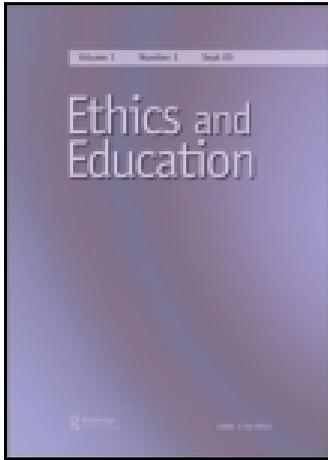


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### Emotional responsibility and teaching ethics: student empowerment

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## Emotional responsibility and teaching ethics: student empowerment

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‘This class is so [insert expletive] depressing.’ I overheard a student communicating this to a friend upon exiting one of my ethics courses and I wondered how my classes could generate a sense of empowerment rather than depression, a sense of hope rather than despair. Drawing from David Hume’s and Martin Hoffman’s work on the psychology of empathy and sympathy, I contend that dominant Western philosophical pedagogy is inadequate for facilitating morally empowered students. Moreover, I stipulate that an adequate analysis of the role emotion should play in pedagogy requires tending to the politics of emotional expression and how oppression functions. I argue that ethical educators have a moral responsibility to facilitate not only critical moral thinking but critical moral agency. Part of ethical education should involve the provision of tools for effective citizen engagement, and reasoning alone is insufficient for this goal. The role of emotion in ethical decision-making and action remains devalued and under-analyzed. Approaches that fail to adequately recognize the role of emotion in ethical education are to the detriment of effective ethical pedagogy. I recommend a number of methods for remedying this omission so as to provide tools for moral action.

**Keywords:** responsibility; ethics; emotion; education; action; political engagement

### Introduction

Overheard: ‘This class is so [insert expletive] depressing’ – one of my students, speaking to a friend upon exiting my Introduction to Ethics course

It was not a comment I was meant to hear, and it resonated as being genuine. The student was reeling from the impact of twice-a-week doses of exposure to the all too present moral harms in the world that are the result of human behavior. Lamenting that my philosophy class depressed my students to a fellow colleague from sociology, who also taught ethical issues, prompted an, ‘Oh, your students too? My students say the exact sort of thing.’ I could not shelve this worry; it pressed on me in the way that issues often press on academics – it instigated research.

I wondered how my classes could generate a sense of empowerment rather than depression, a sense of hope rather than despair. Student empowerment and ethical citizenry remain key goals of the liberal arts tradition. If students are hopeless about the possibility for change, if they are depressed by the state of the world and overwhelmed by

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the problems therein, if they fail to recognize their power as shapers of the world, then inaction is inevitable. The threat of inaction is amplified when the motivational dimensions of particular emotions and emotional configurations are ignored by pedagogical approaches. Looking to how emotions motivate, and how reason stripped bare of emotional richness fails to motivate, it became apparent that philosophical ethics as currently taught in the West do not often lead to emotionally morally empowered students.<sup>1</sup> In my analysis, moral empowerment requires (1) enhanced capacities for (i) thinking through moral issues with an open mind and open heart and (ii) providing justification for one's own point of view, (2) tools for actively generating positive moral change in the world, and (3) an emotional orientation that at minimum enables, and more strongly motivates, positive moral action. I am concerned that in many philosophical ethics courses the tools for remedying the harms identified are not always afforded. Such tools involve identifying activist techniques for effecting tangible positive change as well as meeting emotional requirements for empowered action (e.g., hope).<sup>2</sup>

Drawing from David Hume's account of the essential role of sympathy for moral behavior, and supplementing this analysis with Martin Hoffman's work on the psychology of empathy and sympathy, I contend that dominant Western pedagogy in philosophical ethics courses at the university level is inadequate for facilitating morally empowered students.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, I stipulate that an adequate analysis of the role emotion should play in pedagogy requires tending to the politics of emotional expression and how oppression functions. I argue that ethical educators have a moral responsibility to facilitate not only critical moral thinking but also critical moral empowerment. Part of ethical education should involve the provision of tools for effective citizen engagement. Reasoning, in the absence of meaningfully attending to the role of emotion, is insufficient for this goal. I make the case that the role of emotion in ethical decision-making and action remains under-analyzed and postulate that this is indicative of a general devaluation of the import of emotion. Failure to address the significance of emotional knowledge, and the resultant failure to attend to developing this epistemically fertile capacity, reflects the continuation of oppressive structures – structures that dualize reason and emotion and privilege reason. Approaches that fail to adequately recognize the role of emotion in ethical education are to the detriment of effective ethical pedagogy. I recommend a number of methods for remedying this omission so as to provide tools for moral action. In what follows, I highlight the responsibility teachers of ethics have to their students to recognize student emotional needs – needs which require fulfilling if students are to be enabled to be engaged citizens through moral empowerment.

### **David Hume's account of the essential role of sympathy for moral behavior**

I will adopt an account of the moral relevance of sympathy that echoes the insights of David Hume. Hume's (1983, 74–75) secular account of morality hinges on a universal human predisposition to feel compassion for the suffering of others, a disposition premised in part on a sympathetic response to the pain of others. We recognize the pain of others to be undesirable in a way similar to how our own pain is undesirable. 'The signs of sorrow and mourning... affect us with melancholy... symptoms, tears and cries and groans, never fail to infuse compassion and uneasiness' (Hume 1983, 43). Witnessing happiness, joy, and prosperity gives pleasure and bearing witness to suffering and sorrow unease (Hume 1983, 43). Sympathy-generated pleasure is the moral approval felt toward socially

useful traits, actions, and people that manifest social virtues (who are humane, generous, etc.) We approve of characters and manners that tend to usefulness for the good of all (Hume 1983, 50). Sympathy grounds benevolent action toward others. Inculcating appropriate emotional responses and reflecting the crucial role of emotion in and for moral life are thus essential for appropriate moral action. On Hume's (2002, 265–266) model, no action is possible without an emotional impetus – without a desire for one thing over another, we would be perpetually indifferent to states of affairs.

### **Empathy, sympathy, emotional overloading, and the politics of emotion**

Martin Hoffman's work helps substantiate Hume's claims above with empirical evidence. Hoffman (2000, 4) defines empathy as 'an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own', while sympathy refers to times in which empathy is accompanied by a feeling of compassion and a conscious desire to help (88). I adopt this distinction in what follows. Empathy is an emotional response which, when accompanied by compassion and desire to help, is referred to as sympathy. Sympathy, as described by Hume above, involves this active element. One can feel empathy on this account without making the move to sympathy. In adopting Hoffman's definitions here, I am glossing over a number of important and interesting debates about the multiple conceptualizations of empathy, sympathy, and compassion that are available. I emphasize this to make clear that the conceptualizations I borrow from Hoffman are broad in scope and contestable. Although for the sake of inclusivity I utilize Hoffman's account, I want to be explicit that I do not maintain that his are the only useful or apt characterizations of these terms.<sup>4</sup>

The weight of evidence indicates even children do not turn away from the suffering of others – rather, they are motivated to help victims (Hoffman 2000, 86). Views that reduce humans to solely self-interested maximizers, absent of sympathetic inclination, have been called in to question. Benkler (2011, 77, 79) amasses evidence meant to illustrate that we are not solely calculating, rational, self-interested, actors; rather, humans are often caring, decent, and kind. Metaphors of humans as rational economic calculators have been challenged (Jasper 1998, 398). Thoits (1989, 317) hypothesizes that the growing interest in emotions in sociology is plausibly due to growing recognition that humans are influenced by emotional attachments and affective commitments and that motivational factors are not reducible to solely rational-economic concerns. Andreou (2007, 47) contends that empirically oriented moral philosophy recognizes morality as being grounded in sentiment; the capacity to make genuine moral judgments depends on related emotional capacities. All this supports attending to emotional facets of morality.

Building on the theoretical presuppositions above, I am interested in exploring the relationship between empathetic responses and sympathetic moral action that reflects the desire to remedy the suffering of others (both human and more-than-human). How to habituate appropriate sympathetic responses is a central social and political issue, as is the question of how emotional *response* is related to moral *action*. For example, what level of empathetic emotional interaction is required to instigate an active sympathetic response? Second, what level of empathetic emotional interaction leads to a failure to instigate an active sympathetic response? More specifically, should we be concerned about the possibility of empathetic responses to the suffering of others that overwhelm and are psychologically crippling? Overwhelming and crippling responses (which I refer to as emotion-overloading) can be contrasted with sympathetic responses wherein one has been

provided with an emotional grounding for facilitating the alleviation of suffering. Hoffman is helpful here for charting what works and what fails when it comes to motivating sympathetic action. Hoffman identifies three forms of, what I refer to as, emotion-overloading: over-arousal, fatigue, and indifference. I will address each and then turn to additional related worries. Finally, I focus on the ways oppression functions and the care needed to address the ways social and political injustices complicate what adequate emotional understandings and responses entail.

Hoffman (2000, 178, 198) defines ‘empathetic over-arousal’ as a process that occurs when an observer’s empathetic distress becomes so painful and intolerable that it is transformed into an intense feeling of personal distress, which may move the person out of the empathetic mode entirely. Motivation to help the other is trumped by motivation to help oneself, to alleviate one’s own emotional pain at bearing witness to a significant harm. At one extreme of empathetic distress, it is so strong it moves beyond concern for the other to concern for one’s own distress while the opposite extreme involves such a weak amount of empathetic distress that it fails to motivate pro-social moral action (198). Once an observer has reached the threshold of distress tolerance relative to them and becomes over-aroused, thoughts turn to gaining physical or emotional distance by disengaging from the source of empathetic distress (Hoffman 2000, 204).

