SYMPOSIUM ON *ENTANGLED EMPATHY*

Commentary on *Entangled Empathy* by Lori Gruen

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This essay explores four aspects of Gruen's theory. The first section considers her analysis of the concepts of sympathy, pity, and emotional contagion. The second section outlines the main features of her conception of empathy and highlights some worries about empathy that her theory addresses. The third section examines empathy's contributions to moral epistemology. The fourth section queries Gruen's contention that empathy is morally motivating.

It is not customary to start philosophical commentaries with remarks about the cover art for the target text. But I am going to make an exception in this case because the photograph on the cover of *Entangled Empathy* is so revealing—so perfectly represents the philosophical project to come. The title of the photo is "We Animals," and it shows a woman—actually just part of her back and one extended arm—with two young rescued gorillas—one clinging to her arm and the other's arm around her waist. It is an image of affective entwinement across species. It's not sentimental in the sense of false, overwrought sentiment. But it is touching, and in keeping with the intimacy and evocativeness of the cover image, Gruen's book is laced with recollections of philosophically telling personal experience. Although I will focus on her theoretical account of empathy here, I'd be remiss if I didn't say that it's informed by Gruen's deep reflections on her encounters with nonhuman animals and that her book adds up to an inspiring vision of caring relations among all sorts of animals.

Gruen's definition of entangled empathy near the beginning of her book is worth quoting because it is indicative of the ethical importance she attributes to empathy and also of her ambitions for empathy. Here it is:

> A type of caring perception focused on attending to another's experience of wellbeing. An experiential process involving a blend of emotion and

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> cognition in which we recognize we are in relationships with others and are called upon to be responsive and responsible in these relationships by attending to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, and sensitivities. (3)[1]

Entangled empathy is a really hefty concept. Reading the definition again, I think it compasses nearly the whole of morality:

1. Accurately seeing how others are faring,
2. Acknowledging our connections to them,
3. Affectively and cognitively grasping that those relationships come with responsibilities, and
4. Acknowledging that those responsibilities require appropriate responsiveness to others.

So far as I can see, the only dimension of morality that isn't included in this definition is the action component—following through on and carrying out those perceived responsibilities. But as we'll see, Gruen argues that empathy is morally motivating. So the action component is already implicit in her concept of entangled empathy.

In this essay, I'll explore four aspects of Gruen's theory. Section I considers her analysis of the concepts of sympathy, pity, and emotional contagion. Section II outlines the main features of her conception of empathy. Section III examines empathy's contributions to moral epistemology. Section IV queries Gruen's claim that empathy is morally motivating.

I. Empathy and Related Concepts

Before I get to moral responsibilities and moral motivation, I need to say something about Gruen's understanding of empathy. As she points out, the term is used in a multitude of ways, and it has acquired both colloquial and scholarly meanings. Since there's a lot of terminological confusion and a lot of talking at cross purposes in the philosophical, psychological, and neuroscientific literatures, Gruen contrasts empathy with several closely related concepts.

She starts by distinguishing sympathy from empathy, and at first it seems like she's doing it in a way that's fairly common in philosophical discussions. Sympathy is a concerned response to something undesirable that's happening to someone else, and a sympathetic person will respond to that perception by trying to alleviate the suffering or solve the problem (44). Standardly, when you sympathize with someone, you don't try to imagine what she is undergoing, but rather your concern for what you see she is undergoing moves you to take whatever helpful measures are called for. But Gruen complicates and critiques this conception of sympathy.

On the one hand, she writes, "When a lost child cries out in fear, a sympathetic observer will recognize the fear and attempt to comfort the child" (44). Yet, on the other hand, she goes on to claim that because in sympathizing you maintain an

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external perspective on the other, it's compatible with substituting a shallow or weak response of regret for a robust helping gesture (45).[2] In line with this claim, she ascribes a phenomenology to sympathy that seems at odds with her account of the sympathetic adult's encounter with the fearful, lost child. "While we're being sympathetic," she tells us, "we attempt to be disconnected from others" (45).

