The Importance of Being Earnestly Apathetic: An Ethical Defense

Mark P. Maller

Abstract: The article presents a multi-faceted overview of arguments that defend apathy-indifference primarily in ethics and from historical and phenomenological perspectives. The history of philosophy is important for examining its deeper meanings, especially the ancients. Research is scant in philosophy scholarship, though prevalent in psychology and education. I argue that apathy and/or indifference is the most fundamental relation toward others and objects in the world, and can be a morally acceptable state of mind. It is defined as a universal human attitude and absence of feeling which leads to inaction and lack of decisions. Indifference is a neutral, unbiased mood and intrinsic aspect of consciousness – a normal ever-present reaction toward irrelevant or unimportant things and sentient beings. As such, it deserves to have an important place in moral philosophy in theory and practical life. Although loaded with bad connotations, apathy and indifference can be an admirable moral virtue without negative effects. Indifference/apathy is a positive value when it protects the self from disappointment, and Stoicism advocates it as detachment from negative events, inner turmoil, and death. Stoics Epictetus and Seneca defend this idea. Moreover, the practice of sympathy and empathy may be overvalued: fleeting, weak, unwarranted and/or insincere.

Keywords: apathy, indifference, Stoicism, empathy, mental attitudes.

Moral and Psychological Descriptions

Apathy or indifference is the most prevalent state of mind toward others and objects in the world – certainly not sympathy or caring, and it can be a morally acceptable right attitude of enduring value. It is a commonplace total lack of preference toward specific or general things and phenomena. Indifference is defined as a neutral state of disinterest or impartiality with no emotive feeling for something in the broadest sense. As a middle point, indifference toward X (object, person, place) indicates a non-emotive attitudinal disposition which exists toward almost everything: external things, other agents, events. However, it is neglected in philosophical scholarship (except for ancients), though its relevance to education, social problems and politics is widely known. Against the negative views, this article presents a fresh understanding within normative ethics, and entails an experiential theory apropos of a moral life and personal preferences. My intention is a multi-faceted overview of ethical arguments with significant historical and phenomenological perspectives. The words 'agent' and 'individual' are used interchangeably. I critically challenge the value and effectiveness of empathy for replacing indifference, too. Apathy and indifference have not been an

issue in philosophy of mind and ethics because it is unexciting, and seems to lack substantial meaningfulness, but this is a misperception. This psychological-ethical analysis contributes to widespread issues in global society in addition to philosophy of mind and epistemology.

Phenomenological descriptions of apathy and indifference are important and fundamental for understanding the normative issues. As an attitude, it is elusive without observable defining characteristics. Apathy is a strong abiding indifference and absence of feelings, and is loaded with negative disdainful connotations. These terms are used here interchangeably, except in certain pertinent contexts like Stoicism, that emphasizes tranquil indifference. Apathy is defined as a stronger attitude, whereas indifference is unbiased uninterested neutrality. Existentially, indifference is the total absence of emotion – a normal non-preferential attitude that is neither negative or positive. It is a universal state of mind toward anything in the world and beyond it, and possibly the individual's ultimate choice whether to live or fade out. Apathy is distinguished from indifference by its strength and persistence over time as an aspect of one's character. Indifference is a neutral attitude, a lack of preference and weak disinterest in something. They are present regardless of socio-demographic factors, environments, and how they are understood and interpreted. The brain coordinates impulses of conflicting preferences constantly across the lifespan, from the tribulations of youth to settled old age. Indifference occurs toward countless situations and phenomena, regardless of the personal element involved, and perhaps with moral judgments. Indifference toward indifference is a truism, except when observers know of serious crimes or crises, and right moral actions are expected of them. As a neutral state, it is a common thread throughout society, assumed and implied, not literally spoken. 'I don't care,' 'it doesn't matter' are statements of indifference because they express an absence of interest in something. It is a safe reaction that expresses the agent's lack of choice and requires no effort at all. Routine cognitive patterns are undisturbed as indifference indicates the inattentive interiority that distances agents from objects. Overall, its constant ubiquitous disposition shows it is the predominant attitude in the world, though unspoken or unacknowledged from fear of disapproval and alienation. Apathy is masked, disguised because it appears uncaring and bored, and what is not positive is considered negative.

