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WHY THE NATURE/NURTURE AND THE AFFECTIVE/COGNITIVE DICHOTOMY WON'T GO AWAY:
THE CASE OF EMPATHY

SUMMARY: *The goal of this paper is to reveal why the affective/cognitive and the nature/ nurture dichotomy are still present in the literature on empathy and why most of the theoreticians find them appealing. In the first part of the paper I will provide a short overview of the psychological theories of empathy, while in the second part I will turn to the reasons that keep the affective/cognitive and the nature/nurture dichotomies alive in these theories. I will argue that such reasons could be found in the underlying Cartesian picture of mind, emotions and the nature of communication, that most of the contemporary developmental theories implicitly accept. As a result of these assumptions, the phenomenon of empathy within these theories is closely tied to the Cartesian epistemological problem of other minds. My goal is to show that the aforementioned dichotomies are part of the solution of this particular Cartesian problem and if we abandon the problem we will be in a position to abandon these dichotomies. Finally, at the end of the paper I will explore what it would mean to step outside of the Cartesian boundaries and what kind of implications that would have for our understanding of empathy.*

KEY WORDS: *nature/nurture, affective/cognitive dichotomy, empathy, Cartesian picture of mind.*

> ION: That proof strikes home to me, Socrates. For I must frankly confess that at the tale of pity my eyes are filled with tears, and when I speak of horrors, my hair stands on end and my heart throbs. (Plato, *Ion*)

In his most famous science fiction novel, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*, Philip Dick gave his main character Deckard a peculiar job, namely the job to find and 'retire' androids that started misbehaving. However, the trouble was that all androids of the latest version looked and acted exactly like humans, and any IQ test could not successfully differentiate between the two groups. Nonetheless, Dick did not leave Deckard without a reliable method of how to tell an android from a

human. He provided him with the Voigt-Kampff Empathy Test consisting of a series of imaginary situations presented to a subject. These imaginary situations would evoke automatic measurable empathic reactions in any normal human being. In the case of an android, however, the absence of empathy would become apparent.

Dick's novel spelled out an intriguing vision of what it means to be human. Unlike Descartes who argued that it is not conceivable to have an automaton with the ability to use language, and for whom the crux of what it means to be human is the ability to speak and reason, the 20th century novelist does not have a problem to conceive of an automaton that can do this. Instead, the premise that gets Dick's story going is that automatons *cannot empathize with others*. The ability to feel with others belongs only to humans: at the tale of pity the automaton eyes do not fill with tears, nor does the automaton heart throb when it speaks of horrors.

What makes Dick's novel so appealing to somebody interested in empathy is the way it captures two central debates in the contemporary psychological literature: the debates about *what empathy is* and *how it is developed*. In regard to the first question psychologists have frequently used the term empathy to refer to two distinctly separate phenomena: cognitive perspective taking and affective reactivity to others. In Philip Dick's novel empathy is the latter. Similarly, in relation to its development, psychologists understood empathy either as an essential part of human biological heritage or as a skill acquired in the process of general social interaction. While Philip Dick starts off his novel leaning toward the former, the ending implies the latter, i.e. that empathy is not the unique biological make up of humans but that androids could develop it by living long enough and socializing. In contemporary theories on empathic development empathy is understood as both a cognitive and affective capacity as well as both innate and acquired. But the inherent dichotomies still persist in some form.

My goal in this paper is to reveal why the affective/cognitive and the nature/nurture dichotomy are still present in the literature on empathy and why most of the theoreticians find them appealing. In the first part of the paper I will provide a short overview of the psychological theories of empathy, while in the second part I will turn to the reasons that keep the affective/cognitive and the nature/nurture dichotomies alive in these theories. I will argue that such reasons could be found in the underlying Cartesian picture of mind, emotions and the nature of communication, that most of the contemporary developmental theories implicitly accept. As a result of these assumptions, the phenomenon of empathy within these theories is closely tied to the Cartesian epistemological problem of other minds. My goal is to show that the aforementioned dichotomies are part of the solution of this particular Cartesian problem and if we abandon the problem we will be in a position to abandon these dichotomies. Finally, at the end of the paper I will explore what it

would mean to step outside of the Cartesian boundaries and what kind of implications that would have for our understanding of empathy.

1. Empathy in the 20th century psychology

The introduction of the term empathy at the beginning of the 20th century marked the beginning of the intensive research on the topic. Empathy became the focus of the interest not only of psychologists, but also of social philosophers, sociologists, and anthropologists. The research spontaneously centered around two aforementioned basic questions: whether empathy is affective or cognitive, and whether it is innate or acquired human ability.

The first problem to arise and become the real obstacle to progress in the research was the definitional one. Once the word empathy came into use, it became a practice of scholars with the different backgrounds to use it in their own way. Moreover, there was no consensus about its meaning even within various disciplines, and psychology was certainly no exception. So, although it appeared on the surface that all these scholars were talking about one and the same phenomenon, namely empathy, the truth was that they had different meanings in mind. However, in order to undertake any serious empirical research, a psychologist needs to clarify the phenomenon of her investigation, and the case of empathy has not been an exception. As a result, psychologists started with the practice of defining the term empathy in order to avoid any further confusion. Nowadays, almost every article or book on empathy in developmental and social psychology starts with a short history of the acute definitional problem and specifies which definition of empathy is going to be used in the rest of the text. The attempts to define empathy, however, revealed not only the sloppiness and inconsistency in the way psychologists used the term 'empathy' in the first half of the last century, but also that there were more substantive disagreements over the very nature of this phenomenon among them. The major disagreement turned out to be whether empathy was cognitive or rather affective phenomenon. As noted earlier, in order to overcome this tension, contemporary authors admit that empathy is both.

While the disagreements over the nature of empathy could be traced back to different traditions of '*einfülung*' and altruism, the explicit question of how empathy develops could not have been posed prior to 1871 when Darwin's *Descent of Men* was published. Or, at least, it could not have been posed in the same way. Indeed, even before Darwin, scholars speculated about whether certain human capacities are innate or learned. The *Descent of Man*, however, gave these questions an entirely different spin. Within Darwinian framework it became possible to make sense of what it means to say that some trait or capacity is innate. So, Darwin and Darwinians could have argued that if a trait is innate it means that it has been

selected and that it has been transmitted from parents to offspring. A next step, based on the biological discoveries of Mendel's laws of heredity and Watson and Crick's discovery of the DNA structure, allowed for the identification of innateness with the *genetic* inheritance, and it seemed at the time that biologists could finally make *biological* sense of the concept of innateness. Furthermore, once the theory of evolution was widely accepted in the scientific circles, pondering on the questions about human nature independently of how this nature develops in phylogenetic and ontogenetic time, became outdated. Questions about biological and cultural factors in empathic development followed this new turn in biology. So, on the one hand, it became popular to treat our ability to apprehend the feelings of other members of our species as a part of our biological heritage. On the other hand, some theoreticians were interested in empathy as a skill acquired in the process of general social interaction by which the growing child assimilated the images and symbols of society.

Cognitive/affective and nature/nurture dichotomies that have arisen from the two central questions about the nature and the development of empathy when combined resulted in two different traditions of thinking about empathy. In the *cognitive* tradition the development of empathic abilities has been usually explained by the development of a certain mental (cognitive) mechanism through which a child gains knowledge of other minds. Due to the tendency to identify empathy with the cognitive ability, and disregard its affective component theoreticians such as Lipps (1903, 1905), Titchener (1926), Kohler (1929), Piaget (1932), (to name just a few), define empathy as the ability to take the perspective of others and understand their thoughts and feelings. The emphasis is on 'understanding others' not 'feeling' with them. So, e.g. Lipps and Titchener believed that the mechanism through which empathy occurred was an inner imitation of the observed person. In Kohler's work, merely viewing and interpreting the actor's actions, movements, and physical cues could accomplish understanding other people. In Piaget's writings, empathy would be the ability to decenter, and decentring is another word for perspective taking. That is, in the process of decentring the individual suppresses his or her usual egocentric look and imagines how the world appears to others. As such this ability is the late product of the ontogenetic as well as phylogenetic development.

In the tradition that identifies empathy with some sort of *affective reactivity* to others, which goes all the way back to A. Smith (1759), H. Spencer (1870), McDougall (1908), and extends to the psychoanalytic tradition, empathy is usually taken to be an innate capacity that enables humans to achieve successful and fast communication of their inner feelings such as fear and joy. It has been hypothesized that this kind of communication probably had an important evolutionary advantage because such ability enabled humans to bridge the gap between themselves and the

others quickly (and without the need for the advanced cognitive apparatus) by using automatic, innately given mechanism.

