THE ENCHANTMENT OF ETHICS:

EMPATHY, CHARACTER, AND THE ART OF MORAL LIVING

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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My dissertation explores the role of narrative in the cultivation of empathy for ethical attitudes and behaviors. I begin by exploring an uncommon view of human nature, concluding that we are not autonomously individualistic rational deciders but ultrasocial moral intuitionists. Intersubjective relations run deep and provide the basis by which we shape the meaning of our lives as individuals in communities. It is because of this that we need to reconsider and redesign our moral cultivation programs both for the child-rearing years and throughout adult life. I look at empathy, the means of our mutual understanding, care, and help, as a key site for moral cultivation. I explicate the neurophysiological bases of empathy, both conscious and unconscious. Empathy is on the continuum with very primitive, automatic mirroring systems, which through varying levels of mimicry facilitate social cognition and moral insight and action.

Empathy enables us to enter into the worlds and feelings of others in rich and full-bodied ways and can reveal their full subjectivity. Such experiences can incite empathic regard and compassionate action, but empathy, like all of our psycho-social capacities, requires cultivation to develop its skillfulness in practice. Narrative is an obvious means of cultivating empathy because it is humanity's primary meaning-making structure, utilizing the empathic imagination to seduce us into the inner worlds of others. Through

narrative dramatizations of experience, we learn to see and feel from another's point of view, sensitizing us to their inner states and outward behavior. Such sensitivity can facilitate improving our moral attitudes and action by dislodging preoccupation with self-concern and instigating higher regard for others. In narratives we can imaginatively practice various moral actions, witnessing possible results.

Reflective engagement can then bring the moral insights of these imaginative experiences to life in our practical worlds by attuning us to what is morally salient. Narrative engagement is thus a natural and vital part of shaping empathic moral perception for compassionate action. By reading and feeling with others reflectively, we can expand empathy for the pluralistic communities in which we live, make meaning, and grow.

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and anger have taught me more about the meaning and complexity of moral life than any

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HUMANS ARE ULTRASOCIAL MORAL INTUITIONISTS

From the time we are born, the narrative cradle of story rocks us to the
collective heartbeat of our species, ushering us across the threshold of
consciousness and into the domain of humanity.
~Marshall Gregory

If I were God, I'd work on the reach of empathy.
~Franz de Waal

Praise belongs to virtue for from this people become apt
at performing beautiful actions.
~Aristotle

Introduction

Human beings are social animals. We know this to be generally true, but we may

not fully appreciate how social we are or the import of that sociality on how we think and

behave. Recent research in the cognitive and social sciences reveals that we learn how to

be human by mimicking our parents and care givers throughout our formative years.

This mimicry is hard-wired in our neurophysiology and is an important means of

apprehending the meaning of gestures, events, and situations, as well as intuiting our role

as these events increasingly invite and implicate us in their unfolding. With proper care

and attentiveness to our personal, cognitive, and physiological needs in infancy and

childhood, we will mature into reasonably well-adapted and socialized adults. That being

said, the challenges of moral living are sometimes such that general child-rearing

practices are not sufficient to aid us in attending or responding appropriately to complex

moral situations.

We may resist what we believe we ought to do when we are inconvenienced by

someone else's need, or when the wellbeing of me or mine is pitted against the wellbeing

of others. As we examine what tips the balances in favor of self-interest or concern for the other in the psychology of ethics, feelings emerge as having a strong motive force. We have historically believed that reason was an important force for morality, for self-overcoming, but empirical literature suggests that emotions have more power for ethics than we have previously appreciated. Whether we experience feelings of concern, guilt, or other social emotions, we seem to be driven to act by feelings more than by rational commitments.

When we are compelled by regard for the other, we often employ the term empathy. We empathize with our suffering friends and even with strangers. Empathy allows us to feel feelings that resonate with other people's feelings and situations. Sometimes empathy makes us cry with them, and sometimes we turn away from their suffering because it is too much for us. Empathy has become an important area of research and insight to aid ethical theorists. I define empathy as *a neurophysiological process that facilitates our social cognition and relationality by provoking in us cognitive-affective responses that are resonant with the perceived[1] feelings, experiences, and/or situations of others*. Understanding how empathy works in social cognition can help us to construct more apt moral theories and cultivation practices. Empathy is able to be shaped morally, suggesting that it is a useful site for moral cultivation to strengthen, expand, and deepen our capacity for humane regard and benevolent action for others.

David Hume (1751) argues that it is by virtue of such a developed moral concern that we are bound more closely to the lives of others, actually deepening our own flourishing (43). Because we are extremely social, we thrive in and through our

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[1] By "perceived," I include non-conscious perceptions.

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relationships, even when they demand much of us. We seek affiliation and meaning in community. Empathy facilitates this by enabling us to synchronize and sympathize with others such that we can fluidly and automatically understand people and situations and act well within them. This enables us to assume our appropriate roles social situations. As social life gets exponentially more complicated in adolescent and particularly adult life, the demands on moral perception and receptivity require increasingly more sophisticated skills.

Life experience can teach us a lot about social situations and meanings, aiding us is identifying and applying patterns. And yet, as Marshall Gregory (2009) points out, experience alone is no teacher (20-21). In order to successfully navigate social situations and relations, we need interpretive guidance throughout our childhood and youth, which includes instruction in the skills of intuiting, reflecting, analyzing, and correcting with a complexity that matches our developmental stages. Gregory claims that our passion for stories leads us over and over again through the very structures that will show us ourselves, our own lives interpreted, giving meaning to what could otherwise be a loose and disjointed string of events. Stories offer us insight into the experiences of others from which we can build our understanding of the meanings and standards of social life. Stories are important for self-understanding, for understanding the other, and for grasping the roles that we are to play in the creative spaces of relational life, in short, for making our lives intelligible and meaningful. This is why Jonathan Gottchall describes us as storytelling animals (2). The power of stories for human living is that they can affect how we feel, how we think, how we see and how we behave in the world. In this work, *I am investigating empathy's role for ethics and the role of narratives in shaping our*

empathic moral perception and sensitivity. It seems to me that through our engagement with certain types of stories we develop our capacity for empathic engagement with others, and this provokes us to act more often, and with better insight, in helping others. I will show how the enticement of stories invites us into the pleasure and meaning of interpersonal empathic regard, facilitating stronger communal relations.

In the present chapter, I will explain our profound sociality and how our emotional cognition is essential to social cognition. These insights contradict or at least strongly challenge still-dominant Western views about humans as rationally autonomous individuals. This fuller account of our anthropology, lays the groundwork for understanding our empathic responsivity in ethics in Chapters II-IV. In these chapters, I will explicate the process of empathy in three interrelated areas: neurophysiology, aesthetics, and morality. The fourth chapter explicates how empathy is cultivated for moral responsivity. In Chapter V, I will look at narrativity as the most general way in which humans structure experience and examine how empathy takes us into narratives, shaping the moral feelings that influence behavior. Chapters VI and VII look at narrative empathy, the qualities of moral fiction, and the parallels of reading as a practice and the moral life. I argue that immersion in narratives, along with interpretive guidance and critical reflection, provides practice for the moral imagination to experiment in ethical situations. Such practice can enable one to grow in moral skillfulness and moral character. This, then, is a project aimed at developing moral cultivation projects that result in the growth of our humaneness, moral sensitivity, and motivation to act for the good of others.

Improving our Self-Understanding as Humans

The first task of improving our philosophical anthropology, or our view of human nature, is to turn to the research in the cognitive and social sciences, because our self-understanding as a species has been substantially assisted by the insights found there. We have traditionally understood ourselves as rational decision makers who are autonomous in our thinking and behaving, but the science seems to show that it is rather the case that we are deeply interdependent and that our social cognition is utterly dependent on emotional intelligence. As highly social animals, we rely on the immediacy of reading and responding to behavioral cues which are mostly apprehended through the intuitions, or automatic cognitive processes, including the emotions. The automatic processes can accomplish necessary tasks much more efficiently than controlled conscious processes. For example, when walking, and the sidewalk changes, we effortlessly adjust our footfall to accommodate, often requiring no conscious thought whatsoever. Similarly, we can adjust socially when the social footing changes, without necessarily having to slow down and cogitate on the right shift. Psychologist Jonathan Haidt refers to these automatic processors as *intuitions*.

In much of Western thought, we have denigrated the automatic processes (emotions, intuitions, perceptions) as lower orders of human intelligence. Additionally, many have had great faith in the power of the controlled processes (such as reason) to control behavior. Following Plato, many have believed that if we understood what is good, important, or necessary to good living, we would make better choices and fix our moral errors, health problems, etc. Subsequently, human behaviors could be altered by good arguments and persuasive evidence. If behavior were controlled by the conscious

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mind, then this method ought to work. Learn the right conditions conducive to the character we desire, and implement them. To lose weight, for example, one should eat less and exercise more. Yet, in the U.S., where we abound in health knowledge, obesity is on the rise. Problems like this indicate that a more complex psychology is at work in cognition and behavior. In this chapter, I explore two aspects of our complex psychology that are relevant to moral cognition and behavior: 1) the dependent relation of controlled consciousness on automatic consciousness, and 2) the profundity of our intersubjectivity.

Psychologist Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Happiness Hypothesis* (2006) claims that the discrepancy between what we want to do (i.e., lose weight) and what we end up doing (overeating and being sedentary) is due to the fact that our reason (or what he calls controlled consciousness) does not control our actions most of the time (14). It is more like David Hume's (1739) claim that reason is enslaved to our passions (295). Haidt states that it is not necessarily enslavement, since reason and passion (or automatic consciousness) can work together to achieve the ends that the controlled consciousness wants, but we must dislodge the unfounded faith that we have had in reason as the driver of our behavior. We are neither autonomously independent, nor rationally in control of our behavior according to both Haidt and Hume (Ibid. 354). Haidt (2006) compares human sociality to that of bees, calling us ultra-social (2006 48). In this next section, we will look at the dominant view of humans as rational deciders through its strongest voice, and then survey some of the science that challenges this dominant view.

Not Rational Deciders

There are a number of Western philosophical traditions in which the problems of moral philosophy have been considered largely as rational problems, problems to be

solved via abstract reasoning and logic. Thus there is an emphasis on rational derivations of moral principles and rational methods of persuasion and analysis to address moral problems. Immanuel Kant would be the paradigmatic representative of this view. Kant's moral theory is generally understood as rationalist, meaning that reason is the only reliable guide for moral living. The rationalist view has dominated much of Western thought within and beyond philosophical discourses, and generally relies on what Mark Johnson (1993) calls the *Moral Law folk theory*. This theory claims that "morality must be grounded in Universal Reason" (22), so, the principles of morality are universal and discovered by rational processes. This *Moral Law Folk Theory* undergirds any theological or humanistic ethical system in which "reason can discern the appropriate moral laws for a given [ethical problem]" (22). Most versions of the Moral Law view claim absolute universality of principles, assume a mind-body dualism, and a reason-emotion dualism (13-14, 16-17). According to the theory, these dualisms pose the bulk of our moral problems, insofar as the body and the emotions, driven by appetites which enslave and deprave us, overwhelm our rational capacities and will.

As Johnson points out, the *Moral Law folk* theory entails the following: a faculty psychology, our dual nature, the problem of morality as a problem of free will, the existence of universal moral laws, and faith in reason as the human faculty which guides and hopefully controls will. Johnson states, "According to the Moral Law folk theory, then, morality is a massive, ongoing power struggle between the forces of reason and the forces of passion" (1993, 17). This profoundly influential view is operative today in popular and academic ethical and political thought and discourse. So, I will briefly explicate the view through its most influential proponent, Immanuel Kant.

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Kantian Rationalist Moral Theory

I look at Kant as the exemplar of this view because his account is the most consistent and influential. For Kant, morality is impossible without reason. Reason compels all of us as rational creatures absolutely to fulfill our duties; if we fail, we fail in an important way to fulfill our potential as humans. In his *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), Kant asserts that the moral law commands unconditionally and universally, and that "Everyone must admit that if a law is to be morally valid, i.e., is to be valid as a ground of obligation, then it must carry with it absolute necessity," (389). Kant insists that this universality must be grounded in what he calls a "pure" practical reason, and cannot be grounded in experience. He asserts that, "all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely in a priori reason…" (411).

Experience is not a help to morality because it is merely a "groping about with the help of examples." Experience can issue in generalizations, but it cannot guarantee universality. Pure practical reason motivates our moral duty through respect for the moral law. "Duty is the necessity of an action done out of respect for the law" (400). For Kant, reason is what manifests our humanity: "The will is nothing but practical reason…the will is a faculty of choosing only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as being practically necessary, i.e., as good" (412). Kant alleges that experience and inclinations cannot provide reliable insight for morality because they are subject to whims and bodily incentives which are bound up with corrupting self-interest.

Reason for Kant is both the means of discerning obligation, and the faculty which, as practical, gives rise to action. Any individual, insofar as they are rational, is bound by

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unconditionally valid a priori principles that necessitate certain acts and prohibit others. Kant summarizes: "Every practical law represents a possible action as good and hence as necessary for a subject who is practically determinable by reason; therefore all imperatives are formulas for determining an action which is necessary according to the principle of a will that is good in some way" (414). Kant argued that practical imperatives are of two sorts, hypothetical and categorical. Hypothetical imperatives command conditionally, insofar as they specify an action as necessary for achieving a contingent, conditional end. For example, if you are a physician, you are ethically bound to administer medical aid, but this cannot be universal since many of us do not have medical training. Categorical imperatives, by contrast, compel unconditionally, requiring or forbidding certain actions regardless of our contingent ends. Moral laws bind universally, with absolute necessity.

Categorical imperatives compel absolute obligation regardless of outcomes or personal feelings. If we are acting counter to our feelings, it may indicate the categorical quality of reason's command (425). Kant claims that a rational morality cannot rely merely on principles of human nature, because morality applies to all rational creatures, and not just to humans. Any such peculiarities of human nature manifesting as an imperative could only be "a maxim valid for us, but not a law" (425). It would seem then, that for Kant, the moral cultivation project consists in developing the discipline to conform to the dictates of pure practical reason. In so doing, one may make oneself fully attentive to and compliant with the moral law.

A key difficulty for Kantian rationalism is its refusal to give emotions a key role in moral cognition. As we will see in subsequent sections, because morality is social, and

the emotions are essential for sociality, the emotions play an indispensable role in moral cognition. So this omission of the emotions in Kant's account of morality is a serious problem. Additionally, Kantian rationalism only holds if we are autonomous rational deciders as it claims, and the recent research in moral cognition has called this view into question. Also, this view is missing the imaginative dimension of morality. As John Dewey (1922) points out, we often deliberate through "dramatic rehearsal" which is an imaginative envisioning of what the implications and outcomes of a particular action might be. According to Dewey, this is an effective way of ruling out actions that could lead to unpleasant outcomes, and further, that we do this all the time (190-192). Mark Johnson (1993) agrees, stating that the *Moral Law folk* theory "overlooks imaginative cognitive resources that are the very means by which we are able to make morally sensitive and humane judgments" (18). This limit does not reduce its influence in the West. According to Johnson, such rationalist moral systems express "the dominant folk theory of morality in our culture."   As we will see, recent cognitive science and psychological literature do not support the rationalist view of morality because there is increasing evidence for the importance of the role of the emotions in moral cognizing.

Alternatively, I suggest that David Hume's view, called the sentimentalist view, is more aligned with recent findings in cognitive-science literature. Reason's role in moral judgment is not insignificant, but it must share the stage with emotion because moral cognizing is incomplete without it.

Hume's Theory of Moral Sentiments

Hume famously argued that moral feeling is for social doing. His ethics are referred to as sentimentalist because of his emphasis on the moral emotions over abstract

moral reasoning. His view accords well with recent ideas in the social sciences. In this section, I will look at David Hume's emphasis on **the role of the emotions** for morality and how moral feelings are attuned to meeting the needs of our dynamic and **profound sociality**. Hume claims that to meet our social demands, even for the formation of laws, "we must be acquainted with the nature and situation of man…" (1751, 28). The meaning of morality, the point of it, is to facilitate social living. According to Hume, humans are naturally dependent on social relations both for a sense of wellbeing and for moral direction. That sociality relies on our passions to intuitively navigate our social relations through its social sympathies and fellow feeling. In his intellectual climate which celebrated rationality and independence, Hume (1739) states, "Nothing is more usual in philosophy, and even in common life than to talk of the combat of passion and reason, to give the preference to reason, and to assert that men are only so far virtuous as they conform themselves to its dictates. Every rational creature, 'tis said, is obliged to regulate his actions by reason" (294). Hume disagrees with this view based on empirical observations of humans in action.

Hume's (1739) anthropology raises the role of the moral sentiments to the primary source of insight. Reason provides a supporting role. He famously claims that "reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions," a bit of hyperbole alerting the reader to the vital importance of the feelings (295). Our moral activity is more a matter of habits and sentiments than of rational reflection and conscious decision and our moral feelings are imbibed from our communal ethos. "No satisfactory answer can be given to any of these [moral] questions, upon the abstract hypothesis of morals; and we must at last acknowledge, that the crime of immorality is no particular fact or relation, which can be

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the object of our understanding: But arises entirely from the sentiment of disapprobation, which by the structure of human nature, we unavoidably feel on the apprehension of barbarity or treachery" (1751, 87).

Rather than an abstract ideal of rational goodness, morality is focused on the practical *necessity* of belonging to and having standing within our social group: "Human nature cannot, by any means, subsist, without the association of individuals…and the moral obligation holds proportion with the usefulness [to others]" (1751, 35). As social beings, our need to belong causes us to seek out ways to be of use and of value to our group. What is good and just is what is practically useful between an individual and her social relations. "The social virtues are never regarded without their beneficial tendencies…The happiness of mankind, the order of society, the harmony of families, the mutual support of friends, are always considered as the result of [the social virtues'] gentle dominion over the breasts of men" (1751, 20). This "gentle dominion" of the social virtues keeps us in line by appealing to our fellow-feelings.

Contrary to the assumptions in debates over human nature as being primarily selfish or altruistic, Hume claims that self and group interest are not mutually exclusive. What we humans deem to be good is so because it is useful, beneficial or even sweet to our fellow humans (Ibid. 34-5, 43ff).   In fact, such interests are very often either overlapping or in accord (Ibid. 40-42). Even when we receive no direct benefit, we feel pleasure in helping others, in their esteem, in the nobility of others and in their wellbeing (Ibid. 43).

Sentiments, or intuitions, are the primary means by which we discern the actions appropriate for such ends, so our moral feelings provide much of the information for social cognition. The root sentiment for morality is human sympathy, or fellow-feeling, by which we feel our kinship and need for others (Ibid. 43, N19). We need each other not just for survival, but for happiness. "Reduce a person to solitude, and he loses all enjoyment…because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow creatures" (Ibid. 43).

Reason's role has more to do with calculation on Hume's view; it is the means of analyzing the utility of our attitudes and actions (Ibid. 83). Reason is not only calculative, however, because it can perform qualitative evaluations for possible outcomes, as well. For example, when I am parallel parking, reason helps me to discern how accurately I am steering, and how I need to correct so as to improve my car's alignment and nearness to the curb. Reason and passion have been theoretically pitted against each other since perhaps before Plato, and certainly Plato was an eloquent voice in support of this view. Hume, however, sees the roles of reason and passion as being much more complex than many theorists have allowed. Both reason and passion have useful and important functions; our job is to accurately identify their respective uses. "We speak not strictly and philosophically when we talk of the combat of passion and of reason. Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them" (1739, 295). Part of the trouble is that reason is incapable of moving us. "But though reason, when fully assisted and improved, be sufficient to instruct us in the pernicious or useful tendency of qualities and actions; it is not alone sufficient to produce any moral blame or approbation" (1751, 83). Reason is

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impotent because it is only a reflection of experience, whereas sentiments are a living response to experience. Reason assists the sentiments by abstracting details from experience and analyzing them so that the sentiments can then attach value and meaning (Ibid. 295).

The mistake of believing that it is reason alone that rightly guides morality comes from a misunderstanding about the emotions themselves, according to Hume. We misinterpret what he calls the "calm" passions for non-emotional reasoning. "When any of these passions are calm, and cause no disorder in the soul, they are very readily taken for the determinations of reason, and are suppos'd to proceed from the same faculty, with that, which judges of truth and falsehood…because their sensations are not evidently different" (297). These quieter feelings like equanimity, satisfaction, or concentration do not disturb us like the "violent" sentiments of anger, jealousy, etc., but they are emotions and intuitions nevertheless. This "common error of metaphysicians" of confounding reason with passion is a serious mistake that keeps us from comprehending how moral cognition is actually motivated (297).

Reason's role, as an assessor, notes patterns and paths to fulfill passion's desire. Passion is what attaches value to the end toward which reason is charting the path (1751, 83). Without passion all ends are equal. "Extinguish all the warm feelings and prepossessions in favor of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice: Render men totally indifferent towards these distinctions; and morality is no longer a practical study, nor has any tendency to regulate our lives and actions" (1751, 15). So, without feeling, there is no activating force to execute action, and no judgment, which means no morality.

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Thus, emotion moves us and reason calculates the probable effects of certain actions, and assesses the best means to achieve the ends that the passions desire. "'Tis from the prospect of pain or pleasure that the aversion or propensity arises towards any object: And these emotions extend themselves to the causes and effects of that object, as they are pointed out to us by reason and experience" (1739, 295). Reason does not feel *concern* about the *meaning* of the patterns or outcomes. Reason simply interprets the patterns and probabilities of experiences. It is the emotions that relate the patterns to our sympathies with our fellow humans. We feel emotionally compelled to help a man drowning, and reason looks for the means (rope, life-saver) to achieve passion's desire. Moral feelings desire moral wellbeing, and reason lays out the various means of reaching that goal, critiquing one's progress, positive or negative, and correcting one's execution for improved success.

It is the cooperative roles of reason and emotions that facilitate our moral successes and failures, and for them to function accurately, they require the input of our social context. We have instincts for these ends, but also reason and custom to guide us (1751, 32). Our individual needs and wants generally coordinate with society's expectations. We may not always be aware of this however, "…we are not, in every instance conscious of any immediate reflection on the pernicious consequences of [education and habit]. The views the most familiar to us are apt, for that very reason, to escape us; and what we have very frequently performed from certain motives, we are apt likewise to continue mechanically, without recalling, on every occasion, the reflections, which first determined us" (Ibid. 33-34). We may be thus unaware of the social

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influences in our moral sentiments and behavior because they have been part of the air that we breathe since infancy.

The flavor of our social context infuses our thoughts, feelings and actions, defining the nature of our character as a part of that context.   Our sensitivity to context expresses the depth of our innate sociality, our *humanity*, as Hume calls it. We rely on others for valuation of our conduct and character; social approbation is a key motivator for morality (1739, 354-5). Hume claims that this initial motivation is a *natural* law, operative in our human sympathies. By this law we cannot help caring for the opinion of our fellows, and the sentiments born of that regard are then the cultivated judgments of attraction and aversion (for taste or pleasure and pain). We ascertain and respond to social expectations expressed through the group's approval or disapproval (1739, 416-418). We are pleased when the group is happy with us and unhappy when it is not.

With guidance and training, we develop a moral aesthetic in which moral actions can be deemed beautiful. We are naturally drawn to the beautiful. In nature, we take pleasure in flowers, in landscapes, sunrises over the hilltops, etc. So it is with the socially beautiful. We love a kind gesture, smile at a generous act, and feel elevated and inspired by personal sacrifice for others. Such innate attractions are then cultivated by our social circles to express their values. "The social virtues must, therefore, be allowed to have a *natural* beauty and amiableness, which, at first, *antecedent* to all precept or education recommends them to the esteem of uninstructed mankind and engages their affections. And as public utility of these virtues is the chief circumstance, whence they derive their merit, it follows that the end, which they have a tendency to promote, must be some way agreeable to us and take hold of some natural affection" (1751, 40 *emphasis mine*). For

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Hume then, we are naturally driven to accord with the moral feelings of our social milieu and we find actions in accordance with those moral feelings to be beautiful.

This drive is a primary motivator for moral behavior both curbing our egoistic inclinations and promoting our concern for others. Because we are so deeply social, we rely on our sympathetic sentiments to facilitate our wellbeing. As I quoted above, "Reduce a person to solitude, and he loses all enjoyment…because the movements of his heart are not forwarded by correspondent movements in his fellow-creatures" (1751, 43). These *correspondent movements*, which for Hume express our mutual sympathy, provide the intuitions for what we should do and how we should do it. In this way the intuitions can aid us in our choreography toward harmony with our social groups. In time, such performances become the habits of our conduct and the content of our character.

> By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we bring our own deportment and conduct frequently in review, and consider how they appear in the eyes of those who approach and regard us. This constant habit of surveying ourselves, as it were, in reflection, keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and begets, in noble natures, a certain reverence for themselves as well as others; which is the surest guardian of every virtue…Here is the most perfect morality with which we are acquainted: Here is displayed the force of many sympathies…we find it necessary to prop our tottering judgment on the correspondent approbation of mankind (Ibid. 77).

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So it is that like an adept musician, we learn to harmoniously play our part in a social symphony. And we desire to harmonize; we do not generally find pleasure in going against the social grain. Self-interest overlaps with group-interest according to Hume, which he defends by noting the pleasure and pain we feel in social approbation and disapprobation (1739, 368-9). This overlap between our self-interest and group-interest is due to our inescapable sociality. Morality is in service to that sociality. We depend on sentiments (emotions, impressions and perceptions) to motivate and assess moral action, and on reason to identify the efficacious paths in accord with passion's desire. Hume refers to the sentiments as being based in a kind of moral taste: "The approbation of moral qualities most certainly is not deriv'd from reason, or any comparison of ideas; but proceeds entirely from a moral taste…" (Ibid. 414). He further states that such taste is not subject to reason since, "Truth is disputable, but not taste" (1751, 14). And like aesthetic taste, moral taste is malleable, moved by sympathy. At the heart of his moral argument is the claim that sympathy is our most basic moral emotion, grounding our social feelings and relations. Sympathy is responsive to imaginative engagements that shape and refine our characters toward ever more astute and attentive moral perceptions and actions (1739, 418ff).

While in Hume the roles of reason and passion are altered from the views in which reason ought to reign supreme, giving passion a leading role, the role of reason is still crucial to morality. Reason and passion can work as moral teammates because passion cares for the ends which reason is able to calculate. Hume's view offers a viable alternative to the dominant view of rationalist morality, one that more satisfyingly accounts for how we humans experience our own morality. And, as it turns out, the

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literature in the social sciences lends empirical authority to Hume's view as I will show below.

I have thus briefly illustrated an exemplar representation of what I'm calling the rationalist moral perspective (which Johnson claims is based on the moral law folk theory) to give a sense of its compelling character (indicated by its pervasive presence in much of academic and popular moral thinking). I have subsequently summarized Hume's radically alternative view of morality as rooted in sentiments. Hume's understanding of human nature seems to be more accurate and efficacious for moral practice than the rationalist view. I now turn to recent thinking in the cognitive and social sciences that accords well with Hume's view of human morality as emotionally motivated and socially dependent. Below, we will see how social psychologist Jonathan Haidt takes up Hume's view in an effort to develop a more accurate account of moral cognition and practice than the rationalist view.

Scientific Views of Moral Cognition

Many of Hume's claims about our moral sentiments as being socially and emotionally based are defensible on today's findings in cognitive science and social psychology. In this section, I will look at some notable views regarding our moral cognition as intuitionist and ultrasocial. What follows are views from these sciences that support Hume, but also nuance his claims. Beginning with psychologist Jonathan Haidt and other moral intuitionists, who follow and build on Hume, we will see how morality is social and intuitionist. I then turn to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio whose account of the emotions and consciousness flesh out our understanding of how the emotions operate in cognition.

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Intuitionist and Ultrasocial Moral Cognition

What Hume calls the moral sentiments, Haidt (2006) calls the moral intuitions

and he claims that they are instrumental in all moral cognizing. Haidt refers to moral

intuition as *gut feelings* to describe the way neural messages are felt throughout the body.

He states that we should doubt the primacy of reason in moral judgment, because in

moral cognition, intuition is more automatic and efficient, and thus is stronger.

Additionally, as Hume claimed, as our intuitions form judgments, they are interpenetrated

by our sociality and our social context. That is, our moral judgments are rooted in our

preconscious processes which are infused with the social values in which we live and

breathe. Haidt explains the intuition part of this morality thus:

> Intuitionism in philosophy refers to the view that there are moral truths and that
> when people grasp these truths they do so not by a process of ratiocination and
> reflection but rather by a process more akin to perception, in which one "just sees
> without argument that they are and must be true" (Harrison, 1967, p. 72). Thomas
> Jefferson's declaration that certain truths are "self-evident" is an example of
> ethical intuitionism. Intuitionist approaches in moral psychology, by extension,
> say that moral intuitions (including
>
> moral emotions) come first and directly cause moral judgments (Haidt, in press;
> Kagan, 1984; Shweder and Haidt, 1993; J. Q.Wilson, 1993). Moral intuition is a
> kind of *cognition*, but it is not a kind of reasoning (2001, 814).

He thus refers to moral cognizing as "social intuitional." And he explains that

this form of cognizing works more like a lawyer than a judge.

> The social part of the social intuitionist model proposes that moral judgment
> should be studied as an interpersonal process. Moral reasoning is usually an ex
> post facto process used to influence the intuitions (and hence judgments) of other
> people. In the social intuitionist model, one feels a quick flash of revulsion at the
> thought of incest and one knows intuitively that something is wrong. Then, when
> faced with a social demand for a verbal justification, one becomes a lawyer trying
> to build a case rather than a judge searching for the truth (Ibid.).

Like Hume, Haidt views reason's role mostly as supporting the intuitions. He specifies the meaning of intuition by breaking down consciousness itself into what he calls automatic and controlled processes. The automatic processes include all of the activity of the human person that either do not rely on consciousness to do its job (e.g., