

The Indolent Sympathy: An Explanation from Haidt's Perspective

La simpatía indolente: una explicación desde la perspectiva de Haidt

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Abstract

In this paper, I use Jonathan Haidt's theory to explore an affective disposition that I call "indolent sympathy". I argue that this disposition prevents a considerable group of human beings from showing solidarity with the millions of people who find themselves in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty. To demonstrate this, I will first present two dissimilar cases that show the type of affective disposition that I wish to submit to the reader's consideration. Secondly, I will discuss the main characteristics of this affective disposition. Thirdly, I will discuss the social intuitionist model, highlighting the aspects that will help me to account for indolent sympathy. Finally, I will read indolent sympathy in the light of Haidt's theory and explain one of its most important features: brutality.

Keywords: affective disposition, social intuitionism, solidarity, poverty, brutality.

Resumen

En este trabajo me valgo de la teoría de Jonathan Haidt para explorar una disposición afectiva a la que llamo "simpatía indolente". Argumento que esta disposición impide que un grupo considerable de seres humanos se solidarice con los millones de personas que se encuentran en condición de pobreza o extrema pobreza. Para demostrarlo, presentaré primero dos casos disímiles que muestran el tipo de disposición afectiva que deseo someter a consideración del lector. En segundo lugar, discutiré las principales características de esta disposición afectiva. En tercer lugar, expondré el modelo



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intuicionista social, destacando los aspectos que me ayudarán a dar cuenta de la simpatía indolente. Por último, leeré la simpatía indolente a la luz de la teoría de Haidt y explicaré una de sus características más importantes: la brutalidad.

Palabras clave: disposición afectiva, intuicionismo social, solidaridad, pobreza, brutalidad.

1. Introduction

There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul
than the way in which it treats its children.

Nelson Mandela

Case 1: It is a normal day and you head out, as usual, to go about your daily business, starting with breakfast in the cafeteria. On your way there, you pass a homeless child crouched on the ground, inert. A little later, you are enjoying your breakfast when the same child appears, begging. You barely glance at him and, making sure your attitude is forceful, ask him to leave. The child leaves.

This is a typical case in Latin America and the Caribbean, as the data shows. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021), the number of Latin Americans living in poverty in 2020 amounted to 209 million people (33.7% of the population), 22 million more than the previous year. Of this total, 78 million live in extreme poverty or indigence (12.5% of the region's inhabitants), 8 million more than in 2019 and 16 million more than in 2002. The World Food Programme (WFP) estimated a 269% increase in the number of people facing severe food insecurity by 2020, meaning that 16 million people did not know by 2020 where their food would come from in the coming months, up from 4.3 million in 2019. To paraphrase Haidt and Kesebir's (2010) suggestive question in the introduction to "Morality": if a 19th-century Latin American defender of the rights of her community could travel to the present and see how her beloved continent has fared, what would she think of its progress? From the perspective of this defender of the rights of her people, allow me, dear reader, to draw your attention to something obvious: it is not at all unlikely today (that is, in the reader's "today") for us to find a child sleeping on the ground and asking for the compassion of some citizen in some city in Latin America and the Caribbean, the most unequal region in the world (Berkhout, Galasso, Lawson, Morales,

Taneja & Vasquez 2021, 27; Oxfam 2020).¹ This means that in the current century, millions of people have experienced something like case 1. Indeed, I have experienced firsthand the situation of the citizen in case 1 more than once in various Latin American cities. Maybe the reader has too.²

Case 2: It is a normal day at the amusement park when, suddenly, Garavito discovers a child who is looking around as if in search of something he has lost. To gain the confused child's trust, Garavito offers him a piece of candy and asks him what has happened. The child, on the verge of tears, replies that he can't find his mother. Garavito tells him that he knows where she is and that he is going to take him to her. The child is overjoyed. Happy with the gift, he takes the stranger's hand and accompanies him. Once he has the child in his den, Garavito abuses him, maybe even kills and dismembers him, and hides his remains.