I think that it would be more in line with colloquial and philosophical usage and also more conducive to an appropriately subtle moral psychology to characterize pity as involving the distancing phenomenology and the potential for condescension that Gruen incorporates into her account of sympathy. If I may invoke my own experience, sympathy is a feeling that comes over me and connects me to someone else in a strongly caring way. In contrast, I can pity, say, the plight of people caught up in addiction syndromes, yet feel no need to do anything to help them. Whereas sympathy altogether lacks the voluntaristic distancing phenomenology that Gruen ascribes to it, pity is structured by that phenomenology.[3]

Still, I have some thoughts about what may be prompting Gruen to take the view she does. For one thing, some philosophers who discuss the contrast between sympathy and empathy stress that sympathy is a third-personal response in which the sympathizer does not feel what the other is feeling. For instance, Peter Goldie's account brings the separation of the sympathizer from the other to the fore and plays up the advantages of this separation for lucid moral perception and judgment (Goldie 2000, 181; 2007, 70, 82, 83; 2011, 302). The interpersonal distancing characteristic of sympathy notwithstanding, Goldie holds that sympathy is the quintessential moral emotion because it combines concern for the other with a disposition to help (Goldie 2000, 213–15). In contrast, he thinks that the engrossment of empathetic feeling-along-with is an impediment to moral understanding and right action.

I don't agree with Goldie's negative conclusion about empathy, but I do think Gruen's moral psychology would be richer if she drew a clear distinction between sympathy and pity. As she seems at first to acknowledge, feeling-along-with is not always necessary to figure out what needs to be done and can even be a distraction from getting something useful done for someone who's in urgent need. In such cases, sympathetically registering someone's suffering and being sympathetically moved to help her is an excellent response. Moreover, there is a form of sympathy that philosophers typically overlook that is no less morally valuable than the form I've been discussing.

The type of sympathy I have in mind resembles empathy in that it involves shared feelings. But it differs from empathy in that it is itself a form of pro-social conduct. This type of sympathy presupposes both caring about the other person's wellbeing and being attuned to her sensibility. It may but need not be reinforced by sharing the person's reasons for feeling as she does. For example, one way in which you can sympathize with a bereaved friend is to join in her mourning by sharing her feelings of grief. Sympathetic feeling-along-with another person is a moral response because when faced with adversity, people often need and take comfort in the community of

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affect that such sympathy creates. Although sympathetic feeling-along-with someone resembles emotional contagion, it differs importantly from emotional contagion because it is a deliberate way of helping another individual.

Perhaps this is the time to say that I disagree with Gruen's classification of emotional contagion as a form of empathy (46). In holding that emotional contagion is a form of empathy, she's in good company. Philosophers as different as Michael Slote, Jesse Prinz, and Stephen Darwall also consider emotional contagion a rudimentary, automatic form of empathy (Slote 2007; Darwall 2011; Prinz 2011). However, here for once, I'm on Peter Goldie's side. In emotional contagion, you are merely caused to feel as someone else does (Goldie 2000, 189–91). You are not feeling along with that individual out of concern for her or in order to be of help to her. Moreover, you need not care about others or share others' reasons for feeling as they do in order to "catch" their affective state. Switching to a celebratory event, you might detest and resent the colleague who has just received a coveted award, yet you might start to feel joyful as a result of the laudatory tenor of the speeches honoring her achievement and the jubilant behavior of the party-goers around you. The party ambiance transmits an altogether alien affective state to you—a joyfulness that you'll rue if you realize what has happened. Although emotional contagion can also bring about affective states that are consonant with a person's moral identity, they are disconnected from concern for others and hence disqualified as moral emotions. Unlike sympathy and empathy, emotional contagion isn't a moral response at all.

But I need to get back to Gruen's qualms about sympathy. I've said that some philosophers make sympathy sound like a rather cold, detached mode of moral engagement but that this is misleading. So I would urge Gruen to reject these mischaracterizations and to resist being drawn to an ambivalent view of sympathy because of them. I've also maintained that contrary to standard views, there are two forms of sympathy. Perhaps another reason Gruen is more critical of sympathy than most philosophers is that she takes what I've described as sympathetic feeling-along-with to be a form of emotional contagion or a form of what she calls "primary or personal empathy" (47). However, sympathetic feeling-along-with differs from emotional contagion inasmuch as sympathetic feeling-along-with expresses the sympathizer's concern for and desire to alleviate the other's suffering through mutuality of feeling. As well, sympathetic feeling-along-with differs from primary/personal empathy inasmuch as a person experiencing primary/personal empathy "loses herself in the emotions of the other" (47), whereas a person who is sympathetically feeling-along-with another individual maintains her awareness of the self–other distinction and retains her own point of view.

It occurs to me, though, that there's another explanation for Gruen's misgivings about sympathy—one that will take us deeper into her conception of agentic subjects. Although some psychologists have sought to demonstrate a link between empathy and altruistic action, philosophers are by and large skeptical that empathy is morally motivating, and some of them regard empathy as antithetical to morality. Among those philosophers who don't think empathy undermines morality, some maintain that empathy is a precursor of sympathy and thus that empathy indirectly

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contributes to moral action. Others argue that in facilitating access to different subjectivities, empathy furnishes information that helps moral agents discern how to act well. In contrast, Gruen joins the psychologists who contend that empathy is morally motivating. If she is right, sympathy might be morally superfluous. So I need to examine her reasons for thinking that moral motivation is inherent in empathy (section IV). But preliminary to taking up that question, I need to examine her views about the process of empathetic engagement and about the contribution of empathy to moral epistemology.

II. Empathetic Engagement as a Process

Gruen explicates empathy as a process:

> The wellbeing of another grabs the empathizer's attention; then the empathizer reflectively imagines himself in the position of the other; and then he makes a judgment about how the conditions that the other finds herself in contribute to her state of mind or wellbeing. The empathizer will then carefully assess the situation and figure out what information is pertinent to empathize effectively with the being in question. (51)

She goes on to say that because this empathetic process mobilizes both cognitive and affective capabilities, and because this process is initiated by noticing a wellbeing deficit, it will "tend to lead to action" (51).

So far as we know at this point, though, Gruen's account hasn't excluded the empathetic torturer who figures prominently in the empathy literature and who uses her empathetic insights into victims to exploit their weaknesses and torture them more effectively. But Gruen soon dispatches this worry, for she claims that when you're trying to imagine another's subjectivity, you come to share her goals (52). Consequently, your ensuing motivations are likely to be consonant with her goals and your actions to be altruistic.

Maybe. But presumably Gruen doesn't mean to say that empathizers unreflectively and uncritically come to share others' goals and act in support of those goals regardless of what they are. Otherwise, an empathetic therapist working with unrepentant domestic abusers would be an empathetic enabler who couldn't do her job properly. Instead of helping the abusers to control their anger and quell their violence, she would help them to conceal their violence and avoid arrest. To rule out this possibility, we need to push ahead into Gruen's account of relational selves.

Gruen joins a well-established line of feminist thought that includes but is not limited to care ethics in dismissing the unsituated, disembodied, self-constituting subject as a myth. In its place, she posits a relational self—a subject who is shaped by her ongoing social and corporeal experience, who critically reflects on the meanings of the diverse interpersonal relationships and social forces that have influenced her, and who strives to clarify, adjust, and enrich her self-conception (63). Taking this conception of selfhood for granted, Gruen draws out its ethical implications:

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> Since we necessarily exist in relation with other organisms, and since our perceptions, attitudes, and even our identities are entangled with them and our actions make their experience go better or worse (which in turn affects our own experiences), we should attend to this social/natural entanglement. We'll be motivated to improve on these relationships, since we don't want to be in "bad" or "abusive" ones. Given that we are already, inevitably, in relationships it makes sense to work to make them more meaningful and more mutually satisfying. (64)

If I understand her correctly, Gruen is advocating an ethic that integrates identity work with relationship work guided by empathetic engagement. By better understanding their relational partners, people come to see how their relationships can be better and how they can act better vis-à-vis their relational partners. So the empathetic therapist would not simply adopt the goals of her abusive clients, though she might be moved to adjust her assumptions about the kind of men who become abusers. Rather she would factor her own goals into her responses and try to show her clients how satisfying nonviolent relationships can be.

