

Review Article

Between Morality and Evolution: Naturalizing the Sentiment of Sympathy

Thais Alves Costa^{1*}, Evandro Barbosa²¹The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill²Universidade Federal de Pelotas/ The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Abstract: This article explores the consequences of these propositions: (1) the enlightenment made popular a belief in causal determinism – the idea that every event has a cause. (2) The Scottish enlightenment Adam Smith’s moral theory begins from the notion that the morality behind human actions is practical and based on the sentiment of sympathy, a mechanism that we use to place ourselves in others’ shoes. (3) Certain contemporary ethical theories use empirical evidence and evolutionary arguments to explain the origin of sympathy and to support the interference of evolutionary pressures in our moral sentiments. These propositions together have the following consequences: (3) Different biological interpretations of sympathy can lead us to different results from a practical standpoint. (4) So, our understanding of the evolutionary dimension of sympathy has implications for moral theories that have sympathy as their base. Thus, the combination of the Enlighten ideas and moral sentimentalism led to a belief in the causal determination of human emotions, and its causes. Bearing in mind that empirical investigations have demonstrated how evolutionary biology can influence our moral sentiments, my purpose is to analyze whether Smithean morality might be jeopardized by these contentions. To this end, I test whether Smith’s sympathy would be compatible with evolutionary accounts, in particular, with Sharon Street’s view.

Keywords: Sympathy, evolution, moral, sentiments.

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P1

In the contemporary world, the terms *empathy* and *sympathy* are used widely both in popular culture and in a variety of academic fields. Since researchers in different disciplines have focused their investigations on very specific aspects of the broad range of sympathy-related phenomena, one should probably not be surprised by a certain amount of conceptual confusion and a multiplicity of definitions associated with the sympathy concept in a number of different scientific discourses. However, this popularization makes room for a mistake that suggests empathy means “sharing of feeling”, [1] and sympathy means “caring about others” [2]. These words have also often been used as synonyms. The problem with treating them as supposedly equivalent is that doing so disregards their etymological origins.

Coming to the Stoic tradition [3], the Scottish conception of sympathy is related to the notion of *Einfühlung - feeling in* [4]. For Stoics, no being can live alone, since we are part of a whole system that includes all of the objects and entities in the universe immersed in *sympátheia tôn hólon*, had a kind of cosmic meaning and had social nuances [5]. Consequently, all things are part of a single organism. Just as in the human body any change in one member is felt in all others, so in the cosmos there is a mutual interdependence [6].

By contrast, the word *empathy* was introduced in English only in 1909, by the psychologist Titchner [7] as a “translation” of the Greek word *sympátheia*.

³ Blum 1980; Noddings 1986; Slote 1992, 2001 2010, 2013.

⁴ Even though the idea of organic connection exists in the Stoic perspective, the terminology here does not have a religious meaning.

⁵ Cicero, 1962: 570.

⁶ Terjesen, 2005: 3.

⁷ Titchener, 1909: 21.

¹ Fleischacker, 2019:03.

² Fleischacker, 2019:03.

This conception is based on the prefix *sym*, which means *together* or *with*, associated with *pathos*, which means “suffering”, resulting in the *feeling of companionship*. In fact, the Greek *sympátheia* is intimately connected to the empathy idea, as with the Latin-based term *compassion* (similarly translated as *feeling with*). Nevertheless, some philosophers critique the compassion and empathy association, considering that it inevitably implies a painful meaning “occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune,” [8] as Martha Nussbaum reinforces in her discussion of compassion. In the same path as Nussbaum, Paul Bloom argues this translation neglects that “compassion can exist independently of empathy and is an emotional preference over empathy” [9]. The emotional preferences he refers to are linked to the idea that we would tend to feel more empathy for those people close to us.

