

Article

On the Value of Empathy to Inter-Religious Relations: A Case Study Based on the Thought of Charles Hartshorne

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Abstract: Introducing the results of psychology to the field of inter-religious relations, the value of empathy for the latter may seem equivocal. Based on a study of Hartshorne's thought, this paper will clarify conceptually that, as a mechanism, empathy can promote integration and dialogue, but may also result in partiality due to the limitation of its scope, thus resulting in prejudice and even conflict. It will further argue that Hartshorne provides a view of ultimate reality that not only highlights the moral value of empathy, but also promotes the extension of its scope. This implies that a theological account of empathy can go beyond the framework constructed in psychology and transform it into something that has unequivocally positive value for inter-religious integration and dialogue.

Keywords: empathy; inter-religious relations; Hartshorne

1. Introduction

Empathy and related ideas are pervasive across various religious and cultural traditions. They occupy an important place in Brahmanism (Scheler 1973) and early Buddhism (de Silva 1995), appear as one of the core moral teachings in Confucianism (Wong 2012; Terjesen 2013; Leung 2018), and are favored prominently by St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) in the Christian tradition (Scheler 1973). The widespread appearance of empathy across cultures makes it a favorite topic for comparative studies (Scheler 1973; Slote 2020; Wang 2021) and is used even as an argument for empathy as a universal attribute of the human species (Goetz et al. 2010).

Presumably, the widespread appearance of empathy also implies that it may play a role in religious encounters. In fact, the golden rule of global ethics is often treated as a particular type of empathy (Fuchs 2019, pp. 244, 248), and its advocates are often active in religious dialogue (see, for instance, Swidler and Mojzes 2000). Empathy is also mentioned from time to time as an important emotion in cross-textual affective engagement. (Clooney 2005, pp. 388, 390) These indicate the positive value of empathy to inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, theologians and religious studies researchers who work to advance inter-religious dialogue rarely give a serious discussion of empathy and its value.

Contrastingly, psychologists have come up with various sophisticated categories with corresponding definitions of empathy. Some categories and definitions may be compatible with the construal of empathy that take it to be pervasively present across many different religious traditions.¹ Moreover, psychologists have had serious discussions of the role of empathy within and among human groups in a general sense, the results of which could possibly be applied more specifically to the analysis of religious groups. A few empirical studies have carried out this work by exploring the interconnection between different types of empathy and different religious orientations. They find that three main types of empathy—empathetic concern, perspective taking and fantasy abilities—correlate positively with spirituality, but negatively with fundamentalism (Bradley 2009; Damiano et al. 2017).

However, in so far as it is impacted by religious factors, the role empathy plays in religious groups will be differentiated from the role it plays in other human groups. The



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empathy of the faithful may be impacted by the ideas advanced in respective religious traditions about behaviors related to empathy (such as love and benevolence). Such ideas may be advanced and sustained by primary religious texts, theology, rituals and other religious factors. In a context of religious pluralism, this implies that ideas about these various empathy-related behaviors from a range of religious traditions as well as the corresponding diversity of forms of empathy to which they are related will be good targets for comparative study. Because of this diversity, studies in empirical psychology may often struggle to account for the various ways that factors from different religious backgrounds may impact upon the formation of empathy. They may also struggle to account for the dynamic impact upon empathy of various religious factors that are themselves subject to a dynamic process of change. As such, case studies are particularly necessary to illustrate these details when discussing the value of empathy in inter-religious relations.

In light of this, this article focuses on the thought of Charles Hartshorne (1898–2000). While generally regarded as a philosopher of religion rather than a Christian theologian², Hartshorne, nevertheless, profoundly influenced the development of contemporary Christian theology, and his thought is often adduced in the context of inter-religious dialogue between Christian theology and Eastern traditions³. More importantly—although this has not been discussed widely—as this article will show, empathy is an important part of Hartshorne’s ethical thought. Thus, via a study of his thought, it may be possible to explore a way in which theology could shape empathy and direct it profitably in the context of inter-religious relations. We may also, thereby, obtain some constructive ideas on the improvement of religious relations and theories of religious dialogue. To fulfill these goals, this article will be structured as follows:

1. We will review the psychological literature and show that empathy in its natural state leads to both prosociality and partiality. In the context of inter-religious relations, this means empathy may not necessarily lead to integration and dialogue, but possibly also to prejudice and conflict.
2. On the basis of acknowledging the impact of religion on the development of empathy, we not only argue that Hartshorne’s idea of empathy is compatible with some views of psychology, but then further argue that the impact of Hartshorne’s view of ultimate reality upon empathy may in fact attenuate partiality.
3. In the context of inter-religious relations, we argue that Hartshorne’s idea of empathy is helpful for the promotion of religious integration and dialogue. We then conduct a preliminary test of this argument by reference to the findings of some empirical studies.