In contemporary theories on empathic development that define empathy as both cognitive and affective capacity, the nature/nurture debate is still present. (see e.g. Stotland 1969, Batson 1987, Hoffman 1984, Eisenberg 1990, Davis 1994). Unlike more traditional approaches these theories tend to divide empathy into several related but different mental capacities, and accordingly they try to determine which of these are innately given and which are developed and dependent on other cognitive abilities. Precursors of empathy such as primary circular reactions and mimicry are usually taken to be innate unlike perspective taking that is achieved through the development of the cognitive sense of others, i.e. through the development of mental representations of the self and others (see e.g., Hoffman 1984, Davis 1994).

The main problem is that the compromises, which include both the affective and cognitive side of empathy, and also identify innate and acquired features of this phenomenon, do not resolve the tensions between the different aspects of empathy. Traditionally, affective and cognitive processes are taken to be distinct and fairly separate psychological processes. So, if we want to argue that empathy consists of both, we need to spell out the nature of their relation and how these processes bring about unified empathic experience. Similarly, if empathy is understood as consisting of innate *and* acquired capacities and mechanisms, the question of how nature and nurture relate, affect each other, and orchestrate empathic development becomes even more pressing. The most general descriptions how their development unfolds (as e.g. in Hoffman's synthesis) will not suffice.

In the next part of the paper I turn to the basic assumptions about the nature of mind and communication with which contemporary theories of empathic development begin. The analysis that follows is mostly inspired by Wittgenstein's later works (1953/1973, 1967, 1980). While it might be the case that the current theories of empathic development, (theories that presuppose the Cartesian view of mind), could be refined in such a way so that they provide a more comprehensive explanation of the relation and co-development of different aspects of empathy, I suggest that it would be worthwhile exploring further the possibility of the non-Cartesian approach to empathy. At the end of the day, it might turn out that such approach would give us a more fruitful framework for thinking about empathy as well as for future empirical research.

2. The Cartesian Paradigm

One of the main reasons why contemporary developmental theories inevitably run into the affective/cognitive and nature/nurture dichotomies lies in the assump-

tions about the nature of human mind that these theories presuppose. These assumptions are essentially Cartesian[1] and they ultimately dictate how, on the one hand, emotion and cognition are understood, and, on the other, how their development is explained. When summarized they are as follows:

1. Cognition and emotion consist of distinct mental/physical processes, (so, while mind is representational and makes sense of the outside world through the representations, emotions consist in various physiological, neurological, and expressive processes in addition to inner feelings).

2. Representations as well as inner feelings are epistemically private.

3. Given the epistemic privacy of our mental lives communication consists in coding/encoding of epistemically private thoughts and feelings through some socially shared medium, regardless of whether this medium is verbal (language) or non-verbal (facial expressions).

4. In order to explain the development of socially shared systems of communication we need to assume that the child is equipped with some inner constraints that help her learn the language of the community and successfully interpret emotional signals of others. Each of these points requires some unpacking.

a) The nature of cognition and emotion

According to Descartes, mind is a nonphysical substance with various mental capacities; it is identified with the subject or 'I' and differentiated from the physical body. As a different substance it nonetheless interacts with the body and is able to gain knowledge about the outside world by employing different mental capacities. It is important to notice that in Descartes' writings emotions remain outside the mind's realm and belong to the body[2]. Thus, according to Descartes, it is not only the case that cognition and emotion are seen as different processes, but they are seen as different processes that characterize two different substances.

This view of mind raises at least the following two major concerns: a) how do mind and body relate while being two different substances (the *ontological* problem) b) how does mind get to know the outside world (the *epistemological* one). In the twentieth century the former problem has been reformulated since substance dualism became outdated. However, curiously enough, the latter one became the main interest of psychologists and cognitive scientists in an almost

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1   Cartesian is the term that refers to a specific view of mind made explicit in Descartes writings. However, it is not confined to his writings. This view is well spread in the Western tradition.

2   The capacity of sensing does belong to the mind but it is not strictly speaking an emotion or passion. Passions belong the body and hence are part of the physical/natural world (see Descartes' *The Passions of the Soul*)

unaltered form. Regardless of the ontology of mind they accept, i.e. regardless of whether they understand mind either as a brain or as a computer, psychologists and cognitive scientists alike still find that their main goal is to explain how the human mind acquires representations of the outside world. Accordingly, in order to account for knowledge of the outside world that we as humans acquire during our lives, the job of psychologists and cognitive scientists within the Cartesian framework is to reveal the nature and the function of the various mental faculties that the mind employs in achieving this goal.

The most important assumption about the mind that all Cartesians are confined to is the assumption that the mind organizes and makes sense of the world through the representations it forms. This assumption runs not only through the writings of Descartes, but is also to be found in the empiricist tradition, contemporary philosophy of mind, cognitive science, and psychology. The understanding of what representations are, as well as what their role is, varies. In contemporary cognitive science mental representations frequently appear under different names such as symbols or activation vectors. Symbols and symbol manipulations are a crucial part of the computational version of the representational theory of mind (CRTM). Since cognition is computation and computation is symbol manipulation, according to CRTM, mental representations must be understood as discrete and formal symbols. Within connectionism, however, mental representations have a different form. A connectionist network is a web of interconnected units called nodes each with many possible degrees of excitation. Accordingly, connectionist representations are represented not by a single node but by a pattern of excitation distributed by many nodes, and each node contributes to the encoding of many representations.

Although both the role and the nature of representations in contemporary cognitive science might look unrelated to Locke's or Descartes' concept of ideas/representations (e.g. while the latter are part of the conscious, the former are part of the unconscious processes) *they still have the same role in the cognitive processes, i.e. without them the subject would not be able to gain the understanding of the outside world*. So, what unites all these different conceptions of representations is that within the Cartesian conception of mind what it means to say that a child *understands* something is identified with the *possession of certain representations* (regardless of whether these representations occur on the conscious level or whether they play the main role in the subconscious processes that produce what we call understanding on the conscious level). In other words, 'to achieve understanding' means 'to form certain mental representation,' which in turn, is a specific mental process. So, since understanding is a specific mental process, when we say that so and so understands something we are saying that so and so is in a certain mental state. This process of the formation of various representations/concepts is achieved by reason and reason alone.

Since the mind becomes responsible for the knowledge of the outside world, emotions (being different from the mind's faculties) are responsible for how we feel about the world. Emotions, according to Descartes, belong to the body and are automatic. Not surprisingly, according to the contemporary theories of emotions, inspired by the Cartesian bifurcation, such as the Affect Program Theory and the Differential Emotions Theory (Ekman 1984; Izard 1984) emotions are defined as: automatic, complex reactions to the outside/inside stimuli consisting of physiological, neurological, expressive, and experiential processes. Unlike Descartes, however, in contemporary psychology and cognitive science emotions as well as cognition are part of the same material substance, namely brain/neural system. *But, although the distinction between mind and body is not understood as an ontological distinction any more (mind, along with emotions, is usually reduced to a certain function of the brain) the bifurcation of emotion and cognition remains unshaken because emotion and cognition are still different mental/brain processes.* As mental/brain processes they are understood as hidden, inner processes. This leads to the second important assumption of the cartesianism: epistemic privacy.

b) Epistemic privacy

It is usually said that only we know what we think. Within the Cartesian framework this means that only we have direct access or direct knowledge of our own mental states while others can gain the understanding about what we think only if we tell them or let them know in some other way, i.e. if we express our thoughts either through verbal or nonverbal behavior or both. This has two important consequences: firstly, it determines the way the connection between mental states and behavior is understood; and secondly, it affects the way the knowledge of other minds is conceptualized. The argument goes like this: since what I do is determined by what I think, it must be the case that my behavior and my mental states are externally and causally related. So, if we, as Cartesian minds, are to know whether other people have minds and posses mental states similar to ours we cannot confirm that by having direct 'look' into their 'heads'. We can just *infer* when we observe their behavior that they possess minds, have mental representations, and lead mental lives similar to ours. In other words, we can get the knowledge about thoughts of others only by inference, while we have direct knowledge of our own. This means that mental representations are epistemically private.

The relation between inner feelings and outer behavior is not so different. As with respect to *understanding* (or believing, or other cognitive acts for that matter), to *feel something* (anger, happiness, joy, fear) is an inner phenomenon that is related to, but not the same as, the behavioral sign of it. Consequently, in the same way we use the behavior of others to infer that they are in a certain *cognitive* mental state

(e.g., that they understand something) we use their behavior as evidence that they feel something (e.g. that they are in pain). From the third person point of view there is no difference between *how to know* that somebody believes something or *that* somebody feels something. That is, from the third person point of view we have just behavior to work with. Feelings as well as thoughts are epistemically private.