Setting aside all this controversy, even if we consider empathy far from compassion, empathy is totally different than sympathy. All these critiques and complexities just illustrate how problematic it is to associate sympathy and empathy. It is important to highlight that the definitions of sympathy and empathy imply different psychological processes for each sentiment. Whereas sympathy relates to the heightened awareness of another person’s plight, empathy refers to understanding the subjective experience of another. Under such different historical roots, sympathy revolves around the mental process of *feeling in*, while empathy convers a state of *feeling with*, sharing a feeling. Even though I recognize that these terms have been widely accepted and discussed, it has not been my primary intention to discuss the best translation of empathy nor the Greek conception of *feeling with*. My object of study in this paper has as its starting point the sentiment of sympathy seen through the lens of the Scottish Enlightenment tradition. With all these preliminary definitions in mind, I move to the second introductory explanation, where I will use the lens of empiricist moral sentimentalism to elucidate Smith’s sympathy.

The starting point of Adam Smith’s moral theory is the notion that the primary objects of our moral perceptions are the actions of other individuals. This implies that the moral judgments we make about our conduct are the application of the judgments we have made about the other’s behavior. This process of moral justification can be divided into two distinct movements. The first is intended to explain how we judge the conduct of others, using our ability to project imaginatively what represents a condition for moral judgment. The second explains how we use the result of this judgment over ourselves, providing a certain sense of duty and autonomy over our actions. According to Smith, the morality behind human actions is based on

the sentiment of sympathy. This sentiment is essential to the sentimental bonds that take hold among human beings. In other words, this sentiment is a ground-level thesis about what is most valuable in human relationships [10]. In this way, sympathy is the way people incorporate their life experiences in society with “meanings of morality” [11]. Building on this approach, the world is the result of the set of our experiences, acquired and evolved over time.

However, if in Smithean morality theory sympathy is the mechanism for evaluating human behavior, then evolutionary variants of sympathy should be considered. This means we need to take the theory of evolution as a starting point for explaining morality. In biological terms, it means that a possible explanation for the emergence and importance that morality has acquired in human life is related to the adaptive advantage that the moral phenomenon has generated for the human species, in terms of survival and reproduction. Bearing in mind the idea that empirical investigations have demonstrated [12] how evolutionary biology can interfere with our moral sentiments, I am going to follow these premises:

- P1. The enlightenment made popular a belief in causal determinism – the idea that every event has a cause.
- P2. The starting point of Smith’s moral theory is the notion that the morality behind human actions is based on the sentiment of sympathy.
- P3. Some contemporary philosophical theories use empirical and evolutionary arguments to explain the origin of moral sentiments which includes sympathy and its development in human behavioral psychology.
- P4. The theory of evolution leads us to think that moral theories that have sympathy as their moral basis should take into account biological issues.

P2

Evolutionary psychology is an emerging area of science that aims to explain human behavior from an evolutionary perspective and to discover the mental modules that constitute human nature. Such science is concerned in understanding the mechanisms involved in the evolution of our mental capacities [13]. As Joyce explains, evolutionary theories also intend to demonstrate that a large portion of human behavior can be explained by “innate psychological mechanisms in specific domains that were engineered (...) to respond to some threat or discrete ancestral opportunity” [14]. Seen from a philosophical point of view, evolution in our cognitive behavior can have significant moral consequences, since changes over time in the way we

⁸ Nussbaum, 2003: 301

⁹ Bloom, 2013: 33.

¹⁰ See: Griswold, 1999.

¹¹ Raphael, 2007:29.

¹² Portin, 1993; Guimarães; Moreira, 2000; Venter, 2001.

¹³ Darwin, 1985: 366.

¹⁴ Joyce, 2007: 6.

think and process information. Considering this, I explain the influence of evolutionary forces on our behaviors and sentiments through two framework *i.* as a biological mechanism responsible for processing the evolutionary information, and *ii.* As the response to that information, meaning the psychological process [15].