2. Empathy as a Source of Both Integration and Prejudice

Hoffmann once described empathy as “the glue that makes social life possible” (Hoffman 2000, p. 3). The metaphor suggests that empathy has the effect of bringing together and integrating previously separated individuals. This sociological effect is usually explained by an analysis of the psychological changes of an agent in empathetic state. Maibom suggests that, in the empathetic state, an agent “aims to match the emotion that the other experiences or could reasonably be expected to experience in her situation”; in the sympathetic state, one “matches ... the welfare of the other” (Maibom 2014, p. 4). This “matching” lays a foundation for the will to integrate with others. Another noteworthy psychological interpretation of the integration effect formulates it as a “self-other merging” (or “self-other overlapping”).

Initially, Robert B. Cialdini and others proposed that in empathy, one may experience “a sense of shared, merged, or interconnected personal identities” with the empathized, such that the agent would treat the latter as an expanded self symbolically (Cialdini et al. 1997, p. 483). This leads to an “oneness-helping relationship”. The term “helping” is used because in a state of “oneness”, it is hard to distinguish whether one’s concern is aimed at the other or the self. In this situation, “the traditional dichotomy between selfishness and selflessness loses its meaning” (Cialdini et al. 1997, pp. 490–91), and only “helping” rather than “altruism” is appropriate. This view is at odds with Batson’s famous assertion that empathy leads to altruistic motivation and personal distress leads to egoistic motiva-

tion. Implicit in this assertion is that empathy involves an affirmation of the particularity of the other, and it should plausibly be understood as a transcendence of self-interest and concern for the welfare of the other still occurring on the basis of a self–other distinction (Batson et al. 1997, pp. 159–60). Thus, Batson and his colleagues argue against Cialdini’s view in two ways: Firstly, empathy does not result in total psychological self–other merging. Neuroscience research has indeed found that the brain areas responding, respectively, to one’s own pain and the observation of pain in another are roughly the same. This is frequently used to justify self–other merging in empathy. However, by introducing evidence of more subtle differences of neural activity in processing these two kinds of pain, Batson and others maintain that empathic states do not in fact result in a complete merging (Decety and Batson 2009, pp. 116–17). Secondly, even if there is some degree of self–other merging in empathy, it is not the source of altruistic motivation and prosocial behavior. In fact, self–other merging leads to personal distress which motivates agents to escape from another’s pain rather than relieve it. This suggests, then, that “self-awareness and a sense of agency both play pivotal roles in empathy and significantly contribute to social interaction” (Decety and Batson 2009, p. 119).

It should be noted that both Batson and Cialdini agree that empathy can close the distance between individuals at the sociological level. Their difference lies in whether empathy’s prosocial effects in fact derive from self–other merging. Cialdini thinks so, while Batson believes an awareness of the self–other distinction is more important.

On the issue of inter-religious relations, both “integration” and “dialogue” may involve or require an attitude of proximity among the faithful from different religious backgrounds. This attitude is consistent with the prosociality promoted by empathy. Thus, it is reasonable to suggest that empathy could be of benefit to religious integration or dialogue. Furthermore, if we identify “integration” and “dialogue” carefully by defining the former as an attitude of syncretizing different religious traditions and the latter as an attitude of enriching one’s own tradition by exchanging ideas with other traditions, then the psychological account of empathy may still be coherent with integration and dialogue.

Let us take Perry Schmidt-Leukel’s methodology of interfaith theology as embodied in *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* as an example to explain this coincidence. According to him, an interfaith encounter should not end in tolerance. Tolerance presupposes an absence of recognition and appreciation, while what we need in an interfaith encounter is understanding and friendship. He goes on to defend a kind of syncretism. This syncretism allows one to synthesize the ideas and practices of different religions into one’s spiritual development. This, however, may be criticized for resulting in a loss of identity. This loss of identity has a parallel in the state of oneness in which the self and the other are indistinguishable in Cialdini’s account of empathy. Schmidt-Leukel’s response is based on his understanding of identity, according to which it is not an immutable entity but a process existing in historical changing and experiencing the changing (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 81). Thus, syncretism may enrich, deepen and expand one’s identity (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 79). In this response, Schmidt-Leukel explains why syncretism does not lead to a loss of identity. Meanwhile it is dialogue that helps promote transcendence from the original boundaries of the self and deepen the understanding of one’s own tradition in intertextual context. This view has a parallel in Batson’s view of empathy as broadening one’s scope of concern beyond the self. This coincidence makes us willing to hypothesize that empathy may be a positive element in religious integration and dialogue.

But the contrary hypothesis seems possible also. Batson has described the partiality caused by empathy as agents’ favoring people they care personally about (Batson 2011, p. 216). This may be in conflict with principles of fairness (Decety and Batson 2009, p. 122). Paul Bloom is more critical of this partiality. He takes it to be a “spotlight effect” which causes an agent to focus on limited patient(s). The patient(s) is/are most often spatio-temporally close to the agent, but also people who are attractive or similar in character to the agent, etc. In social life, this could lead to in-group biases, even “pushing us in the

direction of parochialism and racism” (Bloom 2016, p. 9). But one rebuttal of Bloom made by Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu suggests that he fails to provide a more nuanced categorical discussion of empathy. They suggest that empathy is not “actually *feeling* what you believe others to be feeling” as Bloom would have it, but to “*imagine* feeling a pain like the one you believe they are feeling” (Persson and Savulescu 2018, p. 185). In the latter sense, empathy is voluntary and could be expanded under the guidance of reason.

Thomas Fuchs also raises a criticism of empathy-derived partiality. Contrastingly with Bloom, however, his criticism does in fact rest on a detailed categorical discussion of empathy. Meanwhile, he pays more attention to the interplay of group identity and empathy. Fuchs generalizes various kinds of empathy into two categories—intercorporeal (or primary) empathy and extended (or higher-level) empathy. Intercorporeal empathy, which all humans are born with, contributes to initial interpersonal “recognition” and is in return affected by it. In addition, recognition is not only facilitated by empathy, but also bound to group identity. Thus, group identity places an indirect constraint on intercorporeal empathy. Fuchs then introduces a number of empirical studies showing that children at the age of 3–4 start simultaneously to recognize their group identity and to develop their in-group bias. Compared to intercorporeal empathy, extended empathy is primarily imaginative and voluntary, meaning it could be extended to strangers far away. The golden rule falls into this category of empathy (Fuchs 2019, p. 248). The empathy defined by Persson and Savulescu in their criticism of Bloom is also similar to this. But through his analyses of historical cases of genocide, Fuchs argues that extended empathy is generally too weak to override the “we-identity”. Thus, both categories of empathy will be constrained by group affiliation, and an “empathy gap” will appear beyond group boundaries. As Fuchs put it, the “assumption of a natural extension of empathy seems rather too idealistic” (Fuchs 2019, p. 243).

Fuchs’ study leads to a view opposite to the above hypothesis of empathy promoting inter-religious integration or dialogue. If the scope of one’s empathy is confined to group identity, it would be difficult for one to expand one’s concern to people from other religious groups by way of empathy without simultaneously giving up or weakening one’s original religious identity. More seriously, the empathy-strengthened recognition within religious in-groups may breed alienation and prejudice between religious out-groups. In the extreme, empathy may even serve to intensify inter-religious conflict, as reflected in the example of genocide Fuchs gives. This may explain why there are so many inter- (and intra-) religious conflicts throughout history despite the pervasive affirmation of empathy across various religious traditions.

To conclude, empathy can result in both prosociality and partiality, which in the context of religious encounter may in turn result in two opposed attitudes—the attitude of integration and dialogue, and that of alienation and prejudice.

3. Empathy Could Be Influenced by Religious Factors

The discussion above focuses on empathy in its natural state. It fails to take into account the complex factors from different religions or within a religion that would be variables reacting upon empathy and shaping its actualization within a particular group. With this in mind, the role of empathy in religious encounters may depend on how it is modified by religion itself.

According to Batson, although empathy-induced altruism has problems including partiality, these could be overcome by deployment in tandem with other forms of prosocial motivations, such as egoism, principlism and collectivism (Batson 2011, p. 225). Meanwhile, Persson and Savulescu suggest that empathy could be properly directed by reason to transcend partiality (Persson and Savulescu 2018, p. 192). Unfortunately, none of them treat religion as a resource to reform empathy, even though Batson mentions the story of the Good Samaritan as an example of empathy presented in Christian tradition (Batson 2011, p. 11). This lacuna is filled by Stephen G. Post.

