

What an [En]tangled Web We Weave: Emotions, Motivation, and Rethinking Us and the “Other”

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In Entangled Empathy, Lori Gruen offers an alternative ethic for our relationships with animals. In this article, I examine Gruen’s account of entangled empathy by first focusing on entangled empathy’s relation to the moral emotions of sympathy, compassion, and other emotions. I then challenge Gruen’s account of how entangled empathy moves us to attend to others. Lastly, and without intending to place humans at the center of the conversation, I reflect on the ways entangled empathy can help us solve some human problems—particularly the racial divide in the United States.

Entangled Empathy is not only a philosophically rich and illuminating way to view ethics, but it is also a practical and accessible text that provides a novel way to respond to and reimagine our relationships with others. In *Entangled Empathy*, Lori Gruen demystifies empathy, defends it, and directs us to a particular target: non-human animals. On her view, entangled empathy is not only an emotion or cognition but a type of caring perception. She denies that it is a panacea or easy solution to all of our problems, for she claims that her account of empathy is a process that requires not only recognition and understanding but also practice and work. Gruen also defends her account of empathy against empathy skeptics like Jesse Prinz and Paul Bloom, who paint empathy with a broad stroke by claiming that empathy is not helpful in ethics (Prinz 2011; Bloom 2014). Gruen argues that empathy skeptics’ real target is unreflective empathy. Entangled empathy escapes their criticisms because entangled empathy is reflective; it “directs our attention to the things that need moral response, can help us provide context and understanding about what the right response would be . . . [and it] can provide us with a more accurate picture of who we are and what our responsibilities to others might be” (Gruen 2015, 56).

Skeptics like Prinz and Bloom focus their attention on the empathy we extend to human animals, but Gruen challenges us to focus our attention on nonhuman animals. We can empathize with a bat by imagining what it is like to be a bat, to be in their shoes, or “take on their wings.” We can also empathize by “catching the emotions” of dogs, cats, and other animals. Gruen’s account, however, takes us much further than mere feeling and imagination. Entangled empathy calls us not just to imagine what it is like to be a bat, but to recognize that we are already in relationships with bats and are called upon to be responsive by attending to their needs, vulnerabilities, and hopes. I see Gruen’s account of entangled empathy as not merely an account of emotion, cognition, and perception but also as an account of care, duty, and moral motivation.

If there is any such thing as preaching to the choir, I consider Lori the preacher and myself a choir member. I am vegan, and all vegans have an obligation to obnoxiously announce their identity whenever they can. The only reason I do not have a pet is because I can imagine myself “in their paws” and I have concluded that a small apartment in New York City will not contribute to their flourishing. Despite these facts, I found myself thinking differently, even changed, after reading *Entangled Empathy*. It is hard to disagree with anything Gruen has written in the text. Therefore, my comments will be a combination of reflections, considerations, and questions about emotions, motivation, and the application of entangled empathy.

I want to begin by focusing my comments on entangled empathy’s relation to the moral emotions of sympathy, compassion, and other emotions, and I consider to what extent entangled empathy can stand on its own. I then go on to say something about what moves us to attend to others. Finally, and without intending to place humans at the center of the conversation, I think about entangled empathy in practice by reflecting on the ways it can help us solve some human problems, particularly the racial divide in the United States.

OTHER EMOTIONS

Gruen notes that in the care tradition, empathy, sympathy, and compassion are moral emotions that focus on different forms of attention. She says, “all of these forms of moral attention recognize that reason cannot be isolated from embodied emotional experiences and thus provide important tools for rethinking our relationship” (Gruen 2015, 37). Instead of showing how sympathy and compassion are connected to or have any role in her account of entangled empathy, Gruen makes a point to distinguish entangled empathy from these other moral emotions. She claims that both compassion and sympathy are elicited only in distress. Sympathy does not involve feeling with the other and has less of a motivating grip. Entangled empathy, however, involves relationships that are not only about suffering; entangled empathy also has more of a motivational grip than the other two moral emotions, and it involves feeling what the other feels.