In relation to the first movement, some studies use empirical data as a basis to analyze the relationship of sympathy between individuals, its origins and developments [16]. To understand the evolutionary empirical basis of sympathy, it is worth highlighting three theories: (A) the classical genetic perspective, (B) the evolutionary theory of natural selection, and (C) the theory of cultural interaction. Each perspective offers a different interpretation of human evolution, and consequently, distinct moral and social developments can be found in this equation [17].

The classical genetic perspective (A) holds that genes are responsible for establishing the behavioral dispositions of each person. A gene is a segment of DNA that encodes a certain function in the biological system [18]. In other words, the gene has a specific functionality that determines the organism's structural and functional characteristics in an innate way. According to this theory, a person's behavior is determined in advance based on his or her genetics. That person's levels of sympathy would thus be genetically predetermined, which could make the possibility of teaching and promoting sympathy somewhat irrelevant.

Empirical philosophers hold that some genetic experiments do seem to support this close relationship between DNA and the development of sympathy [19]. Among these experiments, some stand out. For example, Elaine Hatfield *et al.* [20] carried out studies aiming to measure the relationship between genetic dispositions and sympathy levels. To perform the tests, Hatfield established a "quantitative trait" [21], that is, a genetic trait standard to determine human behavior. Based on this standard, the performance of each participant was recorded along with their respective

genome [22]. As a result, Hatfield discovered that most of the people involved in this experiment had average levels of sympathy. But some were determined to have extremely high or low sympathy levels, and these unusual levels were directly associated with some disorders, such as, at a low level, autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and psychopathy, and, at high level, Williams syndrome.

Individuals on the autism spectrum experience difficulties with social communication and interaction, also exhibiting repetitive patterns of behavior and restricted interests [23]. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA), the risk of ASD is somewhere between 74% and 93% related to genetic disposition [24]. Accompanying this result, the APA offers other important data about ASD development probability for children of the same biological parents. Genetic studies state that when an older child is diagnosed with ASD, the next child will have from a 7 to 20% chance of developing it, too. If we consider the total number of children (not just the subsequent one) the chance for a couple of having a second child with ASD is around 2% - 8%. On average, if the child with ASD disorder is an identical twin, the second twin has from a 36 to 95% percent chance to be affected, whereas if they are fraternal twins, the probability (which was 36-95%) decreases by 31% [25].

Psychopathy is a condition characterized by the absence of sympathy and the blunting of other affective states. Callousness, detachment, and a lack of sympathy enable psychopaths to be highly manipulative. A study published by Waldman and Rhee [26] in 2006 states that psychopathy can be validly identified with using genetic testing. That is because the personality characteristics typical of individuals with psychopathy have a latent factor with an estimated heritability of $h = 0.63$, which is considered high [27]. A study on a large group of children found more than 60% heritability for "callous-unemotional traits" and reported that conduct problems among children with these traits had a higher heritability than among children without these traits [28].

By contrast, an extremely high level of sympathy was detected in people with Williams's syndrome. This is a genetic disorder involving deletion of material from adjacent genes on chromosome 7. Typically, this deletion occurs as a random event during

¹⁵ See: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/morality-biology/>>.

¹⁶ Williams, 1960.

¹⁷ See the discussions presented by Joyce (2007), Kitcher (2009); Waal (2010).

¹⁸ Portin, 1993:173, Keller, 2005:101.

¹⁹ Some empirical research uses the term *empathy* rather than *sympathy* to refer to the phenomenon I call *sympathy* in this text. Here, I will use just sympathy as a methodological strategy. See distinction: Wispé, 1986.

²⁰ Hatfield, E., Rapson, R. L., & Le, Y. C. L., 2011: 19.

²¹ Rosenberg, 2008: 209.

²² See:

http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/glossary/glossary_g.shtml.

²³ DSM-5, 2013:49.

²⁴ DSM-5, 2013:50.

²⁵ Wright; Spikins; Pearson, 2020:56.

²⁶ Waldman & Rhee, 2018: 205.