The second form of emotional-overloading Hoffman outlines is that of compassion fatigue. Repeated empathetic over-arousal over long periods of time leads to the chronic condition of ‘vicarious traumatization’ or ‘compassion fatigue’ (Hoffman 2000, 200). One coping mechanism is turning off emotionally (200). This can result in hardened reactions wherein an appropriate emotional response is not possible; it can also initiate such horror and outrage that the result is paralysis (200). This may help to account for the high rate of social and environmental activist burnout.

Indifference is another concern; namely, situations where a ‘person is exposed to another’s distress repeatedly over time’ such that the cumulative result is the observer’s empathetic distress diminishing ‘to the point of the person’s becoming indifferent to the victim’s suffering’ (Hoffman 2000, 206).<sup>5</sup> Hoffman (2000, 206) hypothesizes that this may help explain growing indifference among urbanites to the suffering of homeless people, as well as the diminished effectiveness of social reform photography. This is particularly worrisome given the way many commercial media sources select and present news. First, there is the barrage of negative and violent images of extreme suffering such that appropriate moral response to what should be treated as horrific and extremely emotionally upsetting imagery is effectively reduced. Moreover, graphic images of suffering are often immediately preceded by, or followed by, sports statistics or celebrity gossip. If images of harms without adequate context or narrative coherence are presented repeatedly in ways that encourage indifference and fail to identify or enable possibilities for helping, then we can reasonably expect the observers to disengage so as to facilitate psychic and emotional self-preservation through denial and avoidance. Such considerations have bearing in classroom settings where students may have already built up indifference.

Additional potential challenges lie in what Hoffman calls empathetic biases. These include: in-group bias, friendship bias, similarity bias, and here and now bias which involves tending to harmed persons who are present and immediately in the harmful situation (Hoffman 2000, 207–212).<sup>6</sup> Reflective awareness of how the above orientations function is thus necessary for an emotionally informed moral pedagogy.

Attending to how oppression functions also merits serious attention. Care is needed to address the varied ways social and political injustices complicate what constitutes adequate emotional understandings and responses. I will highlight feminist concerns regarding the delegation of emotion to the realm of the irrational and attendant denigration in the following section. Here, I highlight concerns regarding how privilege and oppression function in the exercise of empathy using the work of Megan Boler. Boler gives a politicized analysis of how emotion generally, and empathy in particular, operate in pedagogical practices that reflect and shape power dynamics. In *Feeling Power*, she addresses the ways in which individuals and groups feel the power of others exercised over them, as well as the ways in which individuals and groups feel empowered (Boler 1999, xx–xxi).

With regard to empathy, Boler's (1999, 155) concern originated while teaching an introduction to multiculturalism through arts and literature, where texts were meant to spark social imagination through opportunities to identify with the 'other' and to develop moral understanding to build democracy. Although a laudable goal, Boler (1999, 157) worries about the passive empathy that might arise through modes of easy identification and flattened historical sensibility. Boler echoes Martha Nussbaum's concern that compassion cannot be the entirety of justice, for people are 'often too weak and confused and isolated to carry out radical political changes in their own world' (Nussbaum 1996, 57–58; Boler 1999, 157). Boler (1999, 157) is concerned about attempts at empathy that result in a passive response with the reader/student feeling exonerated from privilege and their complicities in it through the freedom afforded through an 'ah-hah' experience – an experience that may mistakenly allow students to think they now understand all that needs understanding about the experience of the 'other'. Boler (1999, 157), in contrast, wants pedagogical methods that ensure responsible action is motivated to end the sources of oppression that are identified. She highlights the importance of the link between altruistic emotion and the disposition to take action to improve the unjust conditions experienced by so many (Boler 1999, 158). Although Boler (1999, 159) uses empathy generated through encounters with texts as her primary example and takes passive empathy to refer to cases where concern is directed at a fairly distant other whom we cannot directly help, her concern is nonetheless helpful in cases of increased proximity where the danger of uncritically foisting one's conceptual framework on that of another is still present. The worry of emotional arrogance regarding comprehension of the experience of the 'other' is illustrated as well as the worry of failure to recognize complicity and responsibility.

### **The role of emotion**

What emotion amounts to has a complex and unresolved history. For example, understandings of emotion can vary significantly depending on the intended application(s) of said understandings; for a non-exhaustive list, consider psychology, philosophy, politics, geography, education, psychiatry, sociology, literature, and so on. Differing characterizations among these spheres demand a relational, contextual, conceptualization of emotion that is dynamic, pluralistic, context sensitive, and frustratingly elusive. Given this complexity, an inclusive definition of emotion which marks the presence of multiple dimensions of emotional life and experience is desirable if multiple dimensions of emotional life are meant to be discussed (Boler 1999, xix). My analysis of emotion echoes Megan Boler's insofar as emotions are understood as embodied and situated, as embedded

in multiple cultures and ideologies, and as having sensational/physiological, cognitive, and linguistic dimensions (xix). I take the varied constellations of emotion concepts implied in my analysis to include physiological, sensorial, cognitive, linguistic, psychological, social, and political dimensions.

