
In this book Slote tries to provide a constructive and systematic defense of “sentimentalism” as a meta-ethical as well as normative ethical theory, which he takes to be a version of care ethics. This book also contains claims on moral education.

In Chapter 1, “Empathy: Cement of the Moral Universe,” Slote asserts that empathy is a crucial source and sustainer of altruistic concern (p. 20). He argues that given this sentimentalist assumption, there are at least two ways, induction (being made aware of the harm one has done to others) and modeling (directly taking in someone’s concern for others), in which empathic concern for others can be strengthened and moral education furthered (pp. 18-21). Lastly, he claims commonsensical moral distinctions correspond with distinctions in our empathic tendencies (p. 21-25).

In Chapter 2, “Moral Approval and Disapproval,” Slote argues that empathy helps create moral approval and disapproval. According to Slote, we can have moral approval or disapproval without making moral judgments. Moral approval is an empathy-driven attitude towards another agent’s acting with an empathy-driven warm attitude (“standpoint”) towards other(s) (p. 34). One’s moral disapproval is an empathy-driven emotion towards another agent’s empathy-less cold attitude towards other(s) (p. 35). Approval is itself warm and disapproval chilly because both emotions are empathy-driven (p. 36).

In Chapter 3, “Empathy in Moral Judgment,” Slote explicates the warmness and chilliness in terms of the direction of motivation: a warm or positive attitude, specifically moral approval, is the disposition to move us towards the action that the attitude is directed at while a chilly or negative attitude, specifically moral disapproval, is the disposition to move us away from the action (p. 46; Slote does not address the concern that this distinction is a matter of description: for example, depending on whether you describe an attitude as a disposition to move us away from refusing to helping a person in trouble or as a disposition to move us towards helping such a person, the attitude might count as chilly or warm). Slote argues that such approval and disapproval are elements in our understanding and making of moral claims. He uses this to explain, for example, why commonsensical moral judgments exhibit responsiveness to distance, partiality, and self-other asymmetry, and why psychopaths cannot make or understand moral judgments.

In Chapter 4, “A New Kind of Reference-Fixing,” Slote explains moral terms with a reference-fixing theory that involves empathy and is based on approval and disapproval. It turns out that certain moral judgments are *a priori* true. The reference-fixing *a priori* description of rightness is that it is “whatever feelings of warmth directed at agents and delivered by mechanisms of empathy are caused by” (p. 61). Given this premise and the (presumably *a priori*) premise that it is the agents’ warm attitudes that cause these feelings of warmth (i.e., approval), it follows that the rightness of actions consists in the agents’ warm attitudes, which is an *a priori* moral truth (p. 61). Slote’s “sentimentalist” theory is supposed to be naturalistic.
and realistic given that moral rightness amounts to a natural, real property (p. 67), but it claims to show that some moral claims are a priori.

In Chapter 5, “How to Derive ‘Ought’ from ‘Is’,” Slote argues that while his account renders some inferences from is-premises to ought-premises valid, this is not implausible. In the process of the argument, he claims his account vindicates the motive internalism of moral judgments, that is, the view that moral judgments are inherently motivating.

In Chapter 6, “The Use of Moral Judgments,” and Chapter 7, “Between Motive and Morality,” Slote argues against ethical rationalists like Kantians that natural emotions or motives are usually appropriate in direction and sufficient in strength for moral actions. And even in cases where these conative states weaken, people rarely need principles or rules to act rightly. Moral rules are not always available in deliberation, though they can work as a strong incentive for right actions when other people make the agents aware that these rules apply to them.

In Chapter 8, “Paternalism and Patriarchy,” Slote tries to explain respect for others’ autonomy in terms of empathy. One shows respect for some person if and only if she exhibits appropriate empathy-driven concern for the person in her dealings with that person (p. 111; note that self-respect is not characterized in terms of empathy; see p. 115, note 15). Slote holds that this view helps vindicate a general objection against paternalism but that paternalism does not always involve lack of respect: paternalistic intervention is more often permissible than liberalism holds. Slote also argues that empathic parents tend to produce persons with autonomy in the sense of an exercised internal capacity for making one’s decisions, while non-empathic parents tend to preclude them.

In Chapter 9, “Justice,” Slote explicitly states the criterion of right actions (finally!): “actions or institutions count as unjust or wrong (or disrespectful) if and only if they reflect or express a lack of full-blown empathic concern for others on the part of relevant individuals or groups of individuals” (pp. 137-138; Slote does not explain what counts as expressing a lack of a mental state, such as an absence of a concern). Slote argues that this criterion can account for distributive and international justice, which many have thought resist sentimentalist, care-ethicist treatment.

In Chapter 10, “Empathy, Objectivity, and Rationality,” Slote goes beyond morality and characterizes intellectual objectivity (as unbiasedness) in terms of empathy. Such objectivity consists in seeing another person’s position or argument through empathy and having a certain favorable emotion toward it (pp. 149-151).

As you see, this book is really ambitious. This single short book tries to demonstrate many original or controversial meta-ethical and normative ethical conclusions. Furthermore, these conclusions are claimed to be the results of a theory unified under the phenomenon of empathy. The question is whether this project is successfully executed. I will focus on the foundations of this project.

I am afraid that Slote does not adequately explain some of the fundamental concepts or phenomena, empathy and full-blown empathy in particular. Slote often talks of empathy as a mental state, but according to note 15 on p. 79 of the book, this is merely a derivative sense of empathy: empathy in the original sense is a mechanism. The problem is that Slote never explicitly tells us what this