These three emotions also share similarities, according to Gruen: they all are directed at the wellbeing of others; agents are able to maintain their own attitudes

(although in empathy they can share the attitudes of others); and although sympathy can be condescending, entangled empathy can be inappropriate and epistemically inaccurate. Given these similarities and differences, I wonder if sympathy and compassion have a closer relationship to entangled empathy than Gruen describes. More specifically, I wonder: What is or what can be the role or relationship of sympathy and compassion in entangled empathy? Does entangled empathy consist of other moral emotions or lead us to them? And is entangled empathy self-sufficient?

Gruen notes that entangled empathy consists of emotion and cognition, but I am not sure exactly what Gruen means by “emotion” here. Emotion could mean the fellow-feeling we share with others when we empathize with them. I can feel sadness at an animal’s misfortune. I can also feel happy about an animal’s joy. If entangled empathy is not only about perception but also about relationships, then emotion is not limited to the emotions we share with other animals, but it also includes the emotions we have in response to the situation of animals. In Adam Smith’s account of empathy, it is not merely feeling what others feel but feeling what others ought to feel or feeling on behalf of others. Smith’s account of empathy is able to capture what David Hume’s account does not. For Hume, a person’s behavior is the effect that causes us to have an idea of that person’s feelings (Hume 1978). This idea of his or her feeling is directly transmitted into the very passion itself. Stephen Darwall thinks this is the most rudimentary and primitive form of empathy (Darwall 1998). Even babies are able to have empathy because this kind of empathy (emotional contagion) works through mimicry. A baby can cry at the sound of other babies crying. In doing so, the other babies’ fear or sadness is transmitted into the very passion itself in the empathetic baby. However, on Smith’s view, I can feel anger at an animal’s suffering and not share the sadness of the suffering animal. In Smithian empathy, rather than respond to others’ emotion, we respond to their situation from their standpoint. “By the imagination we place ourselves in [the other’s] situation,” and imagine “what we ourselves should feel in the like situation” (Smith 1976, 267). We do not copy their feelings as we imagine them; instead, we place ourselves in their situation and imagine how we would feel if we were they. This feeling does not have to be a mirrored emotion. It can be a distinct feeling in response to the other’s situation. If this is the case, then entangled empathy can consist of, but is not limited to, emotions like sympathy and compassion as well as other emotions like resentment. If entangled empathy can consist of a range of emotions, this still does not settle the question of what the relationship is between entangled empathy and other emotions. I want now to consider this relationship in more detail by considering several possibilities.

One possibility is that entangled empathy is a site of development for other emotions. If entangled empathy helps us to provide context and understanding about what the right and just response would be, entangled empathy can also be a process in which these other emotions are nurtured and developed. For example, if a concern about emotions is their fittingness and size, then the recognition of our relationship with animals and the call to their needs and vulnerabilities will help determine what kinds of emotions will aid in these relationships. Entangled empathy also can help

guide us to what is a fitting and appropriate affective response to these relationships. On this view, I imagine entangled empathy as a moral process that helps us frame what is morally salient. Within this process, perception does not do all the work by itself. Rather, emotions can help signal to us when our relationships have increased or decreased in quality. They can also help us to identify a need to transform our relationships. In the case of good relationships, these moral emotions can help us maintain the quality of our relationships. This point is related to another possibility.

Perhaps moral emotions arise from entangled empathy. Gruen's claim that sympathy and compassion respond to distress, but entangled empathy is not limited to that domain, does not exclude the possibility that sympathy and compassion can still arise from entangled empathy. If entangled empathy calls us to be responsive and responsible in our relationships by attending to others, then entangled empathy could "activate" compassion or sympathy in moments of distress and "activate" other emotions in moments where there is no suffering. If this activation language is too strong, we can say that entangled empathy can lead to these other emotions.

Smith thinks this is possible with empathy when he says, "the compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation" (Smith 1976, 12). For Smith, compassion arises from empathy. In other words, empathy can lead us to compassion. Likewise, entangled empathy can lead us to other moral emotions. For example, I can recognize that I am in relationship with animals and should be concerned about what kind of relationship I have with them. I have a caring perception of them and recognize that I am called to tend to their needs and interests. As a result, I am more prone to be motivated to help end animals' suffering (for example, show sympathy) because entangled empathy has made me more sensitive to their wellbeing. I do not think that only empathy can give rise to sympathy, but this does not change the fact that empathy is an emotion that can give rise to sympathy.