Case 2 is part of the chronicle of the biggest serial killer of children in what we know of human history: Luis Alfredo Garavito Cubillos, a native of Génova, Quindío, Colombia. It is estimated that he murdered nearly 200 children over a period of several years. His victims were children of the lower classes, whom he lured by trickery out of crowded urban neighborhoods into isolated areas. Garavito received an initial sentence of 1853 years and 9 days. In the end, however, his sentence was commuted to 40 years, because this was the highest sentence the Colombian penal system allowed at the time. In addition, he received a reduction of 24 years for revealing the whereabouts of some of the bodies. Then he received further reductions for accumulated study hours and good behaviour. On July 6, 2021, life imprisonment for murderers and sexual abusers of children in Colombia was approved; this will not apply to Garavito because the laws in Colombia are not retroactive.³ If released, he would be extradited to Ecuador, where he has admitted to committing the same type of crime, as well as in Venezuela.

Different as these two cases may seem, we can find considerable similarities between them. Both cases involve kids. In both cases, the child suffers deeply, and the citizen is in a position to understand the child's suffering and to act accordingly. Even taking into account that

¹ Concerning inequality, the data presented by Forbes in the list it published on May 17, 2021, provides context for its report that in Latin America and the Caribbean there are a total of 107 billionaires –31 more than in 2020– with a combined net worth of \$480 billion, \$196 billion more than in 2020. In other words, the wealth of billionaires in Latin America and the Caribbean has grown by more than 40% during the pandemic.

² In general, when I find myself in this sort of situation, I give food to the children; I am well aware that this is no solution to the problem that afflicts them. In each case, I do my best to allow my emotions to come to the fore consciously because I don't want to forget that there are homeless children suffering and at a high risk of dying of starvation. This catastrophe is beyond my capabilities, but I seek to integrate the suffering of these children in my reflection in order to invite other people to be aware of it (on the relevance of sharing personal experiences to promote respect, and ascribing rationality to others and willingness to interact with someone who thinks differently on political and moral issues, see Kubin, Puryearb, Scheinc and Grayb 2021).

³ For my position on life imprisonment, see Tovar 2011.

some citizens may have been brought up to understand such suffering differently, they can still *learn* to forward the protection of the suffering child. In both cases, the citizen acts in a non-prosocial manner towards a defenseless, vulnerable and helpless being who is asking for compassion.

The purpose of this essay is to show that indolent sympathy is an affective disposition to experience non-prosocial intuitions in the face of a suffering helpless person. As such, it is the affective disposition in which the citizens in cases 1 and 2 find themselves.

2. Indolent sympathy

A simple way to understand what we are talking about here is the following: indolent sympathy is what disposes us to experience non-prosocial affections when faced with a homeless child. If in this case you feel compassion, then you are not an indolent sympathizer. In that sense, a first characterization can be given in negative terms: indolent sympathy occurs when we remain unmoved, despite being in a position to understand the suffering experienced by a person who is vulnerable (easily hurt or harmed physically, mentally, or emotionally), defenseless (lacking protection) and helpless (abandoned).⁴ These are all properties that are satisfied, to some degree, by the intentional object (on “intentional object”, see Deonna and Teroni 2012, 3; Deonna 2010) of the one who is moved. Thus, it is right to be moved by people who conform to these traits. To be moved, therefore, means to move affectively to the care, warmth, protection of persons who fulfill these properties. When I say “to move affectively” I mean that there is an *attitude* which inclines an individual to care for or to protect another person, to treat this person with warmth, and so on.

Now, indolent sympathy is not reduced to the inability to be moved by a situation that requires it. Indolent sympathy is an affective disposition (on this concept, see Deonna and Teroni 2012, 8), not a moral emotion.⁵ It disposes us to experience non-prosocial affections in situations in which we are faced with vulnerable people suffering. Thus, it refers to a conditional relationship: if you experience these affections in these specific situations, then you are an indolent sympathiser. From another perspective, this affective disposition could be thought of as a cluster of non-prosocial affections linked by an inclusive disjunction, affections that are triggered if the intentional object is vulnerable people suffering. In this regard it is

⁴ One might think that those who are not moved by the helpless who beg for mercy have developed a defense mechanism in the face of a social world whose complex problems overwhelm their empathic capacity. The operation of such a mechanism would be reduced to eliminating the foreign or unknown element, in order to maintain the integrity of the individual and his/her identity within the group. In this respect, this “defense mechanism” could be compared to what Laura Quintana calls “immune affects”. It could be understood metaphorically in symbiotic, not military terms (Quintana 2021, 121). That is, it could be understood as a mechanism whose defensive action implies entering into a regulated relationship with that from which it is defending itself. This does not eliminate the foreign, but rather regulates the limit between what is allowed and what is not.