In *Unlimited Love: Altruism, Compassion, and Service*, Post introduces Batson's empathy-altruism model to argue that altruism is an innate human tendency. He points out, however, that Batson neglected the effect religion could have on cultivating altruism. He then introduces a lot of empirical studies to substantiate this effect (Post 2003, pp. 69–71) and concludes that "Our natural tendency toward helping behavior, which is quite instinctive by Batson's model, can be enhanced by culture influences, the influence of exemplary individuals, reason, and spirituality in order to be fully elevated into something higher" (Post 2003, p. 67). For him, cultural influences allow helping behavior to go beyond the scope of kin-directed altruism and group-directed altruism in the evolutionary sense and expand to humanity at large. The specific cultural influence Post provides is the idea of love and compassion from Christian tradition. He believes this idea derives from knowledge of God's love, which is frequently described analogically as "parental love" even though God's love transcends the boundaries of kinship and is directed rather to all mankind. The faithful with this idea in mind would regard all of humankind as brothers and sisters equally deserving of God's love and be motivated to help them (Post 2003, pp. 130–31). In this way, Christianity deploys the language of fictive kinship to enhance (rather than negate) the natural tendencies of kin-directed altruism and helps extend its scope beyond biological kin affiliation.

Post's approach of going beyond kin-directed altruism via the Christian idea of love is notable here. There is a relationship of inheritance and extension between religious love and natural love and a certain influence of the former on the latter. Moreover, Post treats "compassion"—which to him is a more appropriate way of capturing and improving upon Batson's concept of "empathetic concern"—as an important component of love. One particular deficiency here, however, is that because Post relies heavily on parental love in understanding God's love, he uses compassion merely as an adjunct to parental love. However, in contemporary religious philosophy and Christian theology, there are many thinkers to understand "empathy" as an aspect of God's love, Hartshorne being one example.⁴ This makes it possible to further explore whether divine empathy can enhance natural empathy—just as divine parental love enhances natural parental love—especially insofar as this is conducive to religious integration and dialogue.

4. Hartshorne's Understanding of Empathy

Hartshorne's understanding of empathy is embedded in his discussion of the term sympathy.⁵ His discussion of sympathy in humanity is carried out via an interpretation of "loving others as oneself". "Loving others as oneself" is an important proposition of Christian ethics and also the core of the golden rule. In psychological taxonomy, it might be roughly sorted into the category of perspective taking. Hartshorne, however, gives a different interpretation of it, based on an understanding of individuals grounded in process metaphysics.

In Whiteheadian process metaphysics, the "being" of an individual is not regarded as a transcendently fixed entity but an abstraction from a process of temporal "becoming". In the sense of becoming, one's actualized state is in flux from moment to moment. For instance, the body, mind and other aspects of a person at the age of three and at the age of thirty are different. The state of an individual at one moment is termed an "actual entity". The whole individual, taken across one's lifespan, is a compound unity or "society" composed of infinitely many actual entities that connect to each other. Under this understanding, self-love is regarded as an event of transcending the current self, an event building connections with the expected future self consciously or unconsciously through an imaginative sympathy. In the event, the expected future self is not naturally identified with the current self because it is not actualized yet. But sympathetic love establishes recognition between them. It even integrates these actual entities into a "unity" such that a current self is often willing to sacrifice its time, energy, money and other benefits for the future self's well-being and regard these sacrifices as self-love rather than altruistic behavior.

Here, Hartshorne's usage of sympathy differs slightly from that of Batson and Post. The latter two use empathy or compassion only to characterize interpersonal relationships, whereas Hartshorne uses it to characterize the relationship between different time slices of the self. In such a usage, Hartshorne would not make such a clear division between altruism and egoism—in fact, he seeks to undermine that common distinction, because both are motivated by sympathy; he would not treat sympathy as an adjunct to parental love as Post has done, because even sustaining an individual's life through time is based on sympathy.