At this point, I find myself wondering whether entangled empathy presupposes an objectivist account of wellbeing that would rule out empathetic moral reinforcement between a pair of friends who are both prone to domestic violence. I'll offer an alternative in section III.

III. Empathy and Moral Understanding

Gruen repeatedly points to the role of perception in leading a moral life and the contribution of altered perception to moral insight. Recall that she characterizes entangled empathy as a form of "caring perception" (3). At this point, we need to ask what it is that caring perception perceives. Gruen's answer is wellbeing or lack thereof (7). Inasmuch as she firmly distances her work from utilitarianism and its focus on pleasure and pain or preference satisfaction, it is important to clarify what she means by *wellbeing*, and I would like to offer a suggestion that might be of use to her.

In my view, empathy's distinctive contribution to moral insight is a consequence of the access it enables to the poignancy of another individual's interiority. What I mean by that is that, unlike imagining someone from the external perspective, empathetic imagination accesses values and disvalues as someone whose situation may be profoundly different from your own is experiencing them. I suspect that apprehending the poignancy of diminished value and excessive disvalue in another's subjective experience is what Martha Nussbaum has in mind when she says that by empathizing with someone who is suffering you get a "sense of what it means for *her* to suffer that way" (Nussbaum 2001, 331; emphasis added).

As we know, a caustic remark directed at a person with a solid sense of self-esteem might sting for a moment and quickly be laughed off. In contrast, a person

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who has endured a childhood of emotional manipulation and humiliation might be devastated by the same remark. If you are the first type of person, you are likely to need empathy in order to grasp the tremendous disvalue of such a put-down for the second type of person. And vice versa.

It seems to me, though, that things get complicated here. Although Gruen states that our empathetic reach depends on our experience and the knowledge we've gained (87–88), she doesn't say much about the culturally transmitted resources that empathy depends on. So I'd like to make explicit here what I take to be some unstated assumptions of her account.

Grasping what values and disvalues another experiences presupposes a fund of cultural understandings about which sorts of things are good and which are bad. Moreover, grasping the subjective poignancy of the sets of values that are inaccessible to someone and the sets of disvalues that are all too accessible for that individual presupposes a cultural fund of understandings about what values should rightfully be available to all and what disvalues no one should be subjected to, not to mention the countless values and disvalues that aren't a matter of political right but do have special meaning for particular individuals. So far as I can tell, empathetic experience is not the source of the conceptions of values and disvalues that are needed to interpret another individual's subjective experience. Rather, empathy mobilizes a culturally transmitted, normative conceptual repertoire that underwrites the empathizer's appreciation of the moral significance of others' needs, frustrations, sensitivities, and so forth.

Consider the issue I raised at the end of section II: the worry that a pair of mutually empathetic domestic abusers might strengthen their relationship by reinforcing each other's abusive behavior. One way in which an account of empathy could rule out this possibility would be to posit an objective account of human wellbeing that denies that unjustified violence is compatible with any agent's wellbeing, regardless of how satisfying it may be for those so inclined. It seems to me, however, that that approach courts unnecessary controversy and that a more conventionalist account that steers clear of unmoored relativism is more promising.[4]