²⁷ Skeem; Polaschek; Patrick; Lilienfeld, 2011, p. 95.

²⁸ Waldman & Rhee, 2018: 205.

the formation of the egg or sperm from which a person develops. In a small number of cases, it is inherited from an affected parent in an autosomal dominant manner [29]. The different characteristic features of the syndrome have been linked to the loss of specific genes. Those affected by this syndrome often have an outgoing personality and interact readily with strangers. However, such overly sympathetic people may be unable to stop being intensely disturbed by the emotional experiences of others.

In 2018, the results of the largest genetic study on sympathy so far (involving more than 46,000 people) were released [30]. After careful observation of 10 million genetic variants, it was discovered that these collectively contribute to about 10% of differences in sympathy levels. On the one hand, this result demonstrates that our individual levels of sympathy are partly due to genetics. On the other hand, the percentage variation represented only one tenth in the whole of the formation of human behavior. The result proves that genetics is important, but not the only element to be considered, because it is just one part of the explanation of our behavior.

When a genetic trait is proposed to determine human behavior, we need to deal with two problems. The first is how to operationalize such traits, since representing a personal tendency by a strict code is very difficult. An individual's "traits of interest are not themselves phenotypes, but at most packages of phenotypes or the result of phenotypic and environmental interaction [31]". Second, these quantitative traits studies "will identify a set of *loci* - perhaps ten or more relatively large stretches of DNA - that are jointly highly correlated with the instantiation of a high degree of some quantitative trait in a 'normal environmental range [32]". Considering that, nothing or almost nothing will be revealed by such studies considering the use of "genes for" a trait. This idea is explained by Monod in his book *Chance and Necessity*.

According to Monod, "the idea of *revelation* applies to epigenetic development, but not of course to evolutionary emergence, which, owing precisely to the fact that it arises from the essentially unforeseeable, is

the creator of absolute newness" [33]. He emphasizes the spontaneous character of the molecular epigenesis process, highlighting that individual molecules are devoid of their defined activities and properties. When they are organized, they reveal themselves. The information was present, potentially, just unexpressed. Therefore, the entire primary protein appears to us as the pure product of a choice made at random. In another sense, a sequence of each protein was by no means synthesized at random, because the same order is reproduced, practically without error, in all the protein molecules considered, millions of times, in each organism and each generation. Chance, by this notion, is invariably reproduced and converted into a necessity. It is easy to see how these problems will bedevil the attempt to employ genomics as evidence to test alternative theories about how sympathy emerged [34] Summarizing, the changes seem to "randomly" emerge, and the way that the traits that we can depend on groups of molecules act together so that we cannot necessarily tell what role a single molecule.

Even the term "gene" is doubtful; our current knowledge of the structure and function of genetic material has gone beyond this terminology. When we observe genetic studies nowadays it becomes clear how the term "gene" is insufficient to explain the phenomena of nature. The solution for that could be, as Keller affirmed, that "it is time to forge new words and put that concept aside [35]". Or perhaps we can preserve the concept of "genes" through a redefinition that does not simply incorporate an idea of genes as basic units of living matter [36]. Anyway, the problem is not only in the term, but its strict scope. It means that using only the genetic element to explain our behavior, and consequently our morality, is the root of the limits that the theory below will defend.

To proponents of the evolutionary theory of natural selection (B), the problem with the genetic perspective is that it focuses only on the DNA, since a genetic code is just an information sequence and not an object: "the DNA molecule is the medium, not the message [37]". The argument behind this is that though the gene has an "important role for heritability [38]", facts about our social and natural environment are also important in this equation. Even though they agree to some extent with the first theory, natural selection theorists recognize their limited ability to explain "variation in some characteristic [that] belongs to a

²⁹ Kitagawa; Fujiki; Yoshimura; Oya; Kato, 2011, p. 77.