Apathy may be earnest, yet implies no sincere interest in authentic action, regardless of the individual's knowledge or expertise on the subject. Knowledge of $\boldsymbol{X}$ does not imply interest, nor does interest imply knowledge, and being apathetic toward remembered facts and experiences is commonplace. Indifference is not qualitative, neither high nor low, and its main attribute is that the objects are irrelevant to an agent. To be indifferent to **X**, the object or entity is irrelevant and unimportant to him/her as a detachment from something. If I am indifferent to the weather today, then it is irrelevant to my interests. I have no feeling or concern for it, and the atmospheric conditions are without meaning

until a relevant change occurs. Overcast gray is the symbolic color of indifference, neither dark nor light, bright nor gloomy, like dull colored clouds. In color theory, gray is for boredom, anxiety, indifference, and other colors have symbolic meanings.

Descriptions of its mental state are foremost an essential state of mind or mentality and specifically an attitude and disposition. Ontologically, paraphrasing Sartre about consciousness, indifference *is what it is not* – as if it is *nothing* that negates all feelings and emotion. Its presence exists as an absence of emotion or preference and its sole existence, by necessity, is a rudimentary option – like thinking or non-thinking without complexity or depth. The existence of indifference and apathy is an intrinsic aspect of consciousness and possibly a function of brain neurons. Psychologically, they are indispensable to living because the mind cannot adjust to the total bombarding stimuli, mental and external. Humans indifferently block out about 99% of all sensory stimuli in the environment and process only 10 bits per second on average stimulation (Sauerbrei 2025). Therefore, indifference is a fundamental necessity to human life; none of the emotions, on the contrary, are necessary and indispensable. Some claim that love is necessary, but millions live well and spend their entire lives without it. Sympathy, empathy, sadness, and grief are all important but are not a necessity, though a good moral life is another issue. Joy is relatively brief and never necessary regardless of the euphoria. By definition, love seems loveable, hate hateful, fear is feared itself, and one can be apathetic to apathy itself. These are self-referential emotions in which the subject and feeling or its expression is the same, and is not redundant or merely an analytic statement.

In our quotidian lives, minds attend to immediate things, practical needs, desires, and goals for life situations. Indifference exists simply because it is there, plain and without substance, dull, naked and unnoticed. Humans are indifferent to normal bodily functions, blocked noise, incomprehensible things, subtle or irrelevant differences in their environments, and minimal attention to others and assorted things in nature. Temporality limits the capacity and desire to attend to the vast array of stimuli, internal and external, unless it presents a potential or actual danger. The 24-hour day limits enjoying our preferences regularly, thus indifferent or apathetic moods may predominate human lived time. It is nearly impossible to maintain and/or fulfill feelings for all the agent's preferences throughout an alert conscious day. Preferences remain mainly dormant or subconscious, passive and forgotten mental states without conscious intentionality. Cognizant minds are merely aware, or typically unaware of a myriad of sensible objects of attention. Distractions startle the indifferent bored mind, interrupted by city noise or bad weather which provokes feelings of annoyance. Phenomenologically, awareness of indifference manifests itself as the appearance of boredom in reflective consciousness. Boredom and apathy overlap like Venn diagrams, often indistinguishable as cause and effect. Boredom and apathy may be the cause or effect, and possibly this is apathetic in itself. We may

be bored waiting for something to happen but not apathetic about it, or apathetic but not bored. Sleep is necessary to escape all this, and even then agents may be indifferent toward dreams and dreaming. Experience shows that apathetic boredom instigates and increases sleep and drowsiness.

Days of the week, or entire weeks become irrelevant and unimportant, especially in locked security, and in retirement, and purposelessness engenders indifference and apathy to passing illusory time. Temporality regulates human emotions and apathy such that particular hours are experienced differently, subjectively relative. The perception of periods of time passing indicated by time-pieces and symbols change moods and attitudes, and the reverse also occurs. Indifferent moods change the way humans perceive incremental units of time: from hours to years, and generally no moral or epistemic blame should be inferred. If a person I call *Green* is indifferent to his neighbors' schedules, then there is nothing to think about. The neighbors are perceived as automatons, anonymous bodies moving about, mutually of no interest and without even the desire or intent – Green may be similarly perceived as such. This urban existence perpetuates itself constantly and is pessimistic, but naive optimism is unwarranted and atypical, except in certain circumstances and locations. The statement "I don't care that I don't care" is self-reflective apathy, expressed or implied, in which agents are apathetic toward apathy itself, but whether they should or not be apathetic is undetermined.