Darwall turns to experimental work by C. D. Batson and his colleagues to support the claim that sympathy can rise from empathy (Darwall 1998). In one study, participants were divided into two groups: high-empathy and low-empathy subjects. High-empathy subjects were those who were told to imagine how the person they are observing feels. They were told to empathize. Low-empathy subjects were those who were told to pay attention to information they learn from observing the person. Batson and his colleagues found that high-empathy subjects "show a remarkable disposition to help even when they can easily escape doing so without vicarious personal distress" (Darwall 1998, 273). Darwall calls the motivational state to help "sympathy." Darwall takes this as evidence that there is a psychological connection between empathy and sympathy. For Darwall, "[empathy] . . . brings the other's relation to his situation into view in [a] way that can engage sympathy on his behalf" (271). Similarly, entangled empathy can give rise to sympathy in ways that can lead to helping behavior.

Darwall's account also differs from Gruen's account of entangled empathy in two ways. First, for Darwall, empathy can lead to sympathy, but he does not claim that empathy can lead to other moral emotions. Second, by arguing that empathy focuses

on the situation, and sympathy focuses on the person in the situation, Darwall favors sympathy over empathy. Darwall claims that when we are empathetic, we act out of distress that we feel. However, when we are sympathetic, we act in response to the distress of others. Those who are highly empathetic can suffer depression and anxiety. Influenced by Darwall, Bloom concludes that “a high level of empathy does not make one a good person and that a low level does not make one a bad person. Being a good person likely is more related to distanced feelings of compassion and kindness, along with intelligence, self-control, and a sense of justice” (Bloom 2014).

Unlike in Darwall’s account of empathy, it is possible that if animals are not suffering, entangled empathy can still lead a moral agent to other moral emotions. With entangled empathy, a concern for the quality of the relationship can lead me to love in order to maintain the relationship. Entangled empathy can even lead me to feel shame or guilt when the quality of the relationship declines or is in need of improvement. An adequate response to Darwall’s distress concern is what I call the “moderation claim.” Too much of any emotion or attitude is bound to cause problems. At least Aristotle thought so, hence his doctrine of the mean. Too much anger is bound to cause distress. Too much sympathy can also cause distress. However, entangled empathy lacks the distressful fate that Darwall and Bloom are concerned about. Rather than merely feeling what others feel or only imagining ourselves in their suffering shoes, entangled empathy does not, by definition, constitute distress. Entangled empathy goes beyond only feeling what others feel to also having a caring perception—a recognition that we are in relationships with others and are responsible in these relationships. It is an experiential process that is a blend of emotion and cognition. Entangled empathy does not require that distress be a necessary or sufficient part of the process.

It could be possible that entangled empathy has no need for these moral emotions and I am only making a futile fuss. In *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha Nussbaum argues that empathy does not contribute anything of ethical importance entirely on its own (Nussbaum 2001). To support this, she notes that a sadistic torturer can feel empathy to achieve his sadistic ends. The Nazis were able to persuade Germans of the dehumanizing position of Jews. They accomplished this not only by blocking empathy, but also, by blocking empathy, they obstructed compassion. On her view, empathy by itself is not enough. How different is entangled empathy? Does entangled empathy require collaboration with other moral emotions to achieve its ends or is it self-sufficient? Is recognition of our relationship, fellow-feeling, and caring perception doing all the work? I am worried that they are not.

It seems impossible that one who has entangled empathy could use entangled empathy for sadistic ends. But the reasons this would not work are not just the recognition of the relationship and its aims, but also the moral emotions that are either embedded in entangled empathy or that follow from it. For this reason, I am sympathetic to the need to justify why the account is called entangled empathy and not “entangled sympathy or compassion.” However, I worry about the implications of making a strong contrast between entangled empathy and other emotions and excluding these specific emotions from an account of entangled empathy. After a

discussion of emotions, it makes sense now to turn to the concept of being moved that Gruen presents in the book.