Goralnik and Nelson contend rationality and emotion cannot be disentangled and as such we should ‘address them as a single entity in education and ethical decision making’ (2011, 187–188).<sup>7</sup> They utilize an ethical framework that assumes ‘students will neither care about nor retain the knowledge they gain unless they are first emotionally and ethically engaged by place, community, and content’ (Goralnik and Nelson 2011, 183). Reis and Wolff-Michael contend

Emotions are a significant component of learning and instruction in general (Sansone & Thoman, 2005; Yarlott, 1972). For example, it has been demonstrated that emotions mediate students’ school performance and their decision-making more strongly than scientific and sound reasoning (Ekborg, 2005; Glaser-Zikuda et al., 2005; Grace & Ratcliffe, 2002). (2010, 71)

Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace argue ‘Social responsibility implies an affective sense of connection to others in the community (empathy), and more importantly, it implies a sense of responsibility for others’ (2009, 78). In terms of large-scale ethical shifts, it is relevant to note that: ‘Emotions do not merely accompany our deepest desires and satisfactions, they constitute them, permeating our ideas, identities, and interests. They are, in [Randall] Collins’ words (1990, 28), the “glue” of solidarity – and what mobilizes conflict’ (Jasper 1998, 399). If emotional engagement plays a key role in social responsibility and ethical engagement, then the continued relative absence of attending to emotional dimensions of ethical learning and practice require explication. As a potential explanation of the continued lack of adequate attention to the importance of emotions both in dominant Western theoretical ethics and moral pedagogy, I suggest there remains a negative association of emotions with irrationality and dumb bodily response.

In the history of Western, analytic, philosophy, there is a recurring value dualism between reason and emotion (Lloyd 1984). Irrational emotion is often contrasted with the application of reason. Oppressed groups have historically been associated with emotion (Lloyd 1984; Held 1990). Jaggar (1997, 385) argues that within Western philosophy, emotions are more likely than not to be taken to be subversive of knowledge. Spelman (1989, 263–264) contends there is a great deal of anxiety about emotions in Western philosophy due to a tendency to see them as interfering with the successful function of reason. Philosophical positivists relegated emotions to the province of physical feelings or involuntary bodily movements – emotions were taken to be disruptions to rational judgments (Jaggar 1997, 388; Spelman 1989, 265). Jasper contends ‘that there is still a taint or suspicion of irrationality surrounding most emotions’ (1998, 408). Educational experience is shaped by the continuing, and problematic, assumption of a deep seated opposition between emotion and reason (Boler 1999, 10). Maintaining a view that values emotions in both cognition and moral knowledge challenges such assumptions (Boler 1999, 10). Boler (1999, 110) problematizes the false dichotomy between reason and emotion in much pedagogical practice and argues instead that emotion is central to the domains of cognition and morality and need not detract from intellectual rigor or critical inquiry. Indeed, I suggest a robust pedagogy of emotion enhances intellectual rigor and critical inquiry. Alternatively stated, they work hand in hand.

Contrasting the conceptualization of emotion above there has been a sharp rise in the number of cognitivist views wherein judgments, beliefs, or some kind of cognitive state are constituents of emotions (Spelman 1989, 265). Indeed, human life as we know it would be impossible if reason and emotion failed to act in supportive ways the majority of the time. Singer puts it well, ‘If emotion without reason is blind, then reason without emotion is impotent’ (2000, xix). He highlights the crucial role of empathy for bridging ethical reasoning and action, arguing that ‘Were we incapable of empathy – of putting ourselves in the position of others and seeing that their suffering is like our own – then ethical reasoning would lead nowhere’ (Singer 2000, xix). Warren argues ‘Moral emotions are part of what psychologists have called “emotional intelligence” ... [which is] essential to moral reasoning’ (2005, 271). Ethical reasoning, motivation, and practice require that rational and emotional intelligence operate in concert (Warren 2005, 271).<sup>8</sup> A sole or primary focus on developing ethical reasoning skills is therefore insufficient for supporting genuine moral education that nurtures moral behavior.

### Reasoning is not enough

Commonly in North American university settings, teaching ethics is the equivalent of teaching ethical theory or teaching the application of ethical theory to particular problems (Blizek 2013, 80). Feminist pedagogies are a notable exception; however, these continue to be marginalized in Western academic philosophy. Successfully completing a class in ethics often requires garnering a good understanding of ethical theories and the strength or weakness of the arguments given to justify various positions. Enhancing moral reasoning capacities is therefore given pride of place in the West when it comes to the philosophical study of ethics. What practical behavioral changes, if any, follow from improved moral reasoning is an open question.

The relationship between moral reasoning skills and moral action is a contested one (Blasi 1980). Blasi argues that ‘Unfortunately, cognitive-development theory, as articulate as it is in its specific domain, offers only the vaguest guidelines for approaching the relations of cognition and action, simply hypothesizing a positive correlation between the two’ (1980, 1). Part of my concern about current dominant pedagogy for philosophical ethics is due to the theory-action gap (Kretz 2012). The knowledge-attitude-behavior model of ethical education assumes sharing knowledge inevitably leads to behavior change reflecting the responsibilities associated with this new knowledge (Kretz 2012, 15). A number of empirical studies falsify this claim (Kretz 2012, 15); as such, there is widespread critique of the ‘knowledge-attitude-behavior’ method (Goralnik and Nelson 2011, 183).<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the distance between moral theory and action cannot be traversed by attending to theoretical analysis alone.

Haidt (2001, 814) argues against the rationalist ontology underlying much psychology wherein moral knowledge and judgment are achieved primarily by a process of reasoning and reflection. On Haidt’s (2001, 814) social intuitionist approach to moral psychology, moral intuitions (including moral emotions) come first, and directly cause moral judgments. Haidt sympathizes with Hume’s view that humans derive pleasurable feelings of approbation (approval) toward benevolent pro-social acts, and feel negative feelings of disapprobation (disapproval) toward acts which are not (Haidt 2001, 815–816; Hume 1983, 44). Studies show moral action co-varies with moral emotions more than it does with moral reasoning, thereby providing a challenge to a solely or primarily rationalist

approach to morality (Haidt 2001, 815). Additionally, evidence points to emotions playing a key role in leading to altruism (Haidt 2001, 824). The mechanisms involved in helping are primarily affective and include things such as empathy, reflexive distress, sadness, guilt, and shame (Cialdini 1991 in Haidt 2001, 285). The above evidence suggests that more than moral reasoning is essential for effective ethical education if the practice of ethically engaged citizenship is taken to be a goal.

### The responsibility of teachers

Ethical educators, in discussing a wide range of ethical issues, present students with ethically challenging situations. Given the enormity of current injustices – for example, first-world economic imperialism, deaths due to starvation and lack of medical care, continuing warfare, and the ecological crisis – the impact of such considerations can be quite daunting. Without mediation, particularly given the concerns articulated by Hoffman and Boler, the presentation of such morally problematic occurrences can lead to failures of appropriate empathetic response and sympathetic motivation. Johnson (2005, 44–46) argues student cynicism and apathy are linked to civic disengagement and that pedagogical choices can either support cynicism and apathy or work against it. Authoritarian teaching methods, a culture of doom and gloom (wherein the focus is persistently and primarily on problems), little attention to solutions, and a failure to link social problems to individual behavior lead to apathy and cynicism (Johnson 2005, 47–49). In contrast, empowerment is facilitated through nurturing civic responsibility, increasing perceived civic efficacy (which increases the likelihood of engagement in civic behavior), developing civic skills, and increasing knowledge about society (which increases the likelihood of competence) (Johnson 2005, 49–50). Thus, responsibility might grow out of a desire to aid in the growth of students recognized as multidimensional persons – which includes responsibility for addressing the emotional dimensions of course work, especially when it can be depressing and disempowering.

A felt sense of responsibility for facilitating student empowerment might also be derived through a commitment to the goals of a liberal arts education. Stanford Professor, Rob Reich, describes his understanding of what it is to provide a liberal arts education, an education meant to expose and engage the student with a history of movements and ideas (Colby et al. 2003, 203). Such exposure is meant to serve as a tool not only to increase free thinking but to facilitate the learner becoming a better person (203). Reich notes a tendency in many faculties to resist the claim they have an agenda for improving humanity, but notes that faculties must in the final analysis have some hope for that (203). Such hope is not best reflected through attempts at transmitting to students the particular way you conceptualize as the best way to live; rather,

you're hoping to transmit to them an engagement with the variety of ways to live in the hope they may be better able to realize, on their own terms, a better life. If push came to shove, I think I'd give you the naked admission that the university should be engaged in making students better human beings. (203)

Insofar as the above is an apt characterization, those who are committed to a liberal arts education are likewise committed to their student's success as whole human beings. If a liberal arts education is to result in enhanced human beings, they must be engaged in socially and politically sensitive and reflective ways, as well as have not only their minds but their hearts activated.

Colby et al.'s (2003, 203) findings indicate that a sense of responsibility for facilitating student civic and moral engagement often comes from a belief that education should address the 'whole person' and a belief in the goals of liberal education which includes education for effective citizenship. Professor of physics Arthur Zajonc highlights how

The university is well-practised at educating the mind for critical reasoning, critical writing and critical speaking, as well as for scientific and quantitative analysis. But is this sufficient? In a world beset with conflict, internal as well as external, isn't it of equal if not greater importance to balance the sharpening of our intellects with the systematic cultivation of our hearts. (Rosales 2012)

Rosales (2012) points out that if teachers in higher education accept responsibility for preparing the next generation to address humankind's external and internal conflicts then the internal and external landscapes where these transformations take place require recognition. Most post-secondary institutions have placed cognitive pursuits at the forefront while neglecting a systematic account of the role that affective development plays in forming responsible, educated, and engaged citizens (Rosales 2012). As she so aptly phases it, 'intellect and heart live separate lives on most university campuses' (Rosales 2012). Rosales has come to recognize the danger of

leaving one's heart at the classroom door. Neglecting to address, value and strengthen the fundamental connections between knowledge and love leads to an impoverished understanding of the world and inhibits the kind of authentic transformation that education has the power to foster. (2012)

Attending to the emotional dimensions of learning, including attending to how sympathetic response functions in tandem with practical reasoning about moral responsibility, helps equip students to succeed as moral citizens both as healthy individuals and engaged participants in public society.

### **Empowerment methods**

Pedagogically there are a number of engagement methods to morally activate the minds and hearts of students. Methods of engagement suggested by Johnson (2005, 50) include the following: service learning, community research, positive deviance, lessening teacher cynicism, activist guest speakers, direct student participation in civic groups, evaluating the effectiveness of social movement organizations, student-led social action, student-centered active learning, and adopting class reading that advocates social action. Some active learning strategies recommended by Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace (2009, 82) range from role-playing activities to internships, group presentations to community-based service learning, and games/simulations to action research and advocacy projects. These lists are not exhaustive, but provide a point of departure.

Part of what is at work is the belief that once students understand how social issues in communities are socially created and maintained through social structures of social actions then the fact that social problems can also be diminished through social action can likewise be illuminated (Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace 2009, 79). However, without assistance in developing a sense of personal connection to the social problems analyzed, one cannot assume students will of necessity develop an active sense of responsibility for addressing said problems (Colby et al. 2003, Eyler and Giles 1999, Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy 1999, Mabry 1998, Myers-Lipton 1998, in Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace 2009, 79). Moreover, in the absence of a careful approach, students may read their own

unchecked biases into their interpretation of social problems and perceived solutions. Through direct engagement with oppressed populations, students are afforded a ground for potential understandings of the experience of members of said populations. Students can then take their cue for how to improve circumstances from the lived experiences of those who suffer most from existing oppressive circumstances. Through direct engagement with oppressed populations, privileged persons are also positioned to understand their own complicity in the oppression of others, to understand the ways in which oppression and domination cannot exist in isolation, and to experience the attendant sense of responsibility which can act as a motivation for action (McIntosh 2000).<sup>10</sup> Understandings of these sorts come to fruition through dialogue. Such dialogue requires a necessary emphasis on the care needed to adequately bear witness to the experience of another person who is differently socially constituted as well as an emphasis on one's role in maintaining existing patterns of oppression.

In particular, I am thinking of Thomas' (1992–93, 246–247) account of moral deference wherein adopting a position of moral deference is a necessary condition for bearing witness. In Thomas' (1992–93) account, the power to speak on behalf of another person can only be gifted by that other person once a relationship of trust has been established through active listening; active listening is facilitated through deferring to the experiential authority of the individual who has been downwardly socially constituted due to membership in a diminished social category. Successful dialogue is a necessary condition for justifying the epistemic claim that one correctly understands the experience of another. This helps speak of an important worry articulated by Diane Zorn and Megan Boler. Namely, the possibility of students being mere spectators engaging in passive empathy, where one uncritically and problematically foists their own conceptually framework on another's experience (Zorn and Boler 2007, 142–143; Boler 1999, 161, 184).

Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace contend that community-based social engagement is 'the most promising pedagogy for helping students develop a sense of empathy *with* diverse others – a sense of connectedness resulting from the sharing of experiences and/or circumstances' (2009, 79–80).<sup>11</sup> If students are intentionally given opportunities to explicitly engage and analyze communal obligations, the likelihood of developing empathies toward diverse others is increased (cf. Mobley 2007, Myers-Lipton 1996, in Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace 2009, 81). The stronger claim is that if a course objective is to

develop sentiments of civic and social responsibility and the concurrent development of feelings of empathy and compassion toward the less fortunate so that students may in the future routinely participate in making the lives of others better, we should intentionally facilitate development of that sentiment. (Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace 2009, 82)

Thus, community engagement through service learning and advocacy assignments are one crucial way to potentially morally engage students.

Mower (2008, 2) discusses a method that can be used in classroom settings to emotionally and morally engage students. She uses a process of Sympathetic Moral Reasoning (SMR) utilizing five steps; (1) Moral Question, (2) Script, (3) Perspective, (4) Examine, and (5) Answer. It helps students through (1) enabling them to identify moral questions and (2) giving them a simple and clear process for discovering direct answers to the posed moral question (Mower 2008, 2–3). The three general abilities underlying SMR are (1) emotional literacy (wherein one accurately and reliably recognizes emotions in self

and other), (2) contextual literacy (where one imagines hypothetical, moral charged scenarios vividly and realistically), and (3) moral literacy (where one can adopt first- and third-person roles and perspectives) (Mower 2008, 3). She utilizes a variety of role-playing exercises to develop first- and third-person analysis of actions in context and thereby encourages habituation of appropriate responses (Mower 2008). This differs from the use of thought experiments common in many philosophy classrooms – identifying with each character in some depth encourages direct empathetic consideration of another’s experience as opposed to broad, abstract, consideration of a morally-charged ethical scenario.

Although Mower’s approach, for example, may not facilitate the sort of rich emotional understandings desired by Thomas, Boler, and Zorn, a skill to facilitate greater understanding is being developed. Additionally, skills, to be sure, are needed for adequate coarse-grained, morally desirable emotional responses to others, responses that reflect the systematic nature of broad group-harms and the role of complicity at multiple social and political levels. Skills are also needed for more fine-grained understandings and moral responses between particular individuals. Such considerations reflect the necessarily unique experiences of individuals who are socially constituted in diverse ways. For example, *this* particular pain of *this* particular individual is uniquely excruciating due to their experiences as a queer, black, female living a context where homophobia, racism, and sexism are prevalent. Likewise, for example, *this* particular complicity of *this* particular individual is uniquely unnoticed by them due to their experience as a heterosexual, white, male living in a context that unfairly privileges heterosexual, white, males. Or alternatively, it is this particular heterosexual, white, male who refuses to be complicit. For those in dominant positions, it is crucial to develop, through dialogue, an acute perception of, for example, how one’s own heterosexism contributes to the queer other’s suffering or how one’s own white privilege sustains the racialized other’s suffering.<sup>12</sup> Simultaneous work on coarse-grained (pertaining to large-scale social-political patterns) and fine-grained (pertaining to more personal and concrete relationships) emotional understandings could result in generally enhancing appropriate emotional reflection and responsiveness. A humble orientation of deference in response to the insights of downwardly socially constituted others will be key, as will be the willingness of oppressed persons to share their experiences. The ability to identify complicity in systems of domination through inaction is also essential.

Given that empathy is amenable to cognitive influence, Hoffman (2000, 287) highlights the potential for a significant role being given to socialization and moral education. Moral reasoning and emoting skills can be further enhanced when they result in morally positive real world change. For example, in Hsu’s (2004, 41) study of an environmental education course that focused on issue investigation-evaluation and action training, and placed an emphasis on fostering empowerment, it was discovered that this approach significantly promoted students’ responsible environmental behavior, locus of control, environmental responsibility, intention to act, perceived knowledge of environmental issues, and perceived knowledge of/skills in using environmental action strategies. During the course, students identified a local ecologically troubling issue and then generated, assessed, and executed action plans to remedy the problem. The course included a unit on hope and empowerment to counteract the potentially powerless feelings following exposure to the width and breadth of environmental harm during the course.

The unit on hope and empowerment provided stories of success and included presentations by activists (Hsu 2004, 41).

Having moral exemplars present to classes can also have many positive results. Haidt discusses the experience of elevation. Seeing examples of exemplary moral behavior often trigger (1) a distinctive feeling of warmth and expansion in the chest, (2) a desire to become a better person, and (3) an opening of one's heart to both the person who triggered the feeling and others (Haidt 2002, 863). Exposure to a highly virtuous person who is dedicated to moral causes can have a powerful influential effect on others' moral behavior (Colby and Damon 1992, 22). Elevation is described by Haidt (2000, 2) as the warm and uplifting feeling people experience when witnessing unexpected acts of human kindness/goodness. Elevation makes people *want* to help others and to become better moral persons themselves (Haidt 2000, 2). Elevation therefore has the powerful capacity to spread (Haidt 2000, 4), like other moral emotions such as hope (Kretz 2013, 940).

I take hope in particular to be an essential emotion to cultivate for activism. Justified hope for a particular outcome is a necessary precondition for engagement in action directed toward said outcome; if the desired outcome is impossible then it is irrational to engage in said action, and, alternatively, if the desired outcome is certain, one need not hope for one already has certainty. I argue elsewhere for a conceptualization of hope that is substantive, psychologically informed, responsive, socially supported, proactively pursued, and enhances agency as well as induces positive action (Kretz, 2013, 929). Hope that one can make a difference is a precondition for positive change, and justified hope requires that the hoped goal is possible (Kretz 2013, 932, 936–941). Hope is active, involving both a sense of agency and pathway components (Snyder 1995, 355). As such, hope involves a cycle of expectation, planning, and action wherein an agent explores the power of her or his own agency (Drahos 2004, 22). In contrast, Freire (2011, 3) contends hopelessness and despair are the cause and consequence of inaction or immobilism; thus, a move toward ameliorating these emotional responses in university classes becomes essential. Insofar as hope is necessary for action, then it is a worthwhile virtue to nurture in classrooms aiming to support empowered activism.

I do not wish to suggest that the recommendations above provide a comprehensive answer regarding how to successfully inspire and support empowered activism. Nor have I established that such activism would suffice to ameliorate the heaviness of despair that can accompany being exposed to the enormity of diverse, entrenched, moral problems. I do, however, take facilitating empowered activism to be an essential element for alleviating said heaviness. Experiencing first-hand the ability to contribute to positive moral shifts in the world that reflect one's own considered ethical beliefs and values, and being provided with tools for contributing to these positive shifts, are essential for generating justified hope in a more caring, just, and humane future. I hope this work serves to contribute meaningfully to imagining ways forward where students' hearts are neither encouraged to be left at the classroom door, nor crushed by the weight of exposure to continuing moral harms when students enter the class with open hearts in hand.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, if Hume is right that emotion plays a crucial role in motivating moral action, and if Hoffman is right that emotional overloading can result in inaction, then moral theorists and teachers need to be cognizant of the emotional impact generated by particular

methods of revealing the scope and nature of moral harm. Furthermore, if Boler is correct, careful attention to the politics of emotion is needed to avoid emotional arrogance with regard to perspective taking, and to avoid failure to recognize complicity. The continuing lack of sufficient attention to the role of emotion in dominant Western philosophical pedagogy can be explained in part by the persistent value dualism between reason and emotion. Insofar as emotion remains undervalued, teaching ethics amounts largely to teaching ethical theories and reasoning about their content. Reasoning alone, I have argued, is insufficient for motivating action. The responsibility of teachers to address emotional dimensions of moral experience might arise from a desire not to depress and disempower students, or it may arise from a commitment to the goals of a liberal arts education. Such a move reflects a desire to acknowledge and engage both the hearts and minds of students. Methods of emotional engagement and empowerment are available, and I'm making the case that an adequately comprehensive moral education involves putting them to work.

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### Notes

1. When I say 'reason stripped bare of emotional richness,' I mean reason divorced from emotion insofar as possible. It will become apparent in what follows that I take the two to be necessarily connected.
2. To clarify, my focus is less on teaching students how to feel/what is appropriate to feel and more on recognizing students as emotional beings with emotional needs in the classroom setting – needs that often fail to be met. Importantly, I contend, they fail to be met in ways that can facilitate moral action.
3. Moreover, my focus is not on professional programs such as nursing, medicine, teacher education, and social work, which would require a different sort of analysis.
4. For example, in Verducci's (2000) paper 'A conceptual history of empathy and a question it raises for moral education,' she sketches a history of varied conceptualizations in multiple domains. Nussbaum (1996) likewise gives a nuanced historical analysis of compassion in 'Compassion: the basic social emotion.' Although space does not allow for a robust consideration of the multiplicity of conceptual distinctions that can be made, I will, however, address Boler's worry about a form of passive empathy articulated through Nussbaum's account shortly.
5. What Hoffman (2000, 205–206) refers to as 'habituation' I think better to conceptualize as indifference, as it indicates an indifferent response to witnessing the harm of others.
6. I recommend thinking of what Hoffman calls empathetic bias in terms of empathic orientation or inclination, as bias has an implicitly negative connotation that begs the question of whether

- such human traits will in fact prove to be important to preserve and reflect in moral accounts of how to, in a healthy way, care for others.
7. In support, Goralnik and Nelson (2011, 188) cite the work of D'Arcangelo (2000), Weiss (2000), Sylwester (1994), and McCuen and Shah (2007).
  8. Warren refers here to the work of Goleman (2005) who highlights the limitations of IQ tests that focus solely on rationality and recommends emotional intelligence be taken seriously as a complementary capacity. Goleman's account is far from being uncontentious. For example Boler (1999, 61, 75) worries, correctly, about a failure to address the influences of gender, race, and social class in the formation and interpretation of attempts at emotional expression. I am not advocating an uncritical adoption of Goleman's view but rather use it to illustrate the import of attending to dimensions of intelligence in the sphere of emotion.
  9. For a non-exhaustive list of evidence attesting to a disjunction between, for example, environmental knowledge/attitude and reflective environmental behavior see Bickman 1972; Costanzo et al. 1986; Finger 1994; Geller 1981; Gellar, Erickson, and Buttram 1983; Hsu 2004; Hungerford and Volk 1990; Kollmuss and Agyeman 2002; McKenzie-Mohr 2000; Sia, Hungerford, and Tomera 1985–86. Although the focus of the above studies pertains to environmental knowledge and action, such studies at minimum problematize the more general assumption that moral knowledge, of necessity, leads to action reflecting this knowledge.
  10. My thanks to the anonymous reviewers for requesting that these considerations be made explicit.
  11. Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace (2009, 80) go on to specify in a footnote that pity and compassion are insufficient given that students can feel such things without simultaneously feeling the compulsion to act on these feelings. Whether either of these emotions is sufficient for motivating related moral action is an open question – but Hironimus-Wendt and Wallace's concerns about instigating emotional engagement adequate for supporting the move to behavior remain key.
  12. My thanks to one of the blind reviewers who encouraged making explicit this precise worry.

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