On the other hand, Hartshorne is highly similar to Batson and Post with respect to the position of sympathy in morality. Like the latter two, Hartshorne believes sympathy is other-oriented. More importantly, all three claim sympathy, empathy or compassion as a part of human nature and thereby adopt a stance of psychological altruism rather than psychological egoism.⁶ Batson and Post, however, believe the existence of altruism to be a neuroscientific or evolutionary truth, whereas Hartshorne takes it to be a metaphysical truth (Hartshorne 1974). He, thus, adopts a metaphysical approach in his rejection of Hobbesian moral philosophy (which regards self-interest as the source of all altruistic behaviors and ethical doctrines)—this philosophy is also rejected by Batson and Post, directly or indirectly (Batson 2011, pp. 27–29; Post 2003, pp. 59–63).⁷ According to Hartshorne, altruism is more fundamental than self-interest. The latter is nothing more than the concern motivated by sympathy as confined to the self qua compound unity, so “it is altruism that explains self-love, not the other way” (Hartshorne 1984, p. 108). This indicates a shared mechanism under the seeming opposition between self-oriented interest and other-oriented interest. The possibility of transcending self-oriented interest is therefore inherent in itself. In Hartshorne's words, “even to speak of ‘self-love’ is to imply a difference between the self loving and the self loved, and that difference makes room for everything from one's own future state to other persons, animals, God, as the self which may be loved” (Hartshorne 1964, p. 149).

In less obvious ways, some other scholars also apply empathy to the analysis of the self-relation across various time slices. In elucidating the partiality from empathy, Bloom suggests that empathy is biased towards the less distant self of the next moment. Meanwhile, in response to Bloom, Persson and Savulescu underscore empathy's moral importance in warning of “the risk that without empathy we would not be concerned with anyone's well-being, not even our own beyond the present moment” (Persson and Savulescu 2018, p. 186). In these two cases, empathy toward future selves is used, respectively, to deny and to justify the moral importance of empathy. Both usages seem reasonable. We can explain this contradiction with recourse to two different categories—“the mechanism of empathy” and “the scope of empathy”.

With respect to the mechanism, empathy extends one's concern beyond the self here and now, and helps extend recognition (in Fuchs' sense) to external objects. It thereby inherently results in altruism. However, with respect to scope, any actualized empathy together with the altruism it induces is limited. The limited scope makes it possible to be judged morally as biased or even egoistic. This logic is in line with the view of Post inherited from P. A. Sorokin that “‘in-group altruism’ inevitably means ‘out-group egoism’” (Post et al. 2002, p. 7), even though our reasoning is differentiated from Post by extension of his logic to explain self-interest in an assumption of self as a “society” constituted by a large number of states. In this understanding, empathy-induced altruism is judged morally as altruistic or selfish depending on two variables—the scope of empathy itself and the scope required by some external judge. When the scope of empathy itself is larger than the scope required by the external judge, it will be applauded as altruistic; otherwise, it will be criticized as bias or egoism. In the absence of a clear external judge, the larger the scope of empathy, the greater its potential for moral approval, and the higher its moral value. Looked at this way, Bloom is convincing in suggesting that empathy in its natural state does little to promote altruism to the scope required for moral life in modern society. This may also explain why Whitehead's requirements for moral practice focus on expand-

ing one's sympathy and concern (Griffin 2000, pp. 306–10). Hartshorne not only inherits this view, but also reinforces the role of faith in extending sympathy.

To him, faith means loving God wholeheartedly (Hartshorne 1987, pp. 83–85). In this love, one recognizes that all things including oneself, other people and even animals are embraced by God's love and is willing to serve all the beloved of God. The core of God's love is sympathy⁸, although divine sympathy differs from human sympathy by its unlimited scope and degree. In sympathetic love, God experiences perfectly the feelings of all things. All things are thereby recognized as parts of divine life in a sense similar to one feeling the feelings in one's own body. To speak analogically, Hartshorne conceives God as "the all sensitive mind of the world-body" (Hartshorne 1937, p. 208). This analogy should not be understood as a deduction of divine sympathetic love from a God–world relation which is analogized to the mind–body relation. On the contrary, it means that the mind–body relation is an intimate state established and sustained metaphysically by sympathy. For the faithful, the intimacy of God to all things means that one's love of God could be actualized by his concern for all things. In other words, there is no contradiction between the first and second commandments in this view of God's love.⁹ Moreover, love of God helps expand one's concern to strangers or even enemies who, although they are unable to arouse a naturally friendly attitude toward the agent, nevertheless suffered together with the God the agent loves.