BEING MOVED

Gruen argues that we are in all kinds of relationships that constitute who we are. Recognition of this, Gruen believes, will motivate reflection on the type and quality of our relationships. This reflection will move us to attend to our particular relationships in the hopes of making them better. There are two ways that we can view being moved: (1) in an affective sense (for example, I was moved by the dog's face) and (2) in a motivational sense (for example, I was moved to attend to the dog). In the affective sense, an object or event leads one to feel something. In the motivational sense, an object or event leads one to do something—although one can also feel something as a result. I take it that Gruen is using moved in the motivational sense, so I read her relationality argument as, in addition to other things, providing a motivational account of what entangled empathy can do.

Although I believe that the recognition of the relationship will at least move us to reflect on the quality of the relationship, I am not sure that this reflection alone will move us to attend to these particular relationships. I do not take Gruen's use of reflection to be about theoretical reasoning. I am clear that the reflection she refers to is reflection on the quality of our relationships and not reason in the abstract sense. Nevertheless, I reject the role of this kind of reflection just as I reject Kantian motivation. Kant thinks that reflection on the moral law (through the categorical imperative) will move us to obey it. I have enough experience with humans to know that if we were actually moved morally by reflection alone, we would be better and the world would be a better place. I do not doubt that reflection will play a part in being moved, but I think that being moved also comes about by other features within entangled empathy. I claim that to be moved to attend to these relationships will depend on: (a) how much we care about the object of the relationship, (b) whether we favor immediate over distant relationships or give value to these distinctions, and (c) whether agents actually value the quality of the relationship.

Consider the following example while also forgiving me for using an example of distress:

Michelle and her friends are animal lovers who decided to take a trip to Central Park. While walking in the park, they noticed that as in other urban cities, the horses were not getting enough water. They noticed that the horses' job required them to walk and carry many people with little time for rest. This did not sit well with Michelle and her friends. Few people in the park took notice of this mistreatment. After a couple of hours, Michelle and her friends soon became tired from walking in the park. A horse and carriage rolled by and the driver asked them if they wanted a ride. Although they were very tired, Michelle and her friends rejected the

driver's invitation. Recognizing their relationship with horses and their interests in their wellbeing, Michelle and her friends responded with indignation and refused to patronize the horse and carriage service. They then proceeded to give the horse water, rubbing it gently while trying to get the driver to empathize with the horses. Michelle and her friends did not want to be complicit in the mistreatment of horses.

What moved the agents to attend to the vulnerabilities and needs of the horse? It appears that it was more than just reflection on the type and quality of their relationship with animals. They were moved because they genuinely care for horses' wellbeing. They value horses for their own sake. They do not see their relationship with horses as a distant, impersonal relationship, or as conducted only through a mediator. They see themselves as being in relationship with animals, and this closeness moves them to do something instead of leaving it up to others. They not only reflect on the quality of the relationship they have with animals, but they are concerned about the type of relationship they have with animals. This matters to them. Not only do these agents have entangled empathy, but this empathy is not limited to that particular horse. They have entangled empathy for other horses and animals. As a result, these features will move them to respond to other animals in other contexts.

In summary, what moves agents to attend to animals is not only reflection on the quality of the relationship. They have to at least care about the animals and care about the quality of their relationship with animals in order to be motivated to attend to them. Moreover, being moved requires that there be no favoritism for a particular kind of relationship (for example, pet relationships over wild animal relationships). This allows an agent to be moved no matter how close or distant the animal may be from them.

OTHER APPLICATIONS

I want to conclude my remarks by looking at the human-animal application of entangled empathy. I think Gruen's account of entangled empathy achieves what she aims for, and it has tremendously changed the way I view my relationship with animals. Although Gruen's focus in the book is to provide an alternative ethic for our relationships with animals, I cannot help but think about our relationships with human animals.

Although there has been moral progress in the United States, there are still cities that are segregated, the wealth gap between blacks and whites is very wide, xenophobic speech has become acceptable political rhetoric, prisons are disproportionately filled with black and brown people, and biased practices, policies, and policing have a tremendous impact on prisoners. One of the solutions to these problems is the "empathy cure" that says, "If only whites could have empathy for blacks, things would change" or "If only these groups could understand each other, things would be different." The empathy cure is not just some "hope for the future" that is unsupported by

empirical evidence. The idea has been tested in psychological laboratories. Andrew Todd and his colleagues performed five experiments that tested the impact of perspective-taking on racial bias (Todd et al. 2011). In one experiment, subjects were shown a video of a white man and black man, respectively, shopping in a department store and being stopped by the police. The black man clearly suffered discrimination. The subjects were divided into groups in which they were either asked to imagine what the black man was feeling, to imagine themselves in the black man's situation, or to remain objective. They were then given a test to measure unconscious bias. The groups who were asked to engage in perspective-taking were less biased than the objective group. In another experiment, subjects were shown a photo of an African-American male. They were instructed to take his perspective or be objective. Afterwards, they wrote an essay about a day in his life. The experiment did not stop there. Subjects were also asked to meet individually with an African-American woman, who, unbeknownst to them, was part of the research team but blind to the experimental hypothesis and conditions. They simply talked with her in front of a hidden camera about their psychology course. The African-American woman reported that she had more positive interactions with subjects who were part of the perspective-taking group. The researchers concluded:

Although it certainly cannot promise a full understanding of the harsh realities of discrimination, perspective taking may help to decrease the psychological alienation and mistrust that characterizes contemporary intergroup relations and thereby encourage more—and more positive—intergroup contact. (Todd et al. 2011, 744)

The researchers admit that perspective-taking or empathy is just one strategy among many that has the potential to increase positive racial interactions. Likewise, seeing empathy as a panacea is mistaken, but I do think empathy can help. However, no matter the hope we may have for empathy, there is also social-psychology research that may give us reason to doubt that empathy can help.

Researchers claim that there exists a “racial empathy gap.” The first study to explore the racial empathy gap was conducted by X. Zuo Xu and S. Han X. Wang (Xu and Wang 2009). The researchers showed white and Asian participants photographs of white and Asian individuals in painful and painless situations. By analyzing the region of the brain typically involved in empathy, the researchers concluded that participants empathized more with members of their in-group than with out-group members. This doubt about empathy's ability to extend to those outside of our in-group seems to support the criticisms of Bloom and Prinz, who argue that empathy is biased and localized. Prinz notes that we have more empathy for those close to us and less empathy for those farther away, thus empathy is distributed inequitably. How can an account of entangled empathy help us out of this dilemma?

In previous work, I have considered how Adam Smith's notion of habitual sympathy can help us extend empathy to distant others. By habitual sympathy, I mean affection built up over time that creates empathy. This, for Smith, is a way out of our localized empathy, and he suggests we can get there through face-to-face contact.

After reading *Entangled Empathy*, I think we have the tools to take Smith's idea even further. Perhaps one solution to our racial problem is not that we need only try to befriend members of every group and establish face-to-face contact in order to create affection and empathy. This may be impossible for some, depending on their geographical locations. Gruen helps us to see that we are already entangled. No matter how distant or different, we are already in relationships with one another. How is this so?

For Gruen, granting moral considerability to animals does not depend on their similarities to humans. Although some animals are similar to humans socially and rationally, these same animals also differ from humans in many ways. Gruen thinks that "by overlooking differences and solely focusing on similarities," we can overlook "distinctively valuable aspects of the lives of others" (Gruen 2015, 36). Overlooking these differences can also be dangerous because by doing so we may fail to attend to animals' different needs. What qualifies nonhuman animals for moral consideration are not their similarities to humans; what gives them moral consideration is the fact that they are sentient beings with experiences and whose lives can be better or worse.

