

Open Your Class with This Tomorrow
Against Empathy: The Case Against Rational Compassion

Morality and Empathy

Paul Bloom argues that morality and empathy are not necessarily linked, although they are often presented and consistently linked with one another. Bloom provides examples in his book *Against Empathy* of individuals acting morally but without empathy. For example, if you are walking along a trail and see a child drowning in a pond, you will likely try to save the child, but you do not feel what the child feels, your empathy does not cause your action. Bloom argues that empathy may create a negative outcome in which people think they are doing something good for a person, but the action more likely provides an adverse outcome for a larger group. This activity intends to combine these thoughts with the ideas morality as proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg.

Directions: Read the scenarios below, first determine which stage and level of Kohlberg's theory of moral development the individual is acting and then determine if their empathy caused the action and if the impact was positive, negative or neutral.

Situation	Kohlberg Level and Stage of Morality with explanation	First, determine if there is empathy. Second, does this decision have the optimal outcome? Explain.
<p>Sheri Summers has a rare and fatal disease and is waiting on a list for treatment to save her life. She is 8-years old, has an older brother and a pet hamster. Sheri loves Disney films and wears her hair in ringlet pigtails. She is trying to smile through her illness but is on a long list of patients who are also waiting for the treatment, she may not survive the wait. You have the opportunity and decide to move her up the waiting list because you feel that her life is more important than those ahead of her on the list.</p>	<p>Postconventional Level</p> <p>Social Order Stage: You have decided for yourself to challenge the typical ranking on the waitlist because of your belief that her life is more valuable than others. This is critical self-evaluation of the law.</p>	<p>This situation does not have empathy because while we may feel sympathy, and act out of our compassion for Sheri, it is unlikely that we can actually feel what Sheri or her family are feeling. This is not the optimal outcome because the others ahead of Sheri on the list presumably have their rightful place ahead of her in line so what we think of as kindness may lead to a negative result. (Answers may Vary)</p>
<p>You have set aside 50 dollars monthly for charity. You are debating between providing mosquito netting to a town in rural South America in which every 2 dollars will provide netting to save people from the spread of malaria or donating to the GoFundMe page of your neighbor suffering from a neuromuscular disorder. Your neighbor needs a wheelchair to leave the house. You decide to give to the GoFundMe page so others in the neighborhood will see your donation on the webpage and think you are a good person.</p>	<p>Conventional Level</p> <p>Approval Seeking Stage. You want your neighbors to think you are a good person.</p>	<p>There is no indication of empathy in this situation because there is no indication of feeling the neighbors pain or feeling the pain of those in living in South America. This is not the optimal outcome because while one person's life was made more comfortable, if the money went to South America, may more potential lives could have been saved. (Answers may Vary)</p>

<p>You give your church a predetermined donation each month because they recommend an amount based on your salary. The money goes to the maintenance of the church facilities and grounds. One month, you must decide if you should instead use that money to save five puppies at a shelter that will otherwise be euthanized. You decide to give the money to the church as usual because these are the guidelines in terms of donations they have set for you.</p>	<p>Conventional Level</p> <p>Law and Order Stage: The church is recommending a certain level of donation and you are interpreting this as a mandate from the authority figure (the institution of the church) which you obey.</p>	<p>There is likely compassion for the suffering dogs, but not empathy because it would be impossible to put oneself in the shoes of a dog (if dogs wear shoes). This likely is not optimal because while the church was clean, the dogs may have been killed. (Answers may Vary)</p>
<p>A local school has just been hit by a tornado (everyone is safe), and on the same day, 400 people are killed in a Tsunami in Thailand. You only have enough money to help with one of the causes and decide to donate to the local school because you are afraid that if you do not, your taxes will increase for the cost to rebuild the school.</p>	<p>Preconventional Level</p> <p>Reward and Self-Interest Stage: This action likely falls under satisfying needs, rather than acting for the good of the students. This person is donating to keep their taxes low in the future and seems more concerned with themselves than with others.</p>	<p>This situation likely does involve empathy, the person is close enough to people in the neighborhood to potentially understand the devastation caused by the tornado, but this does not lead to an optimal outcome because one may likely save more lives in Thailand and there may be other options for moving the school which is not a matter of life or death. (Answers may Vary)</p>