³⁰ Led by Vurun Warriar and Simon Baron-Cohen (both from the University of Cambridge), Thomas Bourgeron (*Université Paris Diderot*) and David Hinds (*23andMe Company*), the research investigated, through saliva samples and questionnaires, the coefficients of sympathy.

³¹ Rosenberg, 2008:209

³² Rosenberg, 2008:210. In this case, finding particular genes that explain a certain trait does not work, because the studies can really only look at groups of characteristics and big stretches of DNA.

³³ Monod, 1970:116.

³⁴ Portin, 1993:173

³⁵ Keller, 2005:101

³⁶ Fogle, 1990:349

³⁷ Williams, 1960: 99.

³⁸ Guimarães & Moreira, 2000: 249. The genome ceases to be isolated and is treated as part of the cellular system, which defines and uses the genome as part of its memory mechanism, like an interactive database.

population, that is, intraspecific variability; its transmission in the reproduction process, or heritability [39]". Given that, natural selection is taken as a force driving adaptation at the population level. Skin color variation is one of the most striking examples of human phenotypic diversity. This is a well-known adaptive trait, in which the genetic basis of skin color adaptation in various populations illustrates the many implications of human evolution.

Recently, Preston and Waal's experiments have been used to support the idea that sympathy comes from an evolutionary adaptation mechanism. They argue that sympathy appears by self-interest. Seen in these terms, sympathy, and consequently cooperation, is developed with a view to the offspring's survival. Learned by imitation, sympathy is registered in memory over time [40]. Having these memories stored in the brain would be an inherent characteristic of the nature of sympathetic reactions throughout evolution. To demonstrate this position, Preston and Waal proposed their "Russian doll" model [41]. This model establishes how the spontaneous reproduction of new acts was able to produce disparate sensory inputs when observed and performed, developing sympathy. In this case, the basic mechanism that enables sympathy is activated because of remembering a previous incident of sympathy. First, the neural representation associated with sympathetic reaction is activated. Thus, through cognitively demanding functions such as remembering, reconstruction, and imagination, we relive the experience and activate the basic underlying mechanism of sympathy.

In the end, the Preston and Waal experiments prove that sympathy and imitation share the same motivational structure. This similarity occurs because the association involves shared representations, identification by physical similarity, automaticity and spontaneity that can be easily found in nature. For example, there are indications that chimpanzees regularly imitate acts such as yawning, scratching, and the ways they see other chimps eat, like the way they hold a piece of fruit. Baby monkeys imitate facial expressions just like human babies do [42]. This facial imitation suggests an innate relationship between observation and execution. When a baby imitates a facial expression, her imitation is based on a motor representation formed when she is observing another's expression.

In imitation, there is an automatic correspondence between the visual information of the

observed facial expression and the motor representation. The relationship between observation and imitation is supported by neurophysiological data regarding emotional facial behavior: both are activated by the same group of brain structures, including the aortic premotor cortex, the insula, and the amygdala [43], as noted by Waal. This experiment is proof that sympathy is "an innate, instinctual and, beyond that, ultimately inexplicable human tendency to motor mimicry" [44], since acts of imitation are responsible for the creation and transmission of sympathy.

Finally, the cultural interaction (C) theory claims that sympathy originates from cultural variants elaborated from patterns of behavior, represented cognitively, and passed on from generation to generation [45]. In this case, culture consists of the manifestation of a set of material and ideological phenomena, such as language, gestures, and clothing. These manifestations are constituted by a common pattern of experiences and interactions with the environment, which determines our set of beliefs. Behaviors in this view would function as symbolic constructions, converting to beliefs that, when transmitted over time, guarantee the accumulation of organizational techniques, knowledge, and strategies [46]. On this account, sympathy is developed through socialization, is motivated by cooperation, and grows through habit.

