences indicates that many behavioral characteristics still present today in human beings are results of specific selective pressures. In this sense, the physiological characteristics as much as the mechanisms which placate social behavior must be seen as select evolutionary adaptations owing to its specific function of survival.

Amongst the diverse fields of the natural sciences, ethology is one which depends more on selectionist focus. Darwin (2000) defends his theory that behavioural patterns constitute enough conserved elements in the species, as much with the dental arch and bone formation as any other physiological structure. In the same way that happens with these characteristics, hereditary behavioural similarities can unite members of a species, a gender, or bigger taxonomic units. Despite not constituting more of an evolutionary advantage, certain behaviors currently found in the most varied species still make themselves present in the same way that other organs do, such as those characterized as vestigial.

To argue that behavioral characteristics evolved in a similar way to extra body parts implies stating that both are evolutionary adaptations. This means that the behaviour of social mammals are adaptations in the environment where they developed, in the same way as their physiological characteristics. In short, they are present today through genotypic and phenotypic transmissions accumulated by the species within the evolutionary process. This process includes not only rigid forms of behavior, but also the mechanisms of adaptive modification, such as the concept of learning.

In the following sections I will dedicate myself to the concept of empathy, starting from the philosophical perspective presented by Hume (1896), linked with the idea of social instinct elaborated by Darwin (1981) and relating to neuroscientific research on the subject. The result will be a sentimentalist-evolutionist explication of normative behaviour present in certain mammals, establishing empathy as a basis of these social relations guided by emotional connections.

## 1 Philosophical perspectives on empathy

According to Hume (1986), empathy makes not only one's emotions, but also individuals who possess emotional connections influence and regulate human behavior. With this, one has an important

common and observable element in the group behaviour of social animals with complex nervous systems, given that empathy can be found in different species. According to Quinton (1999, p. 42), “the origins of morality in the passions and sympathy, the natural inclination to hold on to the happiness of others and to feel discomfort at their suffering”. A joyful expression in an individual shows its well-being and provokes satisfaction in those who are interested, in the same way that the manifestation of sadness inspires dismay. Many emotions are felt through the sort of communication brought about by empathy, instead of an individualistic inclination.

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than the propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own. (HUME, 1896, p. 166).

Empathy is defined by Hume (1896) as a basic capacity that makes normative relations based on emotions possible. An important scholar on Humean thought, Smith (2005, p. 169) affirms that “a place has still to be allowed for ‘a quality of human nature’ than which none [...] is more important, viz. sympathy. Not being [...] itself a passion, it cannot be brought under any of the headings in the classification of the passions”. At first, one gains knowledge of the emotions of others through their bodily expression, and these signals bring the subject to conceive the passional state of who is observed. This occurs given that these emotions are now present in the individual, though in a latent way. In this communication of sensations, both experience a syncretic emotional reaction, sharing the same emotional response or correlating emotions which may differ according to the degree of force or vivacity. Empathy is characterized as permitting this emotional communication.

The first way through which a being recognizes the emotions of another is through physical expressions and other external signals. Upon noting signals that indicate the certain emotional disposition of a loved one, through empathy the subject feels an emotion corresponding to the emotion present in another, this being the equivalent to any other original emotion. This communication of emotions is only possible because there exists a conformity in the species in relation with their

emotional apparatus. Therefore, it is not possible that empathy incites in someone an emotion that they are not able to feel.

It is important to note that, despite some individuals being more sensitive to others' emotions, there is, to some degree, an interest in the well-being of those with whom they maintain emotional ties. This manifests itself mainly through mutual caring and interest by those who nurture each other's friendship. What occurs in relation to empathy is the same that occurs in the rest of the body. In other words, although differences exist in relation to the form and size, its structure and composition are the same.

The capacity to access feelings of pleasure and pain are of fundamental importance to understand how emotions can regulate actions. On Hume's thought, Smith affirms (2005, p. 164) that "the distinction between the good and the evil, thus taken in their widest scope, is therefore 'founded on pleasure and pain'". The moment in which an emotion does not provoke any of these sensations, indifference is felt, and the actions of others will not arouse any interest. Pleasure and pain create a preference for actions that provoke determined reactions such as, for example, happiness and sadness.

An attitude is only considered as right or wrong as a sign of a quality or characteristic that arouses social interest, despite happening in small groups. For example, when emotions incited by an action provoke satisfaction, this makes the perpetrator of such actions be seen as good, the opposite being also true. According to Hume (1896), pleasure or pain incited by behaviours of this kind constantly come from their utility or not in relation to public well-being. For an action to arouse these emotional reactions, it is necessary for a natural constitution able to receive these signals to exist. Otherwise, they wouldn't influence the emotions, and it would not be possible to carry out any kind of approval or censorship in relation to the behaviour which incites them.

The cognitive characteristics and emotions of all members of the same species function in a very similar way. Generally, there does not exist an emotion strong enough to motivate an individual that also cannot be present in any other, even to different degrees. According to Schneewind (2001, p. 229) "sympathy is an animal capacity which allows the feelings of others reverberate inside ourselves". It allows to happen what may be considered as an "emotional exchange". For



example, the affliction of a person also affects another and both end up experiencing a state of spiritual synchronicity, though to different degrees.

The affections of others are at first known to us only by their effects, i.e. by their external bodily signs. These signs through association recall in idea the passion which have accompanied them in ourselves in the past. This is the first stage in the process of communication. The second stage consists in the conversion of the passions thus ideally entertained into the actual passions themselves. (SMITH, 2005, p. 170).

The moment in which someone expresses an emotion, the other immediately passes its effects to the causes upon perceiving this. The result is the formation of an idea that is so attuned to another's emotional state that it promptly converges into its own emotion. According to Hume (1896, p. 294), "we are only sensible of its causes or effects. From these we infer the passion: And consequently these give rise to our sympathy". For example, **A** is feeling sad, and **B**, upon recognizing this instinctively through the observed expression, has in itself the idea of sadness. **B** recognizes sadness, but feels it in a less visceral way than **A**. Though empathy, this emotion gains intensity to the point that the idea of sadness that **B** had transforms into an impression, which may gain the same force and vivacity as that experienced by **A**.

Empathy, however, does not appear to be simply the natural ability to reproduce states of pleasure and pain motivated by another's emotion. Moreover, I will defend the hypothesis that it is understood as a psychobiological mechanism, creating an advantageous adaptation that is the basis of social interaction, of the creation of emotional ties, and of group living. In this sense it is possible to understand the reason why it is present not only in human beings, but in other social species, resulting from a long evolutionary process. This point is central to explaining normative behavior from the sentimentalist-evolutionary point of view. Understanding the natural basis of empathy implicates conferring empirical support upon the definition, and there do not exist better candidates for this task than the fields of evolutionary psychology and neuroscience.

## 2 Psychobiological perspectives on empathy

On a phenomenological level of description. Empathy notes a syncretism of the emotions felt by the subject in relation to those expressed by others. Ickes (2003) argues that this “daily mind-reading” is not something that requires learning. According to the author, its basic mechanisms are connected in the brain and need the individual’s social interaction to develop them. In fact, basically all actions of mammals with complex social lives are directed or produced as a reaction to other members of their group. Batson (1990) advances this point to defend that the capacity to experience the emotions of another in relation to oneself illustrates the social nature of “me” or “I”, which would be inherently intersubjective.

It is highly improbable that empathy is a spontaneous product occurring only in human beings and, therefore, not possessing any evolutionary history. Brothers (1989) maintains that in the development and evolution of mammals with complex social lives, the organization of the neural activity was shaped by the need for a rapid evaluation of the motives of another. This capacity has an adaptive value, once it contributes to an inclusive aptitude, aiding in the search for food, detection of possible threats, mates, in addition to the protection and defense of territory.

However, it is not solely evident by this point how selective pressures have shaped empathy. According to Boyers (2001), the evolutionary process operates mainly on the level of functionality, and it is not simply in the relationship between physical structures and the behaviours in which they are useful. In other words, evolution works in the adaptation of solid and flexible mechanisms that incline animals to behave in a determined manner. Tooby and Cosmides (1996) propose a definition of empathy as a “specialized computational disposition”, which models such motives and emotional reputations to be developed as a result of many recurring situations along evolution. However, this does not mean that there exists a unique module of the brain contending such disposition. On the contrary, Boyer and Barrett (2004) demonstrate that there exists a collection of separate mental systems whose combinations produce the capacity for a the emotional comprehension of the other.

Dunbar (1998) defends that social complexity, indexed according to the size of the group, has been a driving force in cerebral evolution.

In this sense, the demands of navigating more complex social relations constitutes a selective pressure within the evolutionary process, exercising influence on the development of empathy. Moreover, the relationship established between the individual that expresses an emotion and the observer which interacts with it has direct implications for the survival of these animals. The capacity of emotional connection is associated by Batson (1991) with pro-social actions, such as the impulse to protect offspring. In this same line, Hamilton (1964) and Wilson (1988) suggest that this behaviour evolved owing to its contribution to genetic aptitude in the selection of kin. What seems to happen between mammals of complex social lives is an extension of this inclination for reciprocal preoccupation towards all members of the group.

Also, empathy is not characterized as a mechanism restricted to only one capacity. For De Waal (1996) it exists to varying degrees, from mere agitation pertaining to the suffering of another, to the complete comprehension of a complex emotional reaction. Comparative description such as those realized by Plutchik (1987) show that there exist analogical social behaviours among human beings and other social animals, from caring and protection to behavioural demands toward all members of the group. In this process of emotional connection, emotions are expressed and recognized instinctively, inciting positive and negative reactions. Being through the feeling of the same emotion or complementary emotional responses, the establishment of emotional links increase the probability of all members of the community to act in a harmonious way.

At one level, emotional expressions are governed by rules and can be elicited by simple stimuli, as in the example of disgust in the presence of bitter taste. However, humans and other animals also use bodily expressions to communicate various type of information to members of their own species. Understanding other people's emotional signals has clear adaptive advantages and is especially important in the formation and maintenance of social relationships. (DECETY; JACKSON, 2006, p. 77).

The phenomenon of emotional contagion defined by Cacioppo et al. (2003) as a tendency to mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another individual.

As a consequence, an emotional syncretism occurs amongst subjects. This is most simply expressed as emotional behaviour propitiated by empathy, given that it does not necessitate complex cognitive deliberations for what happens. Its most elementary emotional component is conceptualized by Trevarthen and Aitken (2001) as the capacity to instinctively detect the emotion of another individual, which is experienced as a result of apprehension of another's emotional reaction.

Research on child development show that from infancy, human beings manifest an instinctive need to relate to other people. It was demonstrated that very young babies express what Trevarthen (1979) defined as "intersubjective sympathy". In other words, they are naturally predisposed to be sensitive and responsive to the subjective states of other beings. This can be demonstrated in different ways, including spontaneous face-to-face interactions between children and their mothers, as well as when a neutral expression is adopted for the act of ignoring the child which may bring the infant to abandon the interaction. This emotional communication operates as a bridge to the apprehension of the baby from others' emotional states.

The development of this emotional syncretism is considered by Hoffman (2000) as possibly owing to the empathic mechanism. The games between the mother and the baby assist in the solidification of the capacity of emotional linkage, which begins to occur in a regular fashion around 2 to 3 months of age. Agreeing with Stern (1985), these playful moments, where every one of the parents contributes to a repertory of interactive behaviours, implies the formation of emotional linkages between themselves and their offspring. A microanalysis of these social interactions conducted by Malatesta and Haviland (1982) showed that mothers are highly predisposed to imitate the expressions of joy, interest, surprise, sadness and anger expressed by the babies. However, they rarely exhibit negative emotions to their children.

Campos and Stenberg (1981) highlight babies' capacity to distinguish emotional expressions and interpret this emotional communication as a "social reference". This idea was reinforced by Rosen et al. (1992), who identified that this process begins at ten months of age and reflects an active effort to obtain emotional cues in a way that aids one's own evaluation of ambiguous or uncertain situations. However, it is not possible to characterize this relationship as empathetic by this study only, seeing how difficult to interpret if the purpose of the social

reference is to evaluate circumstances inside a determined context or those of other members of the group. The point here is to present the integral and flexible reality of social relations guided by emotions, showing that expression and recognition of emotions does not require complex cognitive deliberations.

The perception of emotions activates the neural mechanisms which are responsible for the generation of emotional reactions. Adolphs (2002) argues that this mechanism contributes, though partially, to the manifestation of an emotional reaction through observation of oneself in another subject. For example, upon perceiving somebody smiling, the observer instinctively activates the same facial muscles of the action of smiling, generating in him a corresponding feeling of happiness. Wallbott (1991) and Dimberg et al. (2000) adds that this relationship occurs despite the conscience absence of recognition of the stimulus.

Such a system prompts the observer to resonate with the state of another individual, with the observer activating the motor representations and associated autonomic and somatic responses that stem from the observed target—that is, a sort of inverse mapping. (DECETY; JACKSON, 2006, p. 78).

In all, shared emotional representations on the cerebral level have been found in regards to the comprehension of the action, the processing of pain and the recognition of emotions. This mechanism founds a neurophysiological basis for the functioning of social characteristics through the activation of driving representations of emotions. Despite this, there does not exist a specific place where the manifestation, seeing that its neural bases are widely distributed and the pattern of activation varies according to social context and the emotion experienced.

Studies carried out by Decety and Jackson (2006) reinforce the present thesis on defining empathy in three essential elements: a) the regulation of emotion; b) an emotional response towards another, which many times implies sharing the same emotional state; and c) the cognitive capacity to take the point of view of another being. On a basic level of comprehension, it may be conceived as an interaction between two or more subjects which experiment and share the same emotion or complementary emotions. On the experimental level, empathy should be conceived as a psychobiological mechanism which propitiates a

symmetry between one's own emotional reactions and those experienced by another.

In all, it is plausible to consider that emotional syncretism, propitiated empathy may occur as much automatically as it does intentionally. Lipps (1903) suggests that this mechanism propitiates a “kinesthetic” relationship, of instinct and involuntary nature, of the emotional state of another in the individual. Upon producing this physical mimesis, the emotion is projected beyond the subject in the direction of the observer, acquiring an intersubjective force. Previously, Ax (1964) suggested that empathy is like a state of the nervous system, because it tends to simulate the reactions of another. This is realized through the instinctive imitation of the bodily state of the observed facial expressions, where both feel identical or corresponding emotions.

The central point here is not that empathy can be comprehended as a biological mechanism which facilitates the sharing of emotions. This perspective was developed by Levenson and Ruef (1992), who found evidence that the precision of the observer in the inference of the negative emotional states of others is related to the degree of physiological synchronicity between both. In other words, when two or more subjects feel similar emotions, they learn with more precision the intentions and motivations of everyone. The question now is to find out to what extent empathy contributes so that emotions require the intersubjective force necessary to the capacity to influence social behaviours. I will dedicate the next section of the article to this.

### **3 Psychobiological mechanisms and normativity**

To determine whether behaviours are products of habit, were acquired through the evolutionary process or through cultural constructions is not a simple task. According to Darwin (1981), the behaviour present in social species, to defend the group from possible threats and to hunt their prey together, originates from empathy. As previously argued, if a physiological or behavioural characteristic is relevant to the survival of a species, it constitutes an evolutionary advantage and tends to be preserved through natural selection. Following the naturalist orientation proposed in this article, I will defend in this last section that the characteristics which incline mammals of complex

social life to present normative behaviours has empathy as its foundation, which were acquired by evolutionary process.<sup>2</sup>

Social instincts make a fundamental characteristic for a species in order to be classified as such. Therefore, they act in a very varied manner amongst different animals which present behaviour of this nature. For example, these instincts can determine the specific roles of group members in the social organization and the function which everyone must carry out. However they may also act in a way that some species have developed a tendency to appreciate social conviviality and to make themselves available to collaborate with other members of the group.

The social instincts lead an animal to take pleasure in the society of its fellows, to feel a certain amount of sympathy with them, and to perform various services for them. The services may be of a definite and evidently instinctive nature; or there may be only a wish and readiness, as with most of the higher social animals, to aid their fellows in certain general ways. But these feelings and services are by no means extended to all the individuals of the same species, only to those of the same association. (DARWIN, 1981, p. 55).

I will follow the proposal put forward by Darwin (1981), that social instincts create an evolutionary advantage and must have been preserved by process of natural selection. However, it is important to highlight that the hypothesis that emotions such as anger, guilt and shame create a motivating element central to normative behaviour and is not included in the definition of social instincts solely from this argument. What must be understood is that the capacity to realize reciprocal requirements among members of a group may have been developed through the combination of these instincts with a basis in empathy.

Although they may be overpowered by more impulses, such as sexual, social instincts tend to persist over others. The question here is in understanding that forces act when there is a conflict between particular and collective interests, in a way that comprehends how social

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<sup>2</sup> The influence of the ability to comprehend others' intentions and to respond to them within social conviviality along human evolution was widely worked on by Tomasello (2000), Gallese et al. (2004), Leslie et al. (2004) and Batson (2011).

inclinations may prevail over selfish motives and to create an element of behavioural regulation. In intimate relationships guided by emotional ties, the feeling of “shame on oneself” is commonly felt when one fails, in some way, the expectations of those with whom they maintain links of this nature. In the moment in which particular desires prevail over social interests, immediate pleasure resulting in the satisfaction of the act gives place to a negative feeling which arouses discomfort. Emotions such as guilt and shame come about exactly as an expression of the failure in relation to the other members of the group.

At the moment of action, man will no doubt be apt to follow the stronger impulse; and though this may occasionally prompt him to the noblest deeds, it will more commonly lead him to gratify his own desires at the expense of other men. But after their gratification when past and weaker impressions are judged by the ever-enduring social instinct, and by his deep regard for the good opinion of his fellows, retribution will surely come. He will then feel remorse, repentance, regret, or shame; this latter feeling, however, relates almost exclusively to the judgment of others. (DARWIN, 1981, p. 64).

This idea also makes it possible to infer that a pleasurable sensation will be felt when collective inclinations overpower particular desires. Pleasure proportioned by actions which collaborate with the group conviviality comes from attitudes guided by social instincts which tend to prevail by their longstanding characteristics. Nevertheless, for this to occur it is necessary for the interaction between the members of the group to be frequent, despite being capable of responding emotionally to the behaviour of some of the others. Following the evolutionist proposal, empathy is the mechanism that permits such links to be established, being the basis of the mode in which these social relationships develop.

However great weight we may attribute to public opinion, our regard for the approbation and disapprobation of our fellows depends on sympathy, which [...] forms an essential part of the social instinct, and is indeed its foundation”stone [...] and so consequently would be obedience to the wishes and judgment of the community. (DARWIN, 1981, p. 55-56).



Here I defend the naturalist approach, in which empathy creates at the base of psychobiological mechanisms which drive the care and the attention for those with whom they maintain an emotional attachment. Equally, negative emotions such as fear and anger are driven against possible threats. Empathy is attuned to the capacity that mammals with a complex social life have of retaining old feelings of pain and pleasure, as its necessity to alleviate the suffering of another as a way to placate one's own discomfort. In the same way, a relationship of mutual satisfaction occurs, given that pleasurable feelings are also shared.

The presented concept of empathy is compatible with the Humean conceptualization set out previously. Therefore, it creates a natural mechanism which bases the capacity of mammals with a complex social life to establish emotional ties strong enough to motivate the approval or censorship of socially relevant actions. In this communication of emotions, although its varying degrees and liveliness may differ amongst group members, an emotion acquires an intersubjective element among its members. Therefore, empathy can be understood as an evolutionarily advantageous adaptation which permits this communication of emotions among species that may have an essential characteristic in its social conviviality that is essential to its survival.

Whenever someone receives a compliment for their actions, they experience a pleasurable feeling. If one considers oneself as worthy of compliance, one ends up having the same perspective as one's observer. Here occur two distinct moments. Firstly, one has the pleasure that is aroused by the admiration of others. Secondly, satisfaction for oneself is felt by the recognition of the completed act.

Now nothing is more natural than for us to embrace the opinions of others in this particular; both from sympathy, which renders all their sentiments intimately present to us; and from reasoning, which makes us regard their judgment, as a kind of argument for what they affirm. (HUME, 1986, p. 168-169).

For Hume (1896), as much for emotions as deliberations of understanding exercise influence on normative behaviour. This is especially true in relation to the requirements realized about one's own character. For example, the subjects constantly seek to encounter motives

that justify their desires, in a way that they do not feel bad for wanting something that goes against the values of the group with whom they live. However, this is done as an attempt to influence an emotion that is now present, changing this kind of rationalization as merely instrumental. The emotions constantly act over comprehension, precipitating the individuals of all kinds of opinion and influencing the way in which they approve of or censure actions, be they their own or of others.

So that they have the force of social constraints, emotions depend on empathy, being itself liable to influence according to the kind of relationship that exists between the subject and the group of which it makes a part. According to Hume (1896, p. 170), “the pleasure, which we receive from praise, arises from a communication of sentiments”. Someone that is constantly depressed, but who lives alone among strangers, is not as affected by this situation as much as someone who is exposed to the disdain of their partners. In this last case, a double depression can happen, that of the family, from whom one necessarily has ties of consanguinity and, for the most part, of contiguity; like two friends, for whom one has only connections of the last kind. Being so, the higher the number of existent relationships amongst members of a group, the bigger the influence that emotional linkage propitiated by empathy will be on social relations.

## Conclusion

The Humean proposal on the motivational bases of normative behaviour is an excellent way to address the presented question, but it can be refined still more if viewed under the scope of evolutionary theories on the psychobiological mechanisms of sociability. As previously argued, whenever a kind of behaviour is reproved of, the emotional charge present in the act of censorship varies according to who is being condemned and the motives of condemnation. The one who carried out the action, upon perceiving that they were disapproved of by the members of their group, feels guilt or shame. These emotions cause displeasure and make the individual feel a disagreeable sensation. The other members may feel disgust, anger or indignation as a reaction to such behaviour.

The intensity of the disapproval is associated with the emotional connection that exists between the perpetrator of the action and those who disapprove, as well as the sort of behaviour presented. For example

the moment in which a member of a group is assaulted by an external agent, this incites aggressive emotions such as anger or indignation in the other members, impelling them to witness such an act. If this same member has not suffered a heavy aggression as a cause of this action, then the emotion experienced by the rest of the group tends to be more lenient.

What is important in this article is not to make a catalogue of the different emotions and the intensity with which they present themselves to approve of or censor behaviours. What is relevant is the understanding that normative reciprocal requirements ordinarily carried out are influenced by the manifestation of an underlying emotional disposition propitiated by empathy. In this way, judging an action as right or wrong is intrinsically linked to the capacity to experience an emotion which arouses a feeling of pleasure or pain, motivating one to take a position on the observed act.

This communication of emotions does not imply that every member of the group will always feel compelled to act in a way that helps another. Normative behaviour guided by psychobiological mechanisms of sociability is very complex, being influenced by the kind of relationship that exists among members of the group, as well as the natural and social context in which they relate to each other. Any animal tends to be more affected by the pleasure pain of its offspring than other members of the species. However what occurs among animals of complex social behaviour is an extension of this interest to all members of the community.

Empathy permits one to feel pleasure as a response to actions which aim for the social harmony of the group, as well as to receive social compensation in exchange for acts which preserve this well-being. Considering that it permits this exchange of emotions, it ends up making the desires of one interfere with those of another. In this way, emotions stop being something individual and subjective, to gain a place that is common to all members of the group, giving emotional reactions the intersubjectivity necessary to acts as normative regulators to social conviviality. It is in this sense that the emergence of regulatory sanctions, and the consequent development of the phenomenon of morality, could have being developed from this natural foundation based on empathy.

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