

EMPATHY AND ENABLING RELIGIOUS EVIL

Empathy, feeling what another is feeling and having a good understanding of it, is more important than love for you can feel empathy for an enemy even without reconciling with them. The emphasis Christ put on loving enemies is just toxic for that reason. Empathy is superior and helps reduce hate and some hate is not so bad.

What if God hypothetically could command you to not have empathy (maybe he says it is good but not appropriate under current conditions) or even made empathy a sin in itself? The hypothetical test excels and perfects our knowledge of what is really important. Obviously empathy is such a great good that even defiance of God would be totally justified in either case. Even if it were evil we should do it for evil that benefits us is worth it.

People enable oppressive and violent religions and political systems because of a lack of empathy. They may have good empathy in many things but when it is a religious or political matter the empathy is gone.

Suppose a hospital treats a baby and the baby dies through getting the wrong treatment. Empathy may cause enraged people to get it closed down. Empathy can also cause sensible people to try and help the hospital get it right in future.

Empathy works best in directly and obviously frightening matters such as plagues where people are dropping like flies and earthquakes. But for more subtle and indirect evils such as global warming the empathy will tend to be too weak to be effective in getting people to help. It is because the horror and danger is more hidden and is more gradual. Evils that are in your face will get a stronger reaction than evils that feel a bit far away. Evil doesn't look so evil when it is in the distance.

Those who feel that they must have empathy for all people as themselves will find they soon have empathy for nobody. You simply cannot and will not empathise with a stranger as you would a member of your family.

We enable evil because we feel the responsibility is shared and diluted by numbers. That is why we don't get too upset if we get a severe reprimand if others are being reprimanded with us. It is a different story if only Enabling bad things to happen by silence or neglecting to challenge them is indicating that you have no objection to these things happening. Enabling is a form of bullying for it supports those who bully and impedes those who want to stop the bullies. The enabler enjoys having her hands clean - she gets a smug glow. That in itself is bullying. It sends a message to the victim who actually gets beaten up. And the bully won't be inspired by enablers to live better. The bully will feel encouraged to keep up the harassment even if only by their silence.

When you contribute to the power of an oppressive and dishonest body, such as a religion, by silence or membership you will not feel responsible or very responsible for the harm done. You might tell yourself that you are keeping out of it but you are not. Your keeping out of it is consent. You are happy to risk making it harder for those who need encouragement to go and do something about it. Bullying doesn't have to be direct or physical to do lasting damage. Victims of bullies are often more damaged by bystanders and those who let the bully do her or his worst or those who think the bullying is funny. Standing by tells them that the bully is not the only person who thinks they are worthless and fit only to be made fun of. It attacks the victim's coping skills and makes them think there is something wrong with them that is making the bully be horrible. It can lead to the victim even defending the bully. You are more likely to cope if it is a few people who bully you but if you see that the community is letting them do it then coping will be extremely difficult. You are more worried about what you feel responsible for than what you are responsible for. That is why you may go on social networking and message terrible things to people that you would not say to them in the real world.

Empathy is the ability to understand somebody else's thoughts and ideas and fears and emotions and feelings from their own perspective. The book, Christianity is not Great, points out that those who condone Bible and divine cruelty have a lack of empathy which "keeps believers from accepting the truth about their faith." "If you were a slave ... wouldn't you wish the Christian God had clearly condemned slavery? God's defenders simply lack empathy for these people. They refuse to feel their pain." The book asserts then that their faith works like an anaesthetic and deadens the pain and sympathy they should feel for the slaves.

Now a person might be horrified at the thought that a divine power lets the innocent suffer horrendously even little babies. It makes her sick. Her head might tell her God has a plan but that should have little effect on the horror she feels. So how do believers cope? They work on feeling good about condoning and approving of this God that allows the unimaginably evil to happen. They condone it and it makes them feel good.

Problems with Empathy:

An evil person can try to understand and feel your pain and recognise it in order to hurt you better or more lastingly

You can have empathy with the wrong person - empathy with Jack the Ripper can lead to siding with his killings

Empathy for too many people or for one person too often will lead to you becoming ill or negative or fearful

Empathy can only come about in spite of belief in God for that belief declares that all chances for you to do good are tests from God. Real empathy cares about the person not the test.

Finally, it seems best to seek a vague but real and general and overall empathy for all human suffering. This is very imperfect but it is not possible to feel proper empathy for each individual so you need empathy for the whole. One thing that is possible is to be against and disapproving of anybody's suffering. That is easy for it is about principle not your feelings. Religion wants you to approve of how God allows suffering. That evil makes dirt of any good it does. If you oppose the principle then there is no point in caring what you feel about the suffering of another.