What I would propose is that these abusers' empathy is defective in either of two respects. Conceivably, they regard their domestic partners strictly as objects and therefore don't relate to them empathetically at all. If so, they are disregarding incontrovertible cultural norms that recognize the personhood of all adult humans. More likely, in empathizing with their domestic partners, they are imputing wildly implausible values to their victims' experience of being abused. They might be imagining that their victims are grateful for the direction that their punitive violence furnishes. I call this interpretation of their victims' subjectivity "wildly implausible" because it presupposes willful ignorance of well-tested, longstanding cultural norms concerning not only what sorts of conduct deserve punishment but also, when punishment is warranted, what sort of punitive action befits the malfeasance. If these individuals believe that the prevailing "moral understandings"[5] I cite should be modified to accommodate their withholding of empathy from their partners or their incongruous interpretations of their victims' subjectivity, it is incumbent on them to make the

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case to the rest of us. Absent that, their empathy with each other does not call those norms into question, let alone justify their brutality to their partners.

In a related vein, it seems to me that empathy doesn't tell you what if anything you should do about your empathetic understanding of another individual. Gruen speaks of being "responsive and responsible" in our relationships, and I agree that empathy enables moral agents to decipher the constellations of values and disvalues that may call for moral action. But so far as I can tell, we can't read moral responsibilities directly from empathetic insights into others' subjective states. You may empathetically grasp that someone feels awful. Still, your empathetic understanding of the other doesn't tell you that you should take action to alleviate her suffering.

In this regard, I agree with Margaret Walker that allocations of moral responsibilities depend on social norms that specify who owes what to whom, and also depend on the histories of particular relationships and the expectations generated over the course of each relationship (Walker 1998/2007). If this is right, a system of social norms furnishes the framework that specifies how we are required to be responsible in different sorts of relationships, and empathetic engagement with our relational partners guides us in applying that framework in particular situations. Indeed, I would venture that Gruen's depiction of the sympathetic adult's instantaneous comforting response to a fearful lost child implicitly rests on cultural understandings about the moral significance of juvenile fear as well as on cultural specifications of strangers' responsibilities to lone children in need.

Of course, all known cultural caches of normative concepts and norms of responsibility are flawed. And Gruen and I agree that empathy can contribute mightily to social critique and moral reform. Likewise, we agree that the barriers to empathy across difference are sometimes formidable but seldom insuperable. What attuned empathetic engagement with another individual's suffering can accomplish is to bring the empathizer close enough to that individual's subjectivity to viscerally acquaint the empathizer with the harmfulness of the treatment or circumstances that cause the other's suffering. For this reason, empathetically prompted imaginative identification with the plight of a different other can expose the need to redraw the boundaries of our responsibilities and to reconfigure our social norms so as to fulfill those responsibilities.

Earlier I mentioned the role of empathy in grasping the differing impacts that a caustic remark may have on psychologically different individuals. Here I add the observation familiar to feminists and critical race theorists that similar treatment can have vastly different consequences for individuals who are differentially positioned with respect to social status and power, and that empathy can play a vital role in understanding the moral significance of those different outcomes.[6] Throughout *Entangled Empathy*, Gruen argues that empathy with nonhuman animals is necessary to prompt reconsideration of human nutritional and ecological practices. Her line of thought brings to mind a major epistemological point that she and I agree on—namely, that empathy across difference, whether demarcated by groups within human society or by divisions between species, requires extensive background knowledge. Without adequate background knowledge, would-be empathizers are at risk of

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projecting their own interests, desires, values, and goals onto individuals who don't share them (56–60).

Gruen's expertise regarding the biological properties of diverse species and the social forms that organize their interactions, together with her personal interactions with members of various species, convinces her that it is possible to empathize with nonhuman animals. In light of my comparative ignorance and relatively limited personal experience with nonhuman animals, I am reluctant to opine as to how accurate and deep inter-species empathy can be or as to which nonhuman species it is possible for humans to empathize with. That said, it goes without saying that the question of how people should behave toward nonhuman animals is an ethical question. Moreover, animal studies scholars, Gruen prime among them, are putting steady pressure on widespread normative beliefs about what counts as morally acceptable treatment of nonhuman animals.[7] Both by generating new and more complete information about the lives of these animals and by demonstrating the fallacies in commonplace rationales for inflicting suffering on them, these scholars' work is reorienting and refining deliberations regarding the implications of settled cultural norms and values with respect to human relations with nonhuman animals.