Similarly, what makes humans worthy of moral consideration and thus targets of entangled empathy is not their biological or social similarities to one another. It is not because some humans are part of our family tree, have the same skin color that we do, or live in the same neighborhoods that we do that qualifies them for moral consideration. Human animals are targets of our entangled empathy because they are also sentient beings whose lives can be better or worse. *Entangled Empathy* keeps us mindful of differences in context and experiences so that we do not see difference as a barrier to empathy. This moral considerability also puts us into an ethical relation. Gruen notes that "being in an ethical relation involves, in part, being able to understand and respond to another's needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, perspectives etc., not simply by positing, from one's own point of view, what they might or should be but by working to try to grasp them from the perspective of the other" (Gruen 2012, 227). Note that Gruen does not claim that we are in personal relationships (for example, family and friends) with other human animals. Families are a group of people who love and care for each other and are often bonded by respect and common interests. Friendship requires some degree of intimacy, mutuality, and shared activity. Relationships of inequality, such as relationships with animals and the disabled, may fail to reach this friendship requirement. However, an ethical relation requires only a relationship between sentient beings.

On the empathy *simpliciter* view, we can empathize only with a restricted few. In Smith's view, we can put ourselves in the shoes of others within our intimate circles. The problem for Gruen is that when it comes to animals, this can lead to an anthropomorphizing that is problematic. Smith's account also limits empathy to humans who are close to us. According to Hume, we can catch the emotions of others who are having an emotional experience that is visible to others. However, this limits empathy to those who are visible to us. We are not able to catch the emotions of those we cannot see and who are not able to make themselves visible to us. According to the racial empathy literature, we are more prone to empathize

with those who are of our own race. This limits empathy to those who look like us. Laurie Paul recently argued in *Transformative Experience* that “humans vary so much and so deeply, that even small differences (contextually) in experiences between people can prevent us from knowing what it’s like to be a different type of person” (Paul 2014, 5). Paul notes that unless you have had the relevant experiences, what it is like to be a person or an animal very different from yourself is, in a certain fundamental way, inaccessible to you. We can imagine experiences we have not had, but Paul thinks we cannot imagine them enough to let us know what it is really like to be a bat, dog, or human with an implanted chip. We need to have the experience itself to know. Imagining would not be enough. The empathy accounts of Smith, Hume, and Paul place restrictions on for whom we can and cannot have empathy. However, Gruen’s account of entangled empathy expands our empathy targets. It makes it possible to have empathy for animals and also for humans who are not in our intimate circles, are not visible to us, are of a different race and ethnicity, and who have had transformative experiences. The objects of our entangled empathy are not as limited as the objects of our empathy *simpliciter*. This is because of Gruen’s account of moral considerability and ethical relationships. Gruen’s account is influenced by the care tradition, according to which we are interdependent but we also have agency and are participants in the world. We are dependent on one another to survive and this level of dependence varies. Our lives being better or worse depends on us all responding to one another’s needs and vulnerabilities. These relationships shape who we are and have life-altering effects. We may need to create platonic relationships. We may need to seek out romantic relationships. However, given that we are already interdependent, sentient beings with experiences, this puts us in an ethical relationship with others—a relationship that we do not need to create or seek out in order to have.

The challenge is to reflect on and care enough to want these relationships to be of good quality—entangled empathy is not just about imagining another’s perspective; instead, it goes beyond mere perception to a caring perception. Different from just having empathy, this perception will change how we see the world, one another, and ourselves. Perhaps what the racial-empathy gap research really shows is not that we empathize with those who are, by definition, part of our in-group. Perhaps what it reveals is that we extend empathy to those whom we only think are part of our in-group. *Entangled Empathy* is a call for us to radically change whom we cognitively and affectively think we are in relationship with, whom we share familiarity with, and whom we have responsibilities to. Entangled empathy reminds us that “in-group” is a wider concept than we thought. Although empathy could be biased (at least prior to habitual sympathy), it is impossible for entangled empathy to be. This is because the problem of bias in empathy is due to our limited conception of in-group. However, if entangled empathy enables us to see that we are already in relationships with others and that there are more people in our in-group than we thought, we need not encounter the problem of bias that we find with empathy *simpliciter*.

It is difficult to test the effectiveness of ethical theories. Even if we were able to, as Gruen has noted, the lab world is very different from the real world. Nevertheless, I think that engaging in the exercise of changing the way we see one another and ourselves is a radical idea that has the potential to transform our world of relations. I do not think, however, that the only uptake of entangled empathy is that it changes how we see one another. This is why Gruen refers to entangled empathy as a caring perception instead of merely as a perception. Entangled empathy gives us a more “accurate picture of . . . what our responsibilities to others might be” (Gruen 2015, 56). It is as much about action as it is about affect and perception. As Gruen notes, it directs our attention to things that need a moral response.

As a result, there is a difference between empathetic responses and entangled empathetic responses. Empathetic responses are responses that come about because of empathy *simpliciter*. Entangled empathetic responses are responses that come about because of entangled empathy. Let us return to the example of Michelle and her friends. They see themselves as being in relationship with horses. They have entangled empathy. When they see the horses being mistreated in the park, they are moved to respond because of this entangled empathy. They respond with indignation and refuse to be complicit in the horses’ mistreatment. They also rebuke and encourage the driver to treat the horse with dignity. On Gruen’s account, entangled empathy is about trying to make our relationships better. This means trying to attend to their vulnerabilities and promote their wellbeing. As a result, Michelle and her friends’ entangled empathetic response is both a moral and a political response. Their entangled empathy not only leads to or informs their political response, but it is entangled with those responses.

This is different from the relationship between empathy *simpliciter* and moral and political responses. For example, I can imagine myself in your shoes and still not do anything to place you into new shoes. This empathy need not lead to political action. I can just have an empathetic response by using my imagination without engaging in any action. In addition, not all political responses are entangled empathetic responses. I can give you new shoes without seeing myself in relationship with you. This can lead to ineffective political action. People can respond structurally to the mistreatment of an oppressed group. Nevertheless, if they do not view themselves as being in an ethical relationship with the group, they could respond to the group in ways that are paternalistic and harmful. In order to decrease crime, for example, a police commissioner may decide to put more police officers in urban communities. This is a political response to rising crime. However, if the police force does not see itself as being in an ethical relationship with members of those communities, they may treat those members as criminals instead of as citizens. The police may treat them like a community that needs to be policed instead of like a community that needs to be served. Without entangled empathy, they may not have “an accurate picture of who [they are] and what [their] responsibilities to others might be” (Gruen 2015, 56). Political responses lack an important ethical and epistemic dimension when they are not also entangled empathetic responses.

GETTING BEYOND A COLD-BLOODED ETHIC

Empathy skeptics may be successful at leading some to have second thoughts about choosing empathy over a more cold-blooded ethic. I want to end by considering whether Gruen can rescue us from this cold-blooded route. Bloom argues that putting yourself into someone else's shoes and feeling others' pain is a bad thing and it makes the world worse. Our failures to make the world better are motivated by an affective rush, an empathetic engagement. Governments use empathy to persuade their citizens to go to war, and then we are surprised about the awful consequences of that decision. Bloom does not think it is a coincidence. He claims that empathy ignores the long-term consequences of our actions because when we empathize we are focused on feelings and not on their consequences. Bloom claims there are some people who give because they get a buzz out of it. Others give first by asking, "what does the world need?" and "how can I make things better?" Bloom thinks that the latter makes a bigger change in the world. He suggests that we act in a more cold-blooded way by asking, "how can I help other people?" instead of self-moralizing through empathy. He thinks we should respond with nonempathetic compassion, which he describes as a "more distanced love and kindness and concern for others" (Bloom 2016). I think Bloom and those convinced by his argument will benefit from Gruen's account of entangled empathy. Bloom and Gruen have two different accounts of empathy, but they are both focused on action and consequences. Instead of taking the cold-blooded route, Gruen recognizes that asking "how can I help?" requires a caring perception, not cold-bloodedness. If we do not recognize how entangled we are, we will never understand the moral force of the help question and our relationship to the object that we want to help. We are not cold, isolated individuals who are distant and disconnected from the world and yet can still make moral decisions on behalf of others without any problems. Cold-blooded help is what the police commissioner provided in the example above. I have argued that this creates more problems than it solves. There is nothing wrong with being and feeling connected. This connection can help us pay more attention to the consequences of our actions and to those who may be affected by them. There is nothing unhelpful about seeing that our webs are not meant to destroy or ignore the "other" but rather are meant to show how connected we really are and what we are called to do as a result. This is the start of something special, not something to be wary of.

NOTE

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