If the epistemic privacy of thoughts and feelings holds, there are two questions that we need to ask regarding our knowledge of other minds. Firstly, we need to specify what kind of mental mechanism, (capacity, mental process) yields this knowledge, and secondly, how can we justify this knowledge. In philosophy, the latter is usually referred to as *the problem of other minds*. This means that the problem of other minds is equated with the problem of the *justification* of the knowledge of other minds. However, the answer to this one is usually closely related and depends on the kind of mental mechanism that we hold responsible for the knowledge of other minds. It is not surprising that, in philosophical writings, the two are usually conflated.

c) The nature of communication and the problem of development

Epistemic privacy of thoughts and feelings imposes a specific view on the nature of communication. That is, if our mental states are private and accessible only to us, it becomes urgent to explain how it is possible to understand others when they are talking about their inner states and what exactly the act of talking about these private affairs consists in. In this set up the communicative act becomes the process of encoding and decoding predetermined, epistemically private thoughts and feelings in the socially shared medium, namely language (in the case of feelings facial expressions would serve this purpose). This view of communication, where language and facial expressions serve as the socially shared systems for communication of private mental states, imposes a specific view of how these systems develop and how they are acquired.

It seems that a normal human child is able to attach the correct meanings to the facial expressions very early in life. Also, it seems that a normal human child is able to learn language very quickly. But, how is this possible when a child is never explicitly taught to map the same word, or facial expression to the certain concept or a feeling? Moreover, even if the child was explicitly taught to do this it still remains unclear how the child would do the mapping given that she has only her own private mental states and that she cannot compare them with the private mental states of others. In sum, the problem is that, given epistemic privacy, it is hard to imagine how the child ever makes the right conclusions about which word-concept or facial expression-feeling mappings are the correct ones (the ones that everyone else in their community uses).

So, in order to explain how children end up attaching the same meanings to the same words (or facial expressions) as everybody else in their community we must assume that they have some inner constraints at disposal. Otherwise, children would not be able to learn the language or engage in emotional communication at the early age as they do. Now, the question then arises as to what the nature of these inner constraints is. The debates over the nature and/or relevance of universal grammar, theories of mind, and basic emotions, that plague contemporary developmental theories are, in fact, debates about whether these inner constraints are hardwired and genetically determined or acquired through the child's first interactions with the world. What has been left unnoticed, though, is that the problem of inner constraints emerges only if we accept the Cartesian view of mind.

3. How does empathy fit into this picture?

Cartesian assumptions have had (and are still having) a great impact on the study of empathy. Within these assumptions, empathy as the ability to feel with and for others has to be closely related to the problem (or rather to the solution of the problem) of other minds. Hence, regardless of whether empathy is understood as the mental process of reading of the outer signs and inferring the mental states (thoughts and inner feelings) of others or whether it is understood as the outcome of a mental process of this kind, empathy cannot be accounted for *independently* of the explanation of the fact that human beings, despite epistemic privacy, have the knowledge of other minds.

The problem how we know that other people live mental lives similar to ours has several classical answers. The first attempts to establish the basis for our knowledge of other minds can be traced back to Nicolas Malebranche (1688), John Locke (1693), and George Berkeley (1732). However, the most famous (and also most frequently rejected) solution to the Cartesian problem is the argument from analogy first formulated by Mill (1872) and later expanded by Russell (1948) and others (see e.g. S. Hampshire, 1952; M Slote, 1966.) In its classical version this argument has the following form: since I can make a causal connection between my feelings and the reactions of my body, and because I can observe similar bodily reactions in others I am *warranted* to conclude that the others have similar feelings as I do. So, because I have direct access to my mental life, which is different from the overt behavior, but causally related to it, I am able to gain understanding of what this behavior means and apply this knowledge to others. What Mill is doing here is both: he is identifying the mental mechanism through which we gain knowledge of other minds as well as saying why this knowledge is justified.

A slightly different, but quite popular way to tackle Cartesian problem is to treat knowledge claims about other minds as hypotheses that explain certain

phenomena (see e.g., H.H. Price, 1938; P. Ziff, 1965). That is, when we see somebody moaning, this phenomenon can be best explained by advancing the hypothesis that other minds exist and feel pain, because otherwise this phenomenon would look mysterious. Hence, the knowledge claims about other minds are just part of a larger theory that our minds need to construct in order to make sense of the outside world. So, since the knowledge of other minds is no different from any other knowledge of the world we have to justify it in the same way as any other *empirical* knowledge.

Not surprisingly, psychological theories reflect the pattern and the style of the philosophical tradition. While they are not concerned with the justification of our knowledge of other minds *per se*, they are concerned with the underlying mechanism that allows us to arrive at it. The most prominent contemporary psychological theories dealing with the problem of other minds are 'Theory Theory' (see e.g., Wimmer and Perner 1983, Leslie 1987, Wellman 1990, Baron-Cohen 1995) and simulation theory (see e.g. Gordon 1986, Heal 1986, Goldman 2002, Gallese and Goldman 1998) both offering the answers to the question which mental mechanism humans primarily utilize in understanding others. While proponents of the 'Theory Theory' explain our understanding of other minds in terms of mastering a theory, the proponents of simulation theory explain it by referring to our ability to simulate other agents. These approaches differ on a variety of accounts. On one hand, simulation theory is focused on the process of simulation by which we are putting ourselves in the position of the other. This process triggers pretend mental states and enables us to feel what the other feels. On the other hand, 'Theory Theory' focuses on mental inferences and the ways we get knowledge about the others. Some might argue that the process of simulation already presupposes the possession of a theory of mind, i.e., it presupposes the possession of concepts such as those of belief and desire. The argument usually goes that without these concepts we cannot engage in the process of simulation at all. Due to these and similar problems the attempts to develop hybrid theories have become popular (see e.g., Perner 1994 and Perner 1996).

Although there is no consensus over the nature of empathy in the psychological literature, there is an implicit agreement that empathy has to do something with the mental mechanism through which humans gain knowledge of the mental lives of others. In the cognitive tradition where empathy is quite often identified with perspective taking, empathy itself becomes the very mechanism through which we are able to put ourselves in the position of others and gain understanding about how they feel. The other way to go, within the same cognitive tradition, is to conceptualize empathy as the outcome of other mental processes, processes that consist in the formation of concepts/mental representations about the others and the application of these concepts to particular cases when we are to make sense of the behavior of

others (i.e. empathy is in this case the result of the acquisition of a Theory of Mind). In both cases it can be argued that empathy is either innate mechanism or the acquired one.

In the other tradition where empathy is understood as an affective reaction to the feelings of others, facial expressions (that are the outer signs of the inner feelings) as well as our ability to assign meaning to them are considered to be innate. Similarly, the ability to feel distress when others are in distress is innately given and this distress is automatically induced. The possible rationale for conceiving empathic reactions as instinctive rather than cognitive is to account for the fact that human beings appear to be essentially social and sensitive to others even from the birth, i.e. long before any cognitive abilities develop. So, the assumption is that although it takes a long time for a child to acquire the explicit knowledge of other minds, the child is equipped to relate to others from the beginning and has in some sense implicit 'knowledge' of other minds. In the contemporary theories it is the received view that some precursors of empathy (primary circular reactions and motor mimicry) are innate, but advanced empathic ability is usually understood as the result of cognitive development. However, emotional and cognitive developments remain somewhat unrelated.

If the problem of empathy is seen through the Cartesian spectacles only, and tied to the problem of other minds that arises from the epistemic privacy of mental states, some questions about the nature and the development of empathy cannot be even posed. Given the Cartesian bifurcation between cognition and emotion it remains unclear in what way and how the precursors of empathy (circular reaction, motor mimicry) contribute to the development of the full blown empathic ability including the ability to understand that other people have desires and beliefs on their own. That is, since emotions and cognition are seen as independent mental processes, their development has to be explained by different, unrelated mechanisms. Paradoxically, this leads to the conclusion that although emotion and cognition influence each other when developed, their *development* has to be explained differently due to their essentially different nature. Along these lines empathic development has to be seen as the development of different cognitive and affective mechanisms that at the end come together and enable unified empathic reactions. Whether and how these different mechanisms relate and influence each other's *development*, however, is addressed only in the most general way. Similarly, the problem of the innate and acquired empathic abilities remains problematic, i.e. how exactly they relate is never spelled out, but only assumed. As a result, it seems that the promising way to overcome these problems is to move away from the Cartesian picture altogether.

4. Empathy outside of the Cartesianism

If we are to abandon the Cartesian theory of mind the first task that we need to undertake is to clarify what this involves. Furthermore, we need to clarify how empathy is to be understood outside of the Cartesian picture. Finally, if we are to be fully successful in leaving the old paradigm our last goal is to account for empathic development outside of the Cartesian framework. While the length of this paper does not allow me to address all three tasks, let me just say something about the first two.

In order to challenge the Cartesian view of mind we need to make two important steps: firstly, we need to challenge Cartesian representationalism, and second to challenge any sort of reification of the mind[3]. Giving up representationalism requires *dramatic* change in our understanding of the nature of mind's abilities. For example, what it means to say that a child *understands* something can no longer be identified with the *possession of certain representations*. So, if we are to challenge representational theory of mind (RTM) we need to challenge this concept of understanding. In other words, to deny RTM is to deny that 'to achieve understanding' means 'to form certain mental representation'. According to the alternative view, understanding has to be taken as our *ability to do* certain things and engage in certain activities, not to possess some hidden, epistemically private mental concept. Equally, 'to feel something' can no longer be reduced to certain physiological processes and the inner feelings, but instead it needs to be understood as our *capacity* to engage with the world and other people in a particular way. Indeed, this does not mean that we do not go through any physiological processes or that we do not have feelings, but that 'having an emotion' cannot be reduced to these processes. As a consequence, the sharp *ontological* distinction between emotion and cognition presupposed in the Cartesian framework disappears, which opens the possibility to understand the relation between cognition and emotion as internal (i.e. we can now argue that our affective and cognitive capacities are constitutive for each other).

Given the new way of looking at the understanding and feeling, it follows that the problem of other minds (as the problem of the inference from the outer behavior to the hidden mental states) has to be reformulated. So, when we say that so and so is happy or understands *x* we are not making the inference that so and so is in a certain mental state. The claim that so and so is happy is our way of conceptualizing her behavior rather than the claim about certain physical/mental processes that

3   Various critiques of representationalism could be found in the contemporary cognitive science (for the summary see e.g. A. Clarke 2001 or E. Thompson 2007). However, the critique that I am advancing here is mainly coming from the writings of Wittgenstein (1953).

she goes through. In other words, outside of the Cartesian framework mental events and physical behavior are not related *causally,* but *conceptually*. Accordingly, the problem of other minds can no longer be *empirical* problem, but *conceptual*.

Similarly, if we give up the representational theory of mind what *it means* to engage in social acts such as communication needs to be changed. If there is no epistemic privacy of mental representations and inner feelings, communication can no longer be seen as the process of encoding and decoding predetermined, epistemically private thoughts in the socially shared medium, but rather as a process in which human beings create socially shared meanings. In other words, it is not the case that humans engage in communication *because* they have epistemically private thoughts that need to be communicated, but rather, we say that humans are able to entertain different thoughts *because* they engage in different forms of social communication. If this is the case, there is no longer a need for the inner constraints that have to be posited within Cartesianism in order to account for development of communicative systems. Equally, there is no need for the nature/nurture debate in regard to these constraints.

Finally, if we are to abandon Cartesianism we have to give up the hope that we can construct the ontology of mind that does not succumb to the Cartesian problems. In other words, to conceptualize mind as the entity in the world, is to engage in the reification of the mind. And, what needs to be clear is that once we agree to the idea that the mind is part of the world (i.e., that it *exists* out there either in the form of the properties or substance) we are back in the Cartesian paradigm faced with all the classical problems that go with it (the ontological problem of the mental-physical interaction as well as the epistemological one). Indeed, it is legitimate to speak about other people minds or our own minds even if we do not endorse any ontology of mind. This is the way we conceptualize both ourselves and people around us. However, the claims such as 'humans have minds' or 'plants do not have minds' are *normative* claims and to treat them as *empirical* claims about the world is misleading, and every theoretical conclusion drawn from the assumption that they are empirical claims unavoidably leads to the notorious problems with the Cartesianism. It follows then, that if we want to explain the development of human abilities without the Cartesian metaphysical baggage we need to accept that *there is no mind that develops in this process, at least not in any strong ontological sense*. Instead, what we call development of mind should refer to the development of our abilities to engage in different activities including the normative ones.

In sum, if we abandon Cartesianism we do not have to account for the development of emotion and cognition in the light of their ontological distinctions, nor do we have to face the Cartesian problem of other minds (at least not in the form of the problem of how we make the inference from the overt behavior to the hidden

mental states.) That is, within the new approach it makes much more sense to conceive the distinction between emotion and cognition as internal and the problem of other minds as conceptual. This has important implications for the study of empathy. If we give up the Cartesian identification/reduction of cognition and emotion to a certain mental/physiological processes, empathy also cannot be reduced to either of them (nor can it be understood as a combination of the two). That is, within the Cartesian framework the question about the nature of empathy is identified with the question as to which mental/physiological processes empathy consists in. Outside of the Cartesian paradigm, however, the question 'what is empathy?' is equivalent to the question 'what *are the capacities that we understand as empathetic*?' The answer to the latter cannot be found in epistemically private mental processes but rather in our everyday practice of characterizing certain reactions as empathetic. It would be mistaken, however, to treat this question only as a question concerning words and their meanings. The clarification of what we are ready to classify as empathetic reactions is only a starting point in the research of empathy. The next step is to account for this practice, the practice of characterizing certain reactions as empathetic as well as empathetic reactions themselves. Within this new framework, however, the very nature of the question of empathy changes. The benefits of the paradigm shift in research on empathy can be summarized as follows. Firstly, within the new framework there is no tension in the claim that empathy is cognitive *and* affective since this claim does not entail the further claim that empathy consists in different, usually opposing, mental processes. Similarly, to say that empathic ability is crucial for the way we understand other people does not mean that empathy is the process of inference to the mental states of others. So, instead of pondering over how the human mind gets to know the mental states of others, we need to explain how this way of conceptualizing others emerges in the ongoing flow of the first caregiver-child interactions.

Furthermore, in the same way in which the questions about the nature of empathy change with the paradigm shift, questions about the origins and development of empathy change as well. Since empathic ability is not understood as consisting of mental processes it is beside the point to try to determine which of these mental processes are innately given, and which of them are acquired. What we now want to know, instead, is how empathic reactions emerge in the first relationships between a child and a caregiver. Also, we want to see what biological predisposition a child needs to have in order to engage in these interactions, and accordingly, develop empathic abilities. Furthermore, we need to see how and in what sense the development of empathy contributes to the formation of other human capacities, such as pretend play, the use of language, or abstract thinking. Since it no longer makes sense to hold that these capacities are entirely different capacities of the mind that are supposed to 'solve' different (physical, linguistic,

social) problems imposed by the external (physical, social) world, we need to explain how these capacities relate and contribute to the formation of what we call the human mind.

In conclusion let me just add that this paradigm shift will have profound implications for our understanding of the development of empathic disorders, such as autism. Within the Cartesian framework where empathic abilities have been explained by the development of certain mental mechanism through which a child gains knowledge of other minds, the case in which the child fails to develop these abilities is explained by the lack of this mechanism and this deficit is usually attributed to a genetic malfunction. The main consequence of the paradigm shift in the research of autism will be a change in the way psychologists look at its causes. So, instead, of referring to the lack of a genetically determined mental mechanism as the cause of autism researchers would need to look for its causes in the disturbed interaction between a child and a caregiver and biological factors that contribute to this disturbance. This fresh look will hopefully influence the way autism is treated in the clinical setting and contribute to the development of new methods that will result in the improvement of its treatment.

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Zašto dihotomije između urođenih i stečenih osobina kao i između afektivnih i kognitivnih kapaciteta opstaju u savremenim razvojnim teorijama: slučaj empatije

(Apstrakt)

Cilj ovog rada je da preispita zašto su dihotomije između urođenih i stečenih osobina kao i između kognitivnih i afektivnih kapaciteta i dalje prisutne u savremenim teorijama o empatiji i zašto mnogi teoretičari i dalje drže da su takve dihotomije neophodne. Prvi deo

rada biće posvećen kratkom pregledu psiholoških teorija o empatiji, dok će se drugi deo rada baviti razlozima zbog kojih su gorepomenute dihotomije i dalje prisutne u ovim teorijama. Cilj mi je da pokažem da razloge za opstanak ovih dihotomija možemo naći u kartezijanskoj slici uma, emocija i prirode komunikacije koju teorije o empatiji prećutno podrazumevaju. Zbog kartezijanskih pretpostavki fenomen empatije je u savremenim teorijama blisko povezan sa kartezijanskim problemom tuđih svesti. Tačnije, dihotomije između stečenih i urođenih osobina i između kognitivnih i afektivnih kapaciteta se javljaju kao rešenje kartezijanskog problema u ovim teorijama. Moj cilj je da pokažem da ćemo, ukoliko napustimo problem tuđih svesti, biti u poziciji da napustimo i ove dihotomije. Na kraju rada ću ukratko preispitati šta bi tačno značilo napuštanje kartezijanskog okvira kao i kakve bi to implikacije imalo za naše razumevanje empatije.

KLJUČNE REČI: urođeno/stečeno, afekti/kognicija, empatija, kartezijanska slika uma