The Stueber experiment is one of the most popular studies to support the cultural conception of sympathy. This analysis, which involved young children from different cultural backgrounds, aimed to understand how cultural socialization can be related with the sentiment of sympathy [47]. The experiment's implication is that the "patterns" that we attempt to match, or the similarities amongst situations that allow us to make such matches, are the key to a sympathetic outlook. By encouraging those to focus on similarities that are related to morally relevant properties such as innocence, suffering, and vulnerability, researchers could foster a sympathetic perceptive habit in children. On the other hand, encouraging the children to focus on similarities that invite unwelcomed bias - such as different religious beliefs, races, or sports affiliations - did not contribute to the formation of a sympathetic perceptive habit related to their beliefs. What this experiment proved is that our sympathy originates at least in part from social and cultural factors that foster sociability and the strengthening of shared beliefs. Recently some philosophers have tended to consider all these elements and others together. For instance,

³⁹ "The selective sieve would occur in a competitive environment where the result is the genotypic distribution of the population". Santilli, 2011:194.

⁴⁰ Preston & Waal, 2002:02.

⁴¹ Preston & Waal, 2002:04.

⁴² Bard, 2007.

⁴³ See: Preston; Waal, 2002, Laland, K.; Brown. 2002,

⁴⁴ Waal, 2010.

⁴⁵ See: Street, 2006:172; Portin, 1993:173; Keller, 2005:101; Guimarães; Moreira, 2000:249.

⁴⁶ Baravalle, 2014:126.

⁴⁷ Bloom, 2013: 33.

according to Sober and Wilson, “The [classical] theories that have been proposed as an alternative to group selection are simply different ways of seeing evolution in groups structured selectively [48]”. The evolutionary issue cannot be settled simply by considering isolated theories, given that there are some insufficiencies in each. But when we consider them all together, these approaches seem to make sense in association. Supported by this idea, sympathy needs to be understood from all three of these dimensions, because of biological, psychological, and cultural construction.

Against any compartmentalized visions, my assumption is that an evolutionary understanding of sympathy can be based on multiple factors, such as genes, population, groups, culture, species, and social collectives. Exactly for this reason, I agree with Rosenberg when he says: “it seems more reasonable to assume that cooperative behaviors are the results of the collaboration of a number of different behavioral dispositions all simply reinforced by their environments, that is, dispositions ontogenetically selected for, though not phylogenetically selected for [49]”. We cannot understand our own behavior in the same way as we understand objects in physics or chemistry, in other words, as an object without context, that is, by considering ourselves as things whose behavior can be predicted via “objective”, context-free scientific laws. In the following section, I will analyze how evolution influences our moral psychology.

P3

Once we have understood the empirical bases of moral sentiments in the previous section, it is important to problematize the link between human evolution and morality. Investigating the influence of the evolutionary process in the human species, we aim to answer why we behave, act, and judge in the way we do. Does evolutionary pressure have the power to influence what we think to be right or wrong? Putting it in another way, we know that evolutionary pressures seem to have some impact on our thoughts and behavior, in ways that seem relevant to our moral choices. For example, some people seem genetically predisposed to be more sympathetic than others. But now we have to figure out *how much* of an influence evolution has. Did we evolve some traits that are hard-wired now and that determine what we think is right or wrong? And are things fixed, or are they still changing

as we continue to evolve? [⁵⁰]. Or is what we consider right or wrong under continuous construction, being shaped over the course of evolution [51]? In an attempt to find satisfactory answers, I will use the empirical premise of Sharon Street presented in the text *A Darwinian Dilemma for Realist Theories of Value*. According to Street,

We can expect there to have been overwhelming pressure in the direction of making those evaluative judgments which tended to promote reproductive success (such as the judgment that one’s life is valuable), and against making those evaluative judgments which tended to decrease reproductive success (such as the judgment that one should attack one’s offspring) [52].

