

TASK 1 SUMMARY

TASK 2

After you have heard the recording again, you will have 1 minute to tell me why the speaker thinks that empathy is a mistake.

SCROLL DOWN FOR ANSWERS

TASK 1

ANSWER

ANSWER: The speaker presents the case against empathy (any broadly similar formulation is acceptable).

TASK 2

Now listen again. This time you can make notes if you want to.

After you have heard the recording again, you will have 1 minute to tell me why the speaker thinks that empathy is a mistake.

The case against empathy

Empathy can lead to short-sighted and unfair moral actions [2 POINTS]

Empathy is subject to bias [2 POINTS]

Reason should guide action because it aspires towards fairness and impartiality [2 POINTS]

Our empathy can be exploited by others [2 POINTS]

For those in the helping professions, compassion and understanding are more important [2 POINTS]

To be a good person, compassion is better than empathy [2 POINTS]

How many could you remember?

Record your points here:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

What does it take to be a good person. What makes someone a good doctor their first apparent what guides policy makers to make wise and moral decisions. Many believe that empathy the capacity to experience the feelings of others and particularly at the suffering is essential to all these roles.

I argue that this is a mistake often a tragic one. If he acts like a spotlight focusing one's attention on a single individual in the here and now this can have positive effects but it can also lead to short sighted and unfair moral actions and it is subject to bias but nobody studies and anecdotal experiences show that empathy flows most for those who look like us who are attractive and who are non-threatening and familiar.

Empathy has its place the reason should guide action as aspires towards the sort of fairness and impartiality empathy doesn't provide, when we appreciate their skin colour does not too many who we should care about for example or the crisis such as climate change has great significance even though it is an abstract threat, we are transcending empathy.

A good policy maker makes decisions using reasons aspiring towards the sort of fairness and impartiality empathy doesn't provide.

Empathy isn't just a reflex of course. We can choose to empathize and stir empathy for others but this flexibility can be a curse our empathy can be exploited by others as in cynical politicians tell stories of victims of rape or salt and use our empathy for these victims to stoke hatred against vulnerable groups such as undocumented immigrants.

For those in the helping professions compassion and understanding are critically important but not empathy, feeling the suffering of others to acutely needs to exhaustion burn out and ineffective work no good therapist is awash with anxiety when working with an anxious patient, some distance is required.

Rationality alone it isn't enough to be a good person you also need some sort of motivation but compassion and caring for others without feeling the pain does the trick quite nicely, empathy and compassion are distinct recent neuroscience studies including some fascinating work on the power of meditation show the compassion is distinct from empathy with all its benefits and few of its costs. Many of life's deepest pleasures such as engagement with novels, movies and television require empathic connection empathy has its place. When it comes to being a good person there are better alternatives.