When making non-preferential decisions, no choice is still a choice, and those who are indifferent are choosing, nonetheless. Hume noted a perfect total indifference is essential to chance and a total indifference can never in itself be superior or inferior to another.[1] Forced decisions, accidental actions and chance change the indifferent attitude. Indifference itself is not meaningful deliberation, and therefore leads to no deliberated pleasure or pain. It can be a strength or virtue when it defends the self against disappointment and other negative emotions, as I discuss later. From indifference *or* apathy follows nonaction *and* lack of decision. Therefore **(I v A) ⊃ (N· LD)**. Empirical studies show that apathy engenders less purposeful free actions and increased procrastinating indecision, except in survival and forced choices. Total lack of desire or indifference causes some kinds of apathy as a value. Ascetism is consistent with this, but the survival drive makes it impossible to end all desires. Buddhist philosophy famously emphasizes controlling and diminishing strong desires. However, fulfilling positive emotions and desires promotes happiness, yet brain physiology instills basic desires and drives (food and sex) to persist and be desired, either nonrational or irrationally. We want and need these desires to be satisfied and repeated indefinitely, not ended.

[1] Hume uses 'indifference' ambiguously to mean by chance and indifferent mental states. He states that indifference is relative and cannot be evaluated as such. See *Treatise* [1739] 1967, 124-125.

Normative-Epistemic Indifference

After philosophical psychology, I turn to key normative observations and analysis in accordance with general empiricist traditions. Moral prescriptions work best from experience and not as *a priori* moral laws, according to James, Mill, and other ethical empiricists. Descriptive ethical propositions do not necessarily imply the normative (prescriptive), and following this principle, parsimony ought to be used when inferring normative judgments from statements of apathy and indifference. The principle is assumed to cover all normative statements, which provides some validation that morality is founded on experience, not *a priori* logic or divine authority. Generally, a given assumption is that indifference toward others is an unethical choice or negative trait, anti-social and of no value. It is perceived as a self-centered uncaring outlook and should be ameliorated, which may be true, but it is fundamentally a necessary balance of mind, or consciousness (if one prefers). One epistemological reason for apathy or indifference is that our knowledge about the private lives of others is unknown or unreliable speculation. This ignorance causes apathy, prejudice and misinformation, and consequently a useful civic purpose is encouragement of interest and informative knowledge about diverse kinds of agents.

Clearly, apathy toward **X** implies no interest and irrelevance, regardless of one's knowledge of X. Recently, an article attempts to show that apathy is an intellectual vice. In their example, Mary allows Nick to believe Calcutta is the capital of India when she knows it is New Delhi, which is relevant for her friend Nick's visit to India who holds this false belief (Schwengerer and Kotsonis 2024). Consistent with Aristotle, it is a vice only when it is a regular habitual pattern of Mary's unmotivated behavior. I agree, however different kinds of knowledge matter whether it is trivial or serious, depending on the probable consequences of the false beliefs and careless attitudes. Assume that Mary is knowledgeable about Toyotas, but she does not correct her friends' mistaken belief about them because she is uninterested in their decision to purchase a car and remains silent. It seems wrong, but it would not be an epistemic vice unless it is a habitual pattern. Current knowledge is helpful, but Mary's information could be mistaken, partly true or irrelevant to her friend's budget. In general, remaining silent when the Other's belief is obviously wrong may be a moral issue, circumstantial relativism, or an epistemic vice. No general rule fits all cases, but the word 'epistemic' is inappropriate when emotions or past history exists between agents that indicate indifference, bad motives or animosity toward them. If the agent is merely apathetic, then no motive exists probably, and it is another ethical issue, or if the other has no interest in autos, then the moral issue is irrelevant. However, if an agent asks for directions to an auto dealer (or other destination) and Mary deliberately misdirects them, this deception is unethical and an anti-value. (Go away, get lost, don't care.)

In the media, broadcast news programs serve as an example, regardless of one's opinion and preferences of these info-shows. Reporters assume viewers

should be informed and sensitive to stories of human suffering, that local, national, or news abroad have value. Workmen are trapped somewhere and reporters overlook the basic question of why the public should be interested or sympathize because their job is only to report and fill time on-air or for an internet story. The decision not to cover the story is probably not problematic, but misinformation is an epistemic vice and betrays journalistic trust. Higher ratings are necessary and a weak moral obligation may be present. Viewers may be unreliable evidence of true interest because there are other reasons for watching news. Thus, their assumption is weak, but it does *not* imply that indifference or apathy is praiseworthy or a virtue. Indifference is permissible *prima facie*, but publicly it looks inadmissible because of the appearance of insensitivity. Public expressions of concern perpetuate the misunderstanding that audiences should know of this story and perhaps feel sympathy. Nonetheless, apathy is morally permissible and the norm in that humans clearly cannot sympathize toward everyone in danger.

Partisan observers question: how can you be indifferent to these terrible problems? However, uninterested agents counter: "why should I? I am busy and it will make no difference." The established opinion is that apathy is a detached lackadaisical response and sometimes a mental health symptom or issue. Yet it is possible some critics are indifferent also, covertly hypocritical, or living in a social or economic situation where they cannot contribute to the cause or bound up with their own self-interest. Clearly, indifference or antipathy is a strong reason for sustaining moral quietness of mind and is often morally permissible and possibly virtuous. Ideally, the public is expected to care or have interest in climate change, war victims, and slavery, to name a few, but instead indifference or apathy is the prevailing mindset until it affects individuals in their neighborhood or those they favor. It is considered a negative trait and unvirtuous when altruistic action is needed, but without this assumption, indifference is a nonissue and irrelevant, yet others are blamed if apathy seems unjustified or callous. Generally, agents are apathetic whether goods or harm may come to someone, but they do not wish for it, nor is there malice in thought or deed. Like everyone, Green is indifferent whether a stranger succeeds or fails, but nor does he wish for their failure. Indifference is a detachment from others by maintaining a certain spatial or psychological distance, and some experience estrangement or disconnection. Families and other relationships can become (and are) interconnected with apathy toward each member throughout their lives, combined with ambivalent love and/or other emotions.

Historically, an important question is why others should be interested in, or care about those who suffer, especially in other nations? Adam Smith argued that Europeans would be apathetic toward a huge earthquake in China that killed millions.[2] (Smith 2009, 158). After people express sorrow for these misfortunes,

[2] [3] *Theory of Human Sentiments*. 158. A devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria killed 53,000 people in 2023 yet provoked little interest in America in the media. 'Frivolous disaster' is an oxymoron.

and after their nice sentiments, they would return to their everyday lives as if no calamity happened. "The most frivolous disaster which could befal (sic) himself would occasion a more real disturbance."[3] (Smith 2009) A lost finger is more disturbing to them than a million deaths of Chinese and this does not imply prejudice. Observations show that the farther away a disaster occurs in place or time, indifference increases and sympathy decreases, Smith states. Essentially, the greater that an event affects the agent personally, now or in the immediate future, the intensity of emotions will increase.

Martha Nussbaum argues that Stoicism is critically counter to much-needed compassion (Nussbaum 2001, 360), yet she mentions it is unreliable, inconsistently motivating, and fleeting, like pity. Sadly, Smith and Nussbaum's observation is still true to a lesser extent. Egoism of human nature is one cogent moral explanation. Individual ethical egoists claim that their one true moral obligation is to themselves in the larger picture, but this view does not necessarily imply pure apathy or indifference. The opposite may be true – altruistic acts may, and ideally should be advantageous to egoists while they show the appearance of caring.

Hume's defense of tranquil indifference is consistent with his argument for sympathy as an important virtue, but not empathy, which requires stronger rapport and feeling.

> Of the same class of virtues with courage is that undisturbed *tranquillity,* superior to pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of adverse fortune…and the nearer we can approach in practice to this sublime tranquillity and indifference (for we must distinguish it from stupid sensibility), the more secure enjoyment shall we attain within ourselves, and the more greatness of mind shall we discover in the world. ([1751] 1957, 79)

Philosophical tranquility is considered an aspect of the virtue magnanimity. This is influenced from Epictetus, though no one questions that undisturbed tranquility is not superior to internal and external misfortunes. Indifference is also beneficial for restful *ataraxia.* Peace of mind is attained but 'greatness of mind' (magnanimity) is surely questionable and implausible. The strongest defense of indifference and detachment is from the classical Stoics, whose philosophy is very relevant today and to our purpose.

Analysis of Stoical Indifference

Epictetus (55-135 A.D.) argued one should not worry about things outside your control, and only be concerned with things in your control. The 'unexpected calamity' mentioned is considered beyond our control except by the strictest safety regulations.

> Some things are up to us and some are not up to us. Our opinions are up to us, and our impulses, desires, aversions—in short, whatever is in our own doing… Remember that you are an actor in a play which is as the author wants it to be: short if he wants it to be short; long, if he wants it to be long…see that you act it with skill. Accept your role in life, small or large as the god determines.[4] (Epictetus 1995, 287, 292; "The Handbook" 1; 17)

This theatre metaphor by divine direction became influential by Shakespeare's time. In the strict meaning, almost everything is not up to us – the future itself, which may lead to fatalistic determinism, the view that events happen regardless of our actions in all cases.[5] However, the position is compatible with individual moral responsibility and soft or self-determinism, in which 'free' choices are caused by one's prior experiences, and can be consistent with conventional compatibilism. In this position, individual actions are largely caused by one's character and previous and early life choices. Further on, Epictetus urges one to change what one can and be indifferent to what cannot be changed – this admonition is intended to guide one toward tranquility or *ataraxi*a. In the post-Aristotelian period, some advocates of moderate emotions and less indulgent habits sought tranquility (Sorabji 2000, 18). *'Ataraxia'* is Greek for freedom from disturbance or suffering, like 'equanimity,' and *indifferentia* and *anaisthesia* are approximate meanings to Stoical indifference. He advocates resigned indifference and a quiet state of mind to accept all external affairs and life-threatening situations with grace. A standard objection is that it encourages acquiescence, rather than trying to change society and improve human lives. By contrast, Hegel emphasizes individual self-conscious freedom rather than the emotions.

> A man who lives in dispeace with himself and his lot commits much that is perverse and amiss, for no other reason than for the false opinion that he is wronged by others. No doubt, too, there is a great deal of chance in what befalls us. So long, however, that a man is conscious that he is free, his *harmony of soul* and *peace of mind* will not be destroyed by the disagreeables that befall him. ([1830] 1975, 211, italics added)

As the individual understands his own freedom, he will maintain peace of mind and prevent mental turmoil and disturbances. Hegel's wise comment is consistent with Seneca. "Between the throne and bending at another's knees there is but an hour's space. Know, then, that every lot in life is changeable, and whatever befalls any man can befall you also." (Seneca 2006, 259) Epictetus disagreed, yet there is truth in the latter, but *not* the former clause, because the differential between royalty and ultra-rich, and common citizens is huge and not easily surmounted. All stations in life are potentially or actually changeable, but human misfortunes and disease are globally very unequal, like apathy.

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[4] The pagan 'god' is translated differently in texts. Epictetus' work was written by a devoted student.

[5] White, in Fate and Freewill (2018), defended this unpopular but influential theory in depth from a theological perspective, though he changed his mind afterward.

One major tenet of Epictetus is that what upsets people is not things themselves but their judgments about things, including the opinions of others. Surprisingly, one's parents and children receive no greater sympathy than strangers and we should be indifferent toward their deaths. "If you kiss your child or your wife, say that you are kissing a human being; for when it dies, you will not be upset" (Epictetus 1995, 12) – but this demands too much. His comparison of a broken jug to the death of one's wife or child is glib advice and morally impermissible, except perhaps with unloved estranged family members. The overly broad generalization has egregious exceptions, including serious crimes and anti-social behavior. Epictetus and Seneca defend a no-fault position toward misfortunes, which leads to anxiety-free indifference toward death and evils. Educated citizens should not blame themselves, other people, or the gods, Epictetus argues. Although true for most natural evils, morality and law demonstrate that moral evils and accidents are and should be blamed on humans. Seneca and Epictetus admonish not to assume good fortune and be prepared for the worst. Pessimistic realism is the right attitude.

The Stoical maxim that nothing is either good or bad except our thinking toward it is oversimplified and criticized as shallow, too subjective and rather callous. For very minor issues, it is reasonable *prima facie,* but criminal and illegal acts, social justice issues and innumerable exceptions invalidate or weaken the theory. Some horrific events and things are evil or bad in themselves, an idea ingrained within collective conscience and international law. However, the position is arguably valid in ethical idealism, defined by purely subjective morality in which no moral judgments are true or false themselves, objectively. That is, human judgments evaluate misfortunes, and emotional reactions are controllable with attitudes of indifference. Epictetus approved of Socrates' calm indifference in the *Apology* when he says "let us be of good cheer (hope) about death." (Plato, 41A). Socrates expressed his courage and inner peace to fellow Athenians and became an excellent role model for Stoics. Although Socrates had good reasons for living, he appeared indifferent pending death. Today, those at the end of life might accept this attitude, but most would reject it with indifference or disdain.

Interest in Stoicism is universal, and is undergoing renewed popularity and respect in the west in psychology and among those who have suffered adversity. New translations for the public include Emperor Marcus Aurelius' book of *Meditations*, influenced by Epictetus, ironically. Born a slave, Epictetus was freed and became a renowned teacher whose philosophy was probably caused by his slavery. Nussbaum defends Seneca for respecting one's slaves as human beings with dignity despite their lowly station, but he did not practice the egalitarian cosmopolitanism that he advocated.

Stoical philosophy has contemporary practical applications. Cognitive therapies use similar ideas influenced from Albert Ellis's Rational-Emotive Behavior theory. Ellis was an important pioneer in cognitive behavioral therapy, who rejected Freud's views on emotions and psychoanalysis. Influenced from

Epictetus and other philosophers, Ellis advocated an internal question-answer thought process intended to shield individuals from hurtful emotions and self-sabotaging thoughts.[6] (Ellis and Harper 1968) From analytic philosophers, he utilized logical positive techniques for controlling negative emotional reactions to thought and recommends indifferent responses, rather than apathy. The method teaches individuals to repeat supportive statements to themselves in order to replace internal irrational judgments. For a tranquil mind, he encourages self-responsibility instead of blaming others for their responses to events. However, this can result in repressing expressions of negative emotions that cause latent turmoil and increased stress. Psychoanalysts contend that CBT is superficial by not eliminating the root causes of distress and its methodology is inadequate. Contrary to Stoicism, suppressing emotions like anger and sorrow can produce obsessive thinking and depression when internalized, not serene indifference. Habitually hiding emotions would create an Ostrich effect of psychic repression and merely the appearance of calmness. One goal of therapy is to overcome the negative apathy of clients (and indifferent counselors) toward their goals and obstacles.

Epictetus's thought enabled U.S. Vice-Admiral Stockdale to survive his captivity by the North Vietnamese during the war in 1965. During seven years as a prisoner of war (POW), he forced himself to attain an attitude of indifference toward severe adversity and his pathetic 'station in life' while faced with contempt from his captors. Because of this experience, he attributes Epictetus' ideas tosalvaging his peace of mind and enduring punishing conditions. One's reputation is out of one's control, he notes; others decide that, ultimately. "Make sure in your heart of heart in your inner self, that you treat your station in life with indifference."[7] (Stockdale 1995, 347-348) Nevertheless, these deeply held beliefs cannot fully explain Stockdale's strength of will and heroic perseverance against their hatred of Americans. This is also consistent with skeptic *Sextus Empiricus*, who reportedly said that one cannot hope for the pleasure of obtaining what one wants without the chance for anxiety whether one gets it, depression if one fails, pride if one succeeds, fear of losing it, and possibly the actual loss to achieve tranquil (*ataraxia*) indifference. This is a universal truth, except for the desires that are obtained with ease, and conversely, one should strive to lower desires and expectations to decrease anxiety, fears, and to maintain self-esteem. In his classic psychology, James defends this view by arguing that lowering one's pretensions (expectations) will give relief and "our self-feeling is in our power." (James 1950, 310) However, James argues against ancient Stoicism defined by history and place, and claims it is only possible as a habitual mood for narrow and unsympathetic characters. Thus, it works by exclusion to protect the self, and utilizes Freudian

[6] See also *Overcoming Destructive Beliefs, Feelings, and Behaviors* (2001).
[7] He received numerous honorary doctorates from universities. Stockdale was vice-presidential candidate in 1992.

sour grapes rationalizations, which demote and reject unobtainable things and misfortunes.

In general, indifference and apathy can develop into authentic feelings or interest with the proper stimulus or motivations. The specific reasons include, but are not limited to, higher self-esteem, monetary gain, avoidance of an evil, change in temperament, and any significant particular purpose. However, apathy remains the constant mental state without a social or personal change or motivation. Yet apathy *by itself* cannot cause or create feelings about the object or agent and has no intrinsic value. To say that nothing changes apathy asserts a given fact about its stable nature, a stubborn personality and/or total lack of interest. Plainly stated, sometimes nothing can penetrate pure apathy. The idea that apathy alone causes emotions or feelings directly is impossible and a dubious assertion. How can an emotion arise directly from adamant apathy or no feeling at all? Something cannot arise from nothing. However, being apathetic, the desire to sympathize, and being actively involved at the same time could create inner tension or cognitive dissonance. If agents are divided between apathy and engaging active interest, their minds become clouded with confusion and ambivalence. Clearly, indifference toward **X** does not imply one should be indifferent, nor does indifference imply one should feel sympathy, depending on **X**. If agents are apathetic toward giving charitable gifts, it does not necessarily follow that they ought not be apathetic, and this is morally permissible. Moreover, it does not follow they necessarily should morally feel or express desire for donating to charities, as there are excellent reasons for giving, wrong reasons and unethical instances, depending on the organization. Their indifferent or apathetic attitude becomes inadvertently a virtue when it prevents donating money to mismanaged or wasteful charities, regardless of whether agents have this prior information. The valid disjunctive syllogism demonstrates it.

X v Y X represents agent's interest in charitable giving.

__~__ Y represents agent's apathy in charitable giving.

Y Agent is not interested in charitable giving.

Therefore the agent has apathy to charitable giving.

In a cost-benefit analysis, Neumann shows that apathy can be a beneficial factor, and not always a 'Bad Thing' when defended from a logic-mathematical point of view. These ethical decisions are applied to mathematical analysis, yet these significations are imprecise and subjective; as Aristotle said, ethics is not subject to precision. If agents are indifferent or apathetic toward the goal, they experience no disappointment when it is not achieved and no time is wasted[8] (Neumann1990, 196). If I work toward a clean environment with much effort, I will be happier, but if I fail, my effort will cause me anguish, Neumann argues.

[8] [9] The majority of the public behaves and feels indifferent toward the air quality they breathe.

Moreover, "an avidly desired and pursued goal is always more valued before than after its attainment, and that setting a low initial value on a goal may actually increase its final value."[9] (1990, 196-198)

Overall, Neumann's detailed analysis relies heavily on mathematical probabilities that are inappropriate in theory and practice, but provides needed support for some kinds of apathy and philosophy of value. This is partly confirmed by surveys that show attaining one's desired goal creates happiness for a while, but afterward it is taken for granted and loses its value, and the agents' happiness decreases beyond the hedonic treadmill. Generally, satisfaction and happiness rise and wane over time, and apathy and indifference become acceptable positive options. If the desire or need is achieved, it is commendable, and if not, then it will not disappoint and disrupt peace of mind. Neumann is too sanguine because apathy can be a subjectively difficult attitude to maintain, it provides no solace, and overlooks those agents who are incapable of apathy toward something. Some agents prefer being apathetic or indifferent toward X, but their interest and passion cannot change or be easily overcome.

Indifference is opposite of love and empathy or compassion relative to individuals or circumstances, yet all emotions can transform into apathy. As doxastic states, sympathy is a caring appreciative feeling, and empathy engages and connects with the Other to assuage their suffering or misfortune. The established view is that empathy is an intuitive skill, personality trait and admirable moral virtue. In general, empathy *is – and should be* transferable, but in practice it requires a close emotional connection to the Other, a 'fellow-feeling,' as Mill and Smith said, and tuning-in sensitivities. The wide gap between ethical theory and reality is significant with empathy and compassion. Agents live with comfortable indifference until a crisis occurs, then may rise to the occasion until the urgency is over and return to indifference or apathy, like a bell curve. Sincerity and indifference are mutually exclusive in that agents cannot be sincere and indifferent toward X simultaneously – agents are truly indifferent but it lacks any meaning and significance to them. Like most agents, Green's indifference to X is no concern to her and she is unbothered and blasé toward this attitude.

The pragmatic value of empathy is open to deeper questions. The sincere desire to have empathy is distinctly different from its expression and it cannot be regulated or forced. It is a verifiable rationalist's intuition, and its veracity and capability for helping others is doubtful, in fact. The major challenge is the inability to understand the Other's state of mind or situation in any depth because the individuals' suffering can be unrelatable and misunderstood. Similarly, it is equally difficult to understand another's apathy or indifference, or know whether their apathy is warranted, justifiable, or morally wrong in some cases. The epistemic issue is whether it is truly possible to understand the Others' feelings and the meanings of these feelings to them. Knowledge of other minds is a long

controversy, and I totally agree with the skeptics who question the given assumptions of deeply-held understanding. True comprehension of another mind is fundamental – knowing what the object or experience *means* to them and its direct consequences in their lives. Pragmatically, one ought not assume that superficial semantics of speech is adequate and includes the complete meaning. The expression 'I don't care' has many ambiguous meanings and its inferences may be useful knowledge. For this reason, knowledge of their speech or prose may provide only a general understanding or idea of a subjective experience. Thus, attempts to empathize often miss the goal, and are based on wishful thinking, hearsay, hope and self-pride, and may include immediate family members. In general, empathy is superior to apathy, but empathetic transference ought not be misdirected toward undeserving or unethical agents.

Furthermore, overrating one's abilities, such as empathy, that enhances the agent's self-esteem, is a ubiquitous personality trait. The Dunning-Kruger Effect (Kruger 1999) in psychology shows that individuals over-estimate their modicum of knowledge and skills consistently, and this has been replicated multiple times. Observations consistently show that individuals do not recognize their incompetence or lack of knowledge, and thus have inflated self-esteem – particularly professionals and college students. Individuals tend to overestimate their sensitivity and honesty, and therefore, those who practice empathy probably over-value and embellish their abilities. Counselors might only weakly help or understand their clients. Those who are worlds apart and speak a less known language ought not expect genuine empathy among distant foreigners.[10] Differing languages may be a significant barrier for mutual understanding regardless of translations. Agents assume that others are like them, but are mistaken because the facts reveal different motives and abilities, etc. These important differences suggest empathy is less common with situations and individuals who are unique or a tiny fraction of the population, and indifference prevails (Coplan 2011, 56). [11]

It is very possible that the strength and effectiveness of empathy cannot fulfil expectations, and thus the broad generalizations that validate empathy are unrealistic. Sympathy is more prevalent than empathy. Self-empathy toward one's own troubled past is surely challenging and has potential to be more therapeutic and beneficial than indifference. Despite these faults, empathy and sympathy are excellent virtues, expressed at the right time and in the right situations appropriately, rather than indifference.

[10] 'Worlds apart' refers to geographical and/or psychological-social experiences. Social class, age and life experiences change everything.

[11] Coplan refers to 'pseudo-empathy'. Title refers to a classic American television show "To Tell The Truth".

Final Remarks

Another kind of indifference is pure descriptive ethics, which is overlooked in philosophy scholarship because it is relevant to non-moral decisions, and deserves a lengthy study of consumer choices. I have argued that indifference is necessary to human existence and lived experiences once it is understood as a neutral mid-point of consciousness. This mental state shifts between strong apathy and emotive states, and may be transient or permanent, and essentially is characterized as what it is not – feelings, preferences, and passions. It is a covert value when it shields the self from poor choices and beliefs that disappoint. Indifference and apathy are useful but misunderstood attitudes in practical and theoretical ethics in which no moral blame should be necessarily imputed. The relativity of this attitude is highly significant, as it depends on whether the object may determine moral culpability or responsibility – whether one is apathetic toward a tragedy or ordinary problems. Generally, public apathy transcends one's control and ideally should not disturb. The Stoical belief in freedom from emotions protects against reactions to evils and misfortunes – however, it is objectionable in theory and a struggle in practice. Empathy is a fine virtue when it replaces indifference, but it is often difficult to achieve, very transient, and/or misdirected toward agents. For all these reasons, apathy and/or indifference is not in itself a bad thing, and in many ways is morally permissible and praise-worthy.

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