Unlike empathy's adamant critics, I agree with Gruen that empathy is a valuable moral power. However, I'm a little unsure how morally powerful Gruen thinks empathy is. Although her sharp critique of deontological theories might suggest that she aims to provide a comprehensive account of moral judgment and action, I doubt that empathy can carry all that weight. However, it's possible that her project is less ambitious. In some parts of her book, her project seems to be confined to furnishing an account of noticing moral problems that we've overlooked and correcting our moral misapprehensions. I agree that empathy can foster critique and rectification of received moral understandings. But Gruen goes further and maintains that empathy supplies a remedy for misguided behavior because empathy is morally motivating. In section IV, I'll explore Gruen's proposal to expand empathy's role in moral life beyond moral epistemology.

IV. Empathy and Moral Motivation

I am far less confident than Gruen that empathy is morally motivating. Psychologist Martin Hoffman, whose work Gruen cites, builds moral motivation into his definition of empathy (Hoffman 2011, 233). Thus, the phenomenon he studies under the label empathy includes moral motivation. In my view, however, a philosopher needs to argue for the motivational force of empathy if she wants to endorse that view. So I'll now take up Gruen's defense of the motivational force of empathy.

As we have seen, Gruen holds that we are motivated to "improve our relationships because we don't want to be in 'bad' or 'abusive' ones." Later in her book and implicitly qualifying this claim, she takes up the problems of empathetic suppression and empathetic burnout. Her discussions of these topics make it clear that she is not under the illusion that all or even most people are disposed to engage with others

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empathetically. For this reason, it seems advisable to view her claim about our motivation to improve our relationships as a conditional. That is, if you engage empathetically with your relational partners, you will be motivated to improve your relationships with them.

Recall Gruen's argument (64). After advancing the ontological claim that the identities of persons are constituted in and through their relationships with others, she adduces the facts that each person's actions affect others' wellbeing, and that their weal or woe boomerangs back to affect the original agent's wellbeing. From those premises, she infers the normative claim that persons should "attend to this social/natural entanglement." Finally, she predicts that persons who attend to—that is, empathize with—their relational partners will be motivated to improve their relationships because it "makes sense" to try to make these relationships "more meaningful and more mutually satisfying."

Early in *Entangled Empathy*, Gruen aligns her theory of entangled empathy with care ethics (29–37). Arguably, her defense of the motivational force of empathy parallels the principal tenets of care ethics recast into the language of entanglement and empathy. According to Carol Gilligan, exponents of care ethics understand themselves as relational beings and construe moral problems in terms of webs of connections (Gilligan 1982). For individuals who adhere to an ethic of care, the quality of their relationships is the crux of morality. Thus, they value maintaining those relationships and minimizing harm to their relational partners. Yet, as Gilligan emphasizes, they are not self-sacrificial patsies because they also value self-care.

A major difference between Gilligan's care ethic and Gruen's entangled empathy is that Gilligan is describing how some moral agents (mainly, but not exclusively or all, women and girls) conceptualize and resolve moral problems, whereas Gruen is recommending entangled empathy as the best way for moral agents to lead morally good lives. Because of the prescriptive valence of Gruen's text, the shifting registers of her line of thought give me pause. She seems to be deducing a normative conclusion—people should empathize with those with whom they are entangled—from a metaphysical premise about the constitution of individual identity coupled with factual premises about the ramifying effects of a person's conduct. It's possible that this deduction works, but it would be helpful for Gruen to unpack how it does. Likewise, it would be helpful for her to clarify why people who are motivated to empathize will also be motivated to act altruistically, or to set out what evidence supports her prognostication that people who are motivated to empathize will also be motivated to act altruistically.

Here's one way that her argument might be fleshed out. Let's set aside the dubious idea that people are motivated to empathize with others because they are ontologically relational beings. Presumably there wouldn't be so many people relying on an individualistic, rights-based ethic if that were true. Let us suppose that people are motivated to know what's going on around them if only to avoid harm to themselves, and let's suppose that empathizing with others is a good way to keep track of what nearby organisms are up to. Adapting Gilligan's point that care thinkers are committed to caring for themselves as well as others—a point that Gruen echoes

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(93)—Gruen might contend that people desire their own flourishing. Now, reiterating Gruen's observation that the way people treat others redounds to their own well-being, and invoking the principle that to will an end is to will the means to that end, it follows that people ought to be motivated to do what it takes to make their relationships as good as possible. In other words, since your own flourishing depends on the wellbeing of those with whom you are in relation, being altruistically motivated is necessary to your own flourishing.

Whether or not this argument would stand up to scrutiny, I doubt that Gruen would embrace it. One problem is that it downplays relationality, altruism, and care for others and drifts toward individualism, prudence, and self-interest. Contrary to the spirit of entangled empathy, it renders the value of empathetically motivated altruism contingent on the benefits that accrue to the caring agent. Another problem is that it implicitly shrinks the scope of moral responsibility much more than Gruen (or I) would accept. After all, prudence requires only that you pay attention to those others who could affect you adversely or beneficially. But the aim of entangled empathy is to enlarge people's moral purview to include endangered species in distant places, not to mention caged animals and animals bred for slaughter closer to home. But since none of the depredations or miseries these animals endure are likely to have any immediate impact on many Westerners' lives, I expect that Gruen would repudiate this defense of entangled empathy, and I wouldn't urge her to change her mind.

I'll conclude by expressing a couple of lingering reservations I have about importing moral motivation into empathy. For what it's worth, philosophical precedent distinguishes sympathy from empathy in part by ascribing moral motivation to sympathy but not to empathy. I don't regard that as dispositive. At most, it creates a presumption against attaching moral motivation to empathy for the sake of averting confusion.

A second reason against including moral motivation in empathy is more persuasive. Suppose that you have empathetically gained understanding of what is ailing someone, and that you have mobilized relevant moral norms to figure out what you should do about it. Still, you may refrain from acting as you know you should. To deny this would be to fly in the face of a great deal of empirical evidence to the contrary. Also troubling, averring that empathy ensures that you'll act on your insights into others' subjectivities and your assessments of how you ought to respond turns empathy into something of a moral panacea, which seems farfetched to me. Is it really plausible that a single moral capability, even granting that it's as affectively and intellectually complex a capability as Gruen says it is, could be the solution to all our moral quandaries and failings?

Finally, I would argue that Gruen could scale down the ambitions of *Entangled Empathy* without in the least diminishing its value. Limiting her project to demonstrating the contribution of empathy to apprehending the moral import of others' subjectivities would have sufficed to ensure the significance of her book. Rescuing empathy from its critics and extending its reach beyond the human world are surely major philosophical accomplishments.

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Notes

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all parenthetical page citations refer to Gruen's *Entangled Empathy* (Gruen 2015).

2. Perhaps Gruen's account of sympathy has been influenced by the commercialization of sympathy in the form of products like condolence cards. It seems to me, though, that as a rule such products serve as substitutes for, not expressions of, genuine sympathy.

3. Unaccountably, Gruen seems to equate pity and sympathy as equally compatible with indifference.

4. My thinking here is deeply indebted to Margaret Walker's *Moral Understandings* (Walker 1998/2007).

5. I borrow Walker's phraseology (Walker 1998/2007).

6. For detailed discussion of my views regarding empathy among women who occupy different positions in multiple hierarchies of domination and subordination and the question of feminist solidarity across difference, see my "A Modest Feminist Sentimentalism: Empathy and Moral Understanding" (Meyers forthcoming). I also discuss the role of empathy in interpreting autobiographical stories of human rights abuse in chapter 4 of Meyers 2016.

7. In particular, see Gruen 2011.

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