Street offers a rejection of realist theories by demonstrating that they are inconsistent with our knowledge of the evolution of species. She basically says that these realistic theories fail when they try to explain the link between the forces of natural selection and the way we make our moral evaluations. Street calls this the *debunking* argument, and suggests an anti-realistic perspective to explain the relationship between our evaluative judgments and evolutionary theory. This is just an overview; I will not enter into discussions of realistic or anti-realistic defenses, since my objective here is just to analyze whether the limitations imposed by evolutionary theories can weaken Smith’s moral theory.

Inspired by Darwin’s theory, Street begins her defense with the claim that our moral judgments suffer some pressure from the selective force of evolution. Briefly, traits that maximize the chances of survival and reproductive success are transmitted through the process of natural selection, while those traits that are disadvantageous to survival and reproductive success disappear in a population. Further developing this claim, Street examines how intense the evolutionary pressures on our behavior may have been and whether they may have reached the point of influencing what we consider to be correct or not [53]. The issue here is not to determine exactly what is ethically right or wrong and to lay out her own moral theory, but to understand how evolution may have shaped our morals and, consequently, interfered in what we think. In other words, she just wants to know how evolution may have shaped the way we think about moral matter. Determining the intensity of the relevant evolutionary influences would allow us to define the extent to which

⁴⁸ Sober; Wilson, 1998:98. For Sober and Wilson, “This is not an idiosyncratic interpretation of ours, but it is imposing itself as a consensus among theoretical biologists and others who are much familiarized with the conceptual foundations of evolutionary biology”. (Sober; Wilson, 1998 p. 98).

⁴⁹ Rosenberg, 2008: 212.

⁵⁰ In this case, could a completely genetic adaptation transmit perfectly analogous genes in such a way that making correct moral judgments would be an innate aptitude?

⁵¹ Richerson; Boyd, 2005:4.

⁵² Street, 2006: 114.

⁵³ Wispé, 1986: 314.

these shapings determined why sympathy was considered correct [54]. For Street, there are two possibilities to explain how evolution has influenced the way we deal with morality: directly or indirectly.

The first possibility is that “the observed patterns in the actual content of human evaluative judgments provide evidence in favor of the view that natural selection has had a tremendous influence on that content [55].” According to this explanation, evolutionary factors have directly influenced our moral judgments, determining the content of our personal evaluations. Right or wrong already have their contents determined by evolutionary pressure, and levels of sympathy are fully pre-determined. This view raises several problems. Just to illustrate, if we adopt genetic reductionism, we will face controversies such as the disregard of traits acquired throughout life, as with identical twins that do not develop the same level of sympathy in equal circumstances.

According to Street’s second hypothesis, evolution molds only the psychological traits of our character, not the content of our beliefs. In other words, evolutionary pressures have only indirectly influenced our judgment. They have done so by shaping our psychological structure, that is, how we elaborate moral judgments, not the evaluative content of those judgments. On this account, sympathy would be a sentiment built over time, and evolutionary forces would only have played the role of shaping the architecture of how we think. Putting it in another way, the power of this pressure is “specializing in assimilating, storing and using cultural information,” close to the natural selection and cultural interaction theories [56].

Choosing one or the other hypothesis causes opposing views. If the influence is indirect and evolutionary pressure has only shaped our psychological structure, then the judgment that altruism is correct and egoism is incorrect is shaped, but not pre-determined, by nature. In terms of changes, sympathy would only help us determine what is right and what is wrong. So, if evolution shaped how we think, but did not determine a set of moral content, we have sympathy but will have to apply it ourselves in order to figure out what is right. On the other hand, if we consider this judgment as innately given, right or wrong has already

been determined in advance. So, if nature shapes the actual content of our judgments, all we must do is take a close look and we will be able to directly see what is right or wrong, because it has already been determined. Consequently, the moral formation of the agent is weakened. Sympathy, under this interpretation, would exist as a given content, needing only to be revealed, not exercised.

Sharon Street endorses the indirect perspective, arguing that the evolutionary framework influences *tremendously* our moral judgments, even though it is an indirect pressure. She remarks that “a further piece of evidence in favor of this view is the striking continuity that we observe between many of our own widely held evaluative judgements and the more basic evaluative tendencies of other animals, especially those most closely related to us” [57]. For her, the fact we seem to have the same emotional reactions to many things like other animals do, can strongly suggest that evolution built the psychological architecture, but not the moral content. As a result, our morality is steeped in evolutionary influence, although not in a decisive way.

The evolutionary description of human psychology and behavior can shed considerable light on the nature of morality. The view that morality is based on sympathy admits that much observable human behavior may be innate. But it also strongly defends the idea that humans being are behaviorally malleable by in many ways - that the very plasticity of many psychological mechanisms is an adaptation [58]. To further understand this, several biologists and philosophers have sought, through the evolutionary link, to trace stages of development of human behavior considering physiological (mechanical), ontogenetic (developmental), and phylogenetic (evolutionary) aspects [59]. Putting it in another way, sympathy can be seen as consisting entirely of a set of mutually interdependent origins, through which humans develop our morality.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the scientific works we have discussed in the first moment (P2) show that our biological nature has played an important role in our ability to develop sympathy. Despite that, I consider these biological factors to be only instrumentally important for morality. In my view, it is insufficient to consider that the sentiment of sympathy comes from

⁵⁴ Determining the intensity of this influence implies understanding the relationship between our emotion and the process of evolution. See, for instance, this research that related evolution and the sentiment of fear: https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/study-finds-that-fear-can-travel-quickly-through-generations-of-mice-dna/2013/12/07/94dc97f2-5e8e-11e3-bc56-c6ca94801fac_story.html.

⁵⁵ Street, 2006:117

⁵⁶ Laland; Brown, 2002: 243.

⁵⁷ Street, 2006:117.

⁵⁸ According to Sober and Wilson, what this theory says is just strict and simple, and “This is not an idiosyncratic interpretation of ours, but it is imposing itself as a consensus among theoretical biologists and others who are much familiarized with the conceptual foundations of evolutionary biology” Sober; Wilson, 1998:97.

⁵⁹ Joyce, 2007:03.

only a single biological source, as it involves other elements, given that there are social, political, and cultural pressures that have also shaped our behavior. Using the biological concept of enablement, even if all biological, environmental, cultural, and social variables are favorable for the development of sympathy, it will not necessarily be developed, as it is only a possibility. This enablement claims that human behavior is malleable by our moral development.

In terms of human behavioral evolution (P3), it is important to determine how evolutionary pressure has influenced our behavior. If nature shapes the actual content of our judgments, all we must do is take a close look at a situation and we will be able to directly see what is right or wrong, because it has already been determined. But, if evolution shaped how we think, but did not determine the moral content of our beliefs, we have sympathy, but more is needed for moral judgments. In other words, we need an additional psychological process to determine what is right and what is wrong. Here is the key point. Smithian theory agrees with Street's position. Street's analysis sets the tone for Smith's morality. This is the reason for my strategy in this paper of analyzing the way human beings can be psychologically constituted before presenting why sympathy in Smith is necessary for human moral development.

Considering the key role of this sentiment in Smith's thought (P1), analyzing its *locus* offers different implications for evolutionary psychology, since the recognition that evolutionary forces have shaped our psychological structure, influencing the way we make moral judgments, allows agents to (as Smith says) "discern the remote consequences of all our actions, and to anticipate the benefit or loss that is likely to result from them" [60]. Faced with the influence engendered by the evolutionary link, the Smithian subject appears to be constantly involved in a game of mirrors that reflects the exercise of sympathy as a continuous mediator of social relationships. When observing the behaviors and reactions of other humans to certain types of actions and feelings, people assimilate patterns of judgment. This exercise of capturing the feelings of others makes it possible both to apprehend moral standards and to apply them. This process takes place based on the rationalized procedure of developing sympathetic moral judgment, no longer as an emotion, but as a rational psychological procedure.

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⁶⁰ Smith, 1759: 189.

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