This pattern of extending empathy can be described as follows: the empathy of agent A toward object C results from A's empathy toward mediator B and B's empathy toward C. The empathy of A toward C here is indirect and is, therefore, the result of extension. In a condition in which B's empathy toward C is invariant, the higher A's empathy toward B, the higher A's empathy will, therefore, be toward C. Applying this pattern to the analysis of Hartshorne, he suggests that "in the present state of society the important point is that the human individual and the human group require a third term to mediate between them, as well as between different groups of individuals" (Hartshorne 1937, p. 32) And he presupposes that the sympathetic love of "mighty mediator" (Hartshorne 1937, p. 36) or God (B) to all things (C) is invariant. Thus, the scope and degree of an agent (A)'s empathy to others is highly dependent on the degree of his empathetic love towards God. This provides a way of explaining how one's specific understanding and relationship of God will be helpful in expanding the scope of empathy. It also shows how a group formed by the love of God can open up to dialogue with other groups.

5. The Value of Empathy in Inter-religious Relations from Hartshorne's Perspective

In Hartshorne's theology, one's empathy is not only intrinsically extensible (e.g., from empathy towards the self to empathy towards others), but also could be extended to cover the unfamiliar from other religious groups as a manifestation of his love towards the all-loving God. This is because God's sympathetic love is understood as not confined to the boundaries set by any religious group. And if one's religious identity is to be calibrated by love towards this God rather than by the interaction with other in-group members whose scope of empathy is equally limited, then this religious identity would not result in the type of "empathy gap" posited by Fuchs. In this case, empathy is more likely to facilitate religious integration or dialogue.

However, if the understanding of God or His love changes, the empathy of the faithful would change accordingly. For example, if God's love (or God's salvation) is assumed to be focused on a specific group, then the empathy of the faithful would be accordingly dictated by in-group partiality. Another example is that if God is conceived of as distant from the world, or as a king who influences the world with power rather than sympathetic love, then the empathetic concern of the faithful could be presumed to weaken dramatically. That is the ethical reason Hartshorne gives for refuting deism and classical theism and developing his so-called neo-classical theism (Hartshorne 1984).

Hartshorne and his process theology successors seem to affirm the above reasoning by their passion for comparative religious studies and inter-religious dialogue. Hartshorne

has conducted a great deal of work in the field of theism from an inter-religious/cultural perspective (Hartshorne and Reese 1953; Hartshorne 1978). It is then applied to the dialogical studies between Christian theologies and Confucian and Taoist thought (Berthrong 1994, 2008). And we could list many more such scholars and studies deriving from process theology which promote dialogue between Christianity and other religions. More importantly, one of Hartshorne's core ideas, "creative synthesis" (Hartshorne 1970), is treated as his methodology for comparative studies while also having connotations of the "merging" of empathy. This methodology is developed further and coined "mutual transformation" or "creative transformation" by Hartshorne's successor John Cobb, an advocate of Buddhist–Christian dialogue.¹⁰ Schmidt-Leukel also follows Cobb to a degree with his "transformation by integration" concept (Schmidt-Leukel 2017, p. 2).

Let us examine our views further by reference to the findings of empirical studies. In their discussions of the relationship between religious orientations and value priorities, Gennerich and Huber (2006, 2021) find that religious individuals who seem to balance dialogical openness and system stabilization share benevolent values, "near the middle of values of tradition and values of universalism". Their study follows the conceptualized value structure of Shalom H. Schwartz who defined "benevolence" as "preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact" (Schwartz and Bardi 2001, Table 1). Meanwhile, according to Schwartz, benevolent values are of utmost important pan-culturally because they provide the basis for cooperative and supportive social relations (Schwartz and Bardi 2001). From Schweitzer's description, it seems that our understanding of empathy in its natural state can be counted as one kind of benevolent value. If this view is accepted, then Gennerich and Huber's view that individuals sharing benevolent values occupy a middle ground between liberal and conservative religious positions constitutes further evidence in support of our judgment—empathy in its natural state contains both possibilities of promoting religious dialogue and integration as well as religious prejudice and conflict. Furthermore, Hartshorne and his process theology actually fall into the rather liberal religious position favoring universalism (even though we do not identify it as spiritual identity, religious syncretism, or religious reflexivity specifically). This can help explain why Hartshorne's view of empathy extension is tinged with the character of universalist values, which, according to Schwartz and Bardi (2001), differ from benevolent values in focusing on all others rather than in-group members. The explanation, however, does not preclude that groups or individuals from other religious backgrounds while occupying liberal positions may affirm the extension of empathy and support religious integration or dialogue in a way different from Hartshorne.