⁵ For an analysis of moral emotions, see Haidt 2003.

important to bear in mind that “Affective dispositions are clearly intentional phenomena. Their intentionality will be a function of the intentionality of the emotions that manifest them, and their objects will differ depending on the type of affective disposition considered” (Deonna and Teroni 2012, 9). This means that indolent sympathy’s intentionality will be determined by the non-prosocial emotions experienced by the individual in the face of a suffering helpless being. Once internalized, indolent sympathy becomes timeless and we can experience it at any time, until the end of our lives, unless we retrain ourselves to re-acquire the capacity to be correctly moved (on the conditions for the correctness of emotions, see Deonna and Teroni 2012, 6, 77; Teroni 2007).

In Latin America, not only are helpless children dying: as they walk in rags and covered in lacerations to their graves, they suffer scorn and humiliation. Or worse, they suffer beatings and sexual abuse (the forced recruitment of children by illegal armed groups in countries such as Colombia, for example, remains to be studied). Indolent sympathy is one of the affective dispositions that allows this horror to reign supreme.⁶

One of the aspects that make it very difficult to account for indolent sympathy is that it disposes us to feel affections whose phenomenological experience (on “phenomenological experience”, see Deonna and Teroni 2012, 86) and physiological effects can be almost imperceptible in those who experience them. And this is reflected in our behavior, for we do nothing to change that which, more or less, produces “nothing” in us. Haidt’s conception of moral intuition allows me to overcome this drawback. In what follows I will highlight some aspects of Haidt’s theory that will allow me to interpret cases 1 and 2 in the light of indolent sympathy.

3. Social intuitionist model

The central thesis of the social intuitionist model is that moral judgement is caused by rapid gut feelings and is followed (when required) by slow, *ex post facto* moral reasoning. Haidt defines moral judgments as affective evaluations (good vs. bad) of a person’s actions or character, made with respect to a set of virtues posited as obligatory by a culture or subculture (Haidt 2001, 817). This definition takes into account the fact that in any society, people, in their everyday behaviour, talk about and evaluate other people’s actions, and these evaluations generally have consequences for future interactions.

Haidt (2001) proposes that moral judgment should be studied as an interpersonal process. In this case, reasoning plays a relevant role, but it occurs after the judgment has been made

⁶ “Every year around 10 million children die before their fifth birthday. Most of these children live in developing countries and die because of a disease or combination of diseases that can be prevented by existing, low-cost methods. Child mortality is closely linked to poverty; as a result, progress in the survival of babies and children has been slower for people in poor countries and for the poorest people in countries which have more resources” (ECLAC and UNICEF, 2011, 5. My translation).



and serves to influence the intuitions (and thus the judgments) of others. According to the social intuitionist model, a person has a quick feeling of disgust and this allows him/her to intuitively know that something is wrong (link 1). Next, if asked to justify his/her judgment, the person begins to build the case, in the manner of a lawyer; that is, he/she gives the 'supposed' (maybe false) reasons that led him/her to evaluate the perceived event negatively or positively (link 2). In addition, there is always the possibility of persuading others to make the same assessment as us (link 3). Likewise, the people we are surrounded by throughout our lives persuade us to evaluate events in the way they do (link 4). Haidt's social intuitionist model can be summed up in the form of the following six links or processes:

1. Link of the intuitive judgment: the perceived event provokes intuitions in the evaluator, intuitions which cause the moral judgment; according to Haidt, this judgment appears in consciousness automatically and effortlessly as a result of moral intuitions.
2. Link of *post hoc* reasoning: afterwards, and depending on the situation, the agent performs *post hoc* reasoning to seek arguments in favor of the judgment he/she has made. This moral reasoning requires an effort on the part of the agent and is subsequent to the appearance of the moral judgment.
3. Link of reasoned persuasion: what the model proposes is that we use our moral reasoning (made in 2) to persuade others to evaluate the situation in the way we do. In this case, reasoned persuasion is a means of producing affectively charged intuitions in the listener. In other words, through verbal reasoning, we produce affective responses in others that lead them to express the same moral judgement as we do. Haidt argues, however, that reasoned persuasion does not aim at convincing the other by using logically convincing arguments. Rather, it aims at manipulating the intuitions of the listener in order for him/her to express the same judgment as the speaker. In this respect, Haidt and his colleagues have made significant progress in designing and thinking about experiments in which they manipulate people's moral judgement by manipulating their intuitions (Schnall, Haidt, Clore & Jordan 2008; Haidt & Bjorklund 2008; Haidt 2007; Wheatley & Haidt 2005; Haidt & Joseph 2007; Haidt 2001).
4. Link of social persuasion: the model proposes that the moral judgment made by friends, acquaintances, relatives, etcetera, influences the judgment of the individual, even if reasoned persuasion has not been used. This is because on many occasions our judgments are formed on the basis of the judgment of others. In this case, we perceive the event and make the same judgment as those close to us. Finally, the model includes two links in which space is made available for the rationalist proposal.



5. Link of reasoned judgment: sometimes people build their judgment on logical reasoning, leaving aside their initial intuition. However, such cases are not common, Haidt argues, and occur mainly when the initial intuition is weak and the processing capacity is high.
6. Link of private reflection: in cases where we are faced with moral dilemmas—that is, cases where we have two or more conflicting intuitions about the same event—we can choose the strongest intuition or use reasoning to get out of the predicament. In either case, we will be forced to engage in an internal dialogue.

According to Haidt, the rationalist model focuses on links 5 and 6 and the social intuitionist model focuses on links 1 to 4, although he accepts that, for the latter, there are cases in which links 5 and 6 are required (Haidt 2001, 819).

To support his proposal, Haidt uses fictional stories designed to produce disgust, without any harm or violation of rights. This is the case with the story of two siblings having sex, which is designed to circumvent all the possible reasons a person would have for rejecting incest.

According to Haidt (2001), in the Julie and Mark sibling experiment, most people confronted with the story immediately say that it is wrong for siblings to have a sexual relationship. But when they look for reasons to justify their judgment, they do not find any valid ones. For example, they cite the danger of pregnancy, even though the story avoids this possibility, or they point to the siblings' risk of psychological harm, even though the story also rules out this possibility. For this reason, the people questioned end up saying "I don't know, I can't explain it, I only know that it is wrong" (Haidt 2001, 814). In this case, people find themselves morally dumbfounded, because they cannot find reasons to justify their evaluation, yet they still maintain their initial judgment. The challenge for the model that claims to account for the psychological architecture of moral judgment is, then, to explain how people judge that something is wrong without knowing why (Haidt 2001, 814). This challenge cannot be met by rationalist models (links 5 and 6) such as Kohlberg's (1969; 1971; 1983), but by the social intuitionist model that the author proposes (links 1 to 4).

The moral judgments that people make in cases like that of the siblings Mark and Julie appear in consciousness automatically and effortlessly as a result of moral intuitions. It is important to bear in mind that for Haidt the contrast between intuition and reasoning is not the same as that between emotion and cognition, since intuition, reasoning and emotions are all forms of cognition. Intuition and reasoning, Haidt argues, are two types of cognition whose difference lies mainly in the priority and speed with which each process is carried out. Intuitive processes are fast, effortless, automatic, and not accessible to consciousness. In contrast, reasoning processes are slow, require some effort and involve some steps that are accessible to consciousness.

Accordingly, moral intuition can be defined as the sudden appearance in consciousness of a moral judgement which includes an affective valence (good-bad, pleasant-unpleasant), without any awareness on the person's part of having made a search, weighed the evidence or inferred a conclusion (Haidt and Bjorklund 2008, 188; Haidt 2001, 818).

In this sense, Haidt follows the proposal of the Scottish philosophers (Hume 1739; 1751; Hutcheson 1725; 1728; Shaftesbury 1737; and Smith 1759), for whom the mere perception of a social event produces approval or disapproval in the individual. In this regard, Haidt and his colleagues have shown, by means of different experiments (Schnall, Haidt, Clore, & Jordan 2008; Wheatley & Haidt 2005; Haidt, Koller & Dias 1993), that emotions such as disgust are sufficient for the individual to make a negatively valenced moral judgment. For example, regarding the experiment he published with Wheatley in 2005⁷, Haidt says: "This study was designed to directly manipulate the intuitive judgment link (Link 1), and it demonstrates that artificially increasing the strength of a gut feeling increases the strength of the resulting moral judgment" (2001, 825).⁸ In contrast to what Turiel proposes, the social intuitionist model includes cases where people morally disapprove of an action even if no one is being harmed or even if no rights have been violated.

Based on what has been explained here, I will go on to analyze cases 1 and 2 presented in the introduction in order to illuminate the affective disposition I call indolent sympathy.

4. Indolent sympathy and moral intuitions

Based on the above, let us take up cases 1 and 2. Let us assume that the citizen in case 1 has spent his childhood surrounded by homeless children and that his community never emotionally educated him to experience any kind of prosocial emotion towards these children. Regarding case 2, we will assume that the citizen is a psychopath, which means that his prosocial emotions are very weak (Hare 2003; Cleckley 1976, Habel, Kühn, Salloum, Devos & Schneider 2002).

One of the similarities between cases 1 and 2 is that citizens have very subtle affective experiences. Moreover, it is commonly said that psychopaths feel nothing, no remorse, no guilt, no shame for their transgressions. As Haidt would say, psychopaths reason but don't feel (Haidt 2012, 72). What the studies show is that they have poor emotional experiences. They do feel moral emotions, but in a very subtle way (Habel, Kühn, Salloum, Devos & Schneider

⁷ Some considerations of mine regarding Wheatley and Haidt's (2005) experiment can be found in Tovar, 2010.

⁸ In the first part of his book *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, 2012, Haidt summarizes his research on the causal role of intuitions in the production of moral judgement.

2002; Hare 2003; Glenn, Iyer, Graham, Koleva & Haidt 2009, 394). Similar cases can be found in neurotypicals; for example, the affective experience that a citizen has when passing by a homeless child can become very subtle, almost imperceptible.⁹

As previously mentioned, I call the cluster of non-prosocial affective experiences felt towards suffering helpless people indolent sympathy. In other words, indolent sympathy is the affective disposition to have some of these affective experiences of non-prosocial affections in front of vulnerable people suffering. The point to be added now is that the phenomenological experience and physiological changes can become very subtle in both the case 1 (neurotypicals) and case 2 (psychopaths) citizens. In that sense, indolent sympathy is a disposition that allows for affective experiences of varying degrees of intensity. I will call the lowest intensity "intuition" and the highest intensity "emotion". This distinction is taken from Jonathan Haidt's theory, as will be explained below.

It has been stated above that reasoning, intuition and emotion are all types of cognition and the difference between the first two has been traced. About the last two Haidt says:

Moral emotions are one type of moral intuition, but most moral intuitions are more subtle; they don't rise to the level of emotions. The next time you read a newspaper or drive a car, notice the many tiny flashes of condemnation that flit through your consciousness. Is each such flash an emotion? [...] Intuition is the best word to describe the dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we all make every day. Only a few of these intuitions come to us embedded in full-blown emotions (2012, 53).

According to Haidt, moral affections are experienced in different degrees of intensity. He calls those affective experiences that are manifested with high intensity "emotions" and those that are experienced with low intensity "intuitions". Taking into account this distinction, the intuitions/emotions that a person experiences before a morally evaluable event include anger, guilt, compassion, shame, disgust, contempt, gratitude, schadenfreude, sadness, fear, and so on (Haidt 2003, 854). Some of these moral intuitions/emotions may be experienced by a citizen in the presence of a vulnerable person who is suffering.

With these elements we can move on to the most salient characteristic of indolent sympathy: Indolent sympathy is an affective disposition that leads the individual to move to brutality. To be moved to brutality is to judge clumsily, rudely, or cruelly the suffering of a vulnerable, defenseless and helpless being. The factor indicating *brutality* in cases 1 and 2 is given by the conditions of vulnerability, defenselessness and helplessness of the person who is

⁹ The metaphor of the defense mechanism in military terms would indicate that the system defends itself by not feeling anything for the homeless child. With the metaphor of symbiosis (Quintana 2021, 121), we can think that the system defends itself by feeling for the child whatever it is appropriate to feel according to the contextual, psychosocial and historical conditions of the citizen. Therefore, this affective disposition can be transformed if the conditions of the environment are transformed.

suffering and asking for help. In both cases 1 and 2 there is a homeless child asking for help. According to the data, homeless children have a high probability of dying of starvation in Latin America (CEPAL & UNICEF 2011; FAO, PAHO, WFP & UNICEF 2021). In case 1, the homeless child asking the citizen for help is already walking towards death, which is unconscionably brutal. While death by starvation is slow and painful, it is even more brutal when a vulnerable child dies under torture, as in case 2.

Indolent sympathy is experienced in different degrees of intensity. In the case of brutality, we will say that this intensity is measured from the perspective of the evaluator and has three levels. A brutal act can be clumsy, rude or cruel. Thus, the intensity of brutality (whether the act is considered clumsy, rude or cruel) is measured in relation to the act performed by the citizen in each case. In that sense, we might suggest that case 1 exemplifies a rude act and case 2 a cruel one. In both cases the citizen has moved to brutality. Note that the citizen in case 1 has moved to brutality even though he appears not to have violated any rights or done any harm. I will suggest a working hypothesis to explain this phenomenon using Haidt's theory.

His work with colleagues on disgust (Haidt, McCauley & Rozin 1994; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley 1993; Haidt, Rozin, McCauley & Imada 1997; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley 2008) allowed Haidt to design a model, as mentioned above, that includes cases in which people morally disapprove of an action even if no one is being harmed or even if no rights have been violated. This is, for example, the case of the man who masturbates with the chicken before preparing it (Haidt, Koller and Dias 1993) or that of the brothers Mark and Julie (Haidt 2001). Haidt argues that there are cases of disgust that lead us to make a moral judgment without any harm or violation of rights.

In Latin America we would not normally consider case 1 as violating any rights or causing harm to anyone. Even so, the citizenry might well evaluate the act of the citizen in case 1 as morally reprehensible. This is a working hypothesis; the experiment remains to be performed in order to test it. If this hypothesis were true, case 1 would serve to show that indolent sympathy includes acts of brutality in which the citizenry will consider that no harm is done and no one's rights are violated, as Haidt (2001) states.

According to what has been established so far, I will now present cases 1 and 2 through the social intuitionist model (links 1 to 4). Through link 4, in both cases 1 and 2 the citizen will learn to treat homeless children in a particular way: the way that his community teaches him. In both cases, the citizen has grown up in a society with a high level of inequality, in which he has been taught to see homeless people, for example, as dangerous, as vandals and thus develop non-prosocial moral intuitions towards them. Therefore, the citizen has learned to numb the moral intuitions that would motivate him to move towards care, warmth, protection, shelter, in the face of vulnerable, defenseless and helpless people.

Through link 3, the individual will be able to persuade the intuitions of those around him in order to get them to judge the homeless in the same way as he does. By link 2, if the

citizen is confronted with a situation in which he is asked to justify his judgement towards the underprivileged, he will present a *post hoc* justification (which may be false) of the moral intuition experienced, even if it is non-prosocial.

Through the moral education he receives from his community, the citizen in case 1 acquires an affective disposition that leads him to judge the underprivileged in a non-prosocial way. In other words, through link 4, the citizen has acquired moral intuitions that guide him in the face of events such as that of case 1 in a clumsy, rude, or even cruel way (link 1).

With respect to case 2, I have invited the reader to assume that the citizen is a psychopath. For the following analysis it should be noted that most of the studies have been applied to criminal psychopaths; however, most psychopaths are not criminals (Benning, Venables & Hall 2018). Many are pastors, priests, advertisers, politicians, CEOs, military personnel, etcetera, in other words, citizens we come across in our social environment. This will depend on the training they receive in their social environment during their development (Link 4). In this case, link 4 indicates that we must be very careful about how we behave when, for example, our child is a psychopath. If we are not careful, we will raise human beings like Luis Alfredo Garavito Cubillos. Another important issue to keep in mind is that not all serial killers are psychopaths (Skeem, & Cooke 2010); that is, we can also form non-psychopathic Garavitos.

One of the characteristics of psychopaths is their persuasive ability, as they are used to persuading others through the manipulation of their emotions (Ten Brinke et al. 2017). This means that they are prolific in link 3. This is because—in turn—they are prolific in creating justifications for their actions; that is, they are prolific in link 2 (Shao & Lee 2017; Cooper & Yuille 2007); I say prolific and not expert because they do it frequently, but not all of them do it skillfully enough. For example, those in prison do it badly (Gao and Raine 2010).

Morality, says Haidt (2003, 852), is “like the temple on the hill of human nature: It is our most sacred attribute, a trait that is often said to separate us from other animals and bring us closer to God”. Indolent sympathy is a moral intuition that distances us from that temple. If morality for Haidt leads us to the summit, indolent sympathy, then, leads us to the lowest depths. Sometimes it leads us to those depths in a subtle way—the citizen in case 1 who acts rudely—, and sometimes it leads us ruthlessly—the citizen in case 2 who acts cruelly—.

5. Conclusion

The next time you see a ragged child on the street begging, notice the many tiny flashes of condemnation that flit through your consciousness. Is each such flash an emotion? Intuition is the best word to describe the dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we all make whenever we see out of the corner of our eye the suffering of a vulnerable, defenseless and helpless citizen every day. Only a few of these intuitions come to us embedded in full-blown emotions.



This paraphrase taken from Haidt (2012, 53) can be used to synthesize the feeling that this essay seeks to elicit in the reader. I call this systematic connection indolent sympathy, where brutality reigns (even unconsciously). This affective disposition connects us more broadly with humanity than empathy does, as empathy is restricted to neurotypicals, non-psychopaths (Mullins-Nelson, Salekin & Leistico 2006; Hare 1991; 2003; Glenn, Iyer, Graham, Koleva, & Haidt 2009, 394). Therefore, the brutality suffered by vulnerable people in countries with high levels of inequality is motivated by an emotional disposition that is more inclusive than empathy. Indolent sympathy includes psychopaths and neurotypicals—non-psychopaths. It includes neurotypicals who act daily like the citizen in case 1 and people who act like the citizen in case 2. In this regard, it is important to mention that in countries such as Colombia there have been “dismemberment schools” or “schools of death” where torture and dismemberment techniques are taught (CNMH 2013, 24, 56; CNMH 2014, 157; CNMH, 2015, 209, 268, 280-285; CNMH 2016, 20-21, 177, 249, 274; CNMH 2017, 518; CNMH 2018, 89).

It is important to say that the solution to the situation of the destitute child by no means rests solely with the citizen in case 1 (unless he has the possibility to provide the child with food, housing, education and love). To solve these kinds of problems caused by social inequality, we need to move *en masse* towards the protection of the underprivileged and this is a problem that Haidt can no longer answer and, of course, neither can I in this article. Simply put, indolent sympathy is imparted in our communities. If we want to transform it, it will require a social agreement that promotes a moral education [political and religious] which emphasizes the importance of the welfare of other human beings, a moral education that reaches the entire population without any distinction of class, ethnicity, or gender.¹⁰ In regions with high levels of inequality such as Latin America, indolent sympathy grows like a weed. This means, to put it bluntly, that we will have indolent sympathy for a while.

Psychopaths show abnormalities in empathy and prosocial emotions. Studies also show that psychopaths are impaired in their moral judgments, compared to neurotypicals (Tassy, et al. 2013; Koenigs, Kruepke, Zeier, & Newman 2012; Young, Koenigs, Kruepke, Newman 2012; Blair 1995; 1997). Therefore, indolent sympathy could be the affective disposition that allows psychopaths to experience intuitions in the face of suffering vulnerable people; intuitions that trigger their impaired moral judgments.

This reflection has in no way been about the affective valence of indolent sympathy. It is not being said, for example, that indolent sympathy has a negative valence. Remember that it is not an emotion (on negative emotions see Giacomo, Valentini & Dellantonio, 2021 cited by Graham, Haidt & Rimm-Kaufman 2008, 282). I am proposing to open the spectrum to

¹⁰ For a proposal on moral education from advances in social psychology, as well as the complexities involved in this endeavor, see Graham, Haidt and Rimm-Kaufman 2008.

a kind of affective disposition that guides non-prosocial human behavior, including that of neurotypicals and psychopaths, towards people in conditions of vulnerability who are suffering.

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