There are, admittedly, some contradictions between the views in this article and the findings of some other empirical studies. Some studies suggest that religious fundamentalism is negatively related to empathetic concern, perspective taking and fantasy abilities, while spirituality is positively related to the same three subsets of empathy (Bradley 2009; Damiano et al. 2017). But according to our discussion, "the mechanism of empathy" will exist across a range of religious orientations because the key variable for resulting conservative or liberal attitudes is "the scope of empathy" rather than "the mechanism of empathy". Following this view, empathy may also exist in fundamentalist groups with a form of highly limited scope. The amount of this empathy may even be positively correlated with fundamentalism. How do we explain this contradiction? Is it possible, in theory, that even the empathy with limited scope is not the main cause of partiality or prejudice in fundamentalism, and, hence, that fundamentalism may be yet be negatively correlated with empathy in any of its forms? Or is it possible that the empirical studies fail to capture and log the empathy in fundamentalism because of its highly limited scope—a situation similar to our failure of recognizing the empathy in self-love? Future researchers may wish to explore these questions.

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Notes

- ¹ Researchers tend to give divergent accounts of empathy depending on their backgrounds and theoretical aims, which makes its definition rather diverse. This article will employ the following working definition: empathy means not only understanding the other, but also engaging emotionally with and responding to the other’s feelings. It is, therefore, often divided into cognitive empathy and affective empathy (Maibom 2014). Of the two, cognitive empathy does not have a moral valence. On the contrary, emotional empathy includes not only sensation of the experiences of the other, but also an affective affirmation of the other, with attendant feelings of concern and motivation to help. This article uses empathy mainly in the latter sense. One similar usage is Batson’s “empathetic concern” which can also be given such other names as compassion, pity, sympathy, and so on (Batson 2011, p. 12). Empathy in this sense may be pervasive across—and plays important roles in many—religious or cultural traditions. For example, a study of value hierarchy shows that behaviors highly related to empathy, such as forgiveness and helpfulness, are consistently some of the most important values under the name of benevolence across cultures in 54 nations (Schwartz and Bardi 2001).
- ² As such, in this article, the term “theology” will not specifically refer to “Christian theology” when used to describe Hartshorne’s thought.
- ³ For example, sinologist John Berthrong comments on Hartshorne’s “dual transcendence” as allowing “a Christian theologian to make sense of the famous Confucian dictum ‘humanity makes the *tao* great, not that *tao* makes humanity great’ (*Analecets* 15:28)” because “Hartshorne clearly wants to express the deep conviction that the life and actions of human beings do matter to God” (Berthrong 1994, p. 157).
- ⁴ There are other thinkers contributing to the issue of God’s love as empathy. Paul Fiddes (1992) advocated God’s sympathetic love from time to time in his book *The Creative Suffering of God*. Another example is Edward Farley’s (1996) *Divine Empathy: A Theology of God*.
- ⁵ Hartshorne uses the term “sympathy” to mainly refer to “empathy” and he mixes these two terms from time to time. This article follows his habit so that sympathy and empathy are interchangeable.
- ⁶ On this distinction, see (Sober and Wilson 1998, pp. 199–201).
- ⁷ In Christian theology tradition, a rejection to psychological egoism goes back at least as far as Joseph Butler (1692–1752).
- ⁸ See (Hartshorne 1984, pp. 27–31) (Contents entitled as “God’s Love as Divine Sympathy, Feeling of other’s Feelings”).
- ⁹ As Cobb commented, “Sometimes it has seemed that serving God in some measure turned attention away from serving creatures. But for Hartshorne these limitations are abolished. We have the supreme privilege of contributing to the divine life. God does not depend on us for existence, as we depend on God, but God does depend on us for the specific form that the divine experience will take. We can add to its suffering or to its joy. But none of our contribution to the divine life can be in tension with love of our fellow creatures and service of them. What we do to the least of the creatures we do also to God. Love of God cannot be expressed except through service of creatures.” (Cobb 1991, p. 184).
- ¹⁰ For the development from Hartshorne’s “creative synthesis” to Cobb’s “creative transformation”, see (Wang 2020). For Cobb’s discussion on “creative transformation” or “mutual transformation”, see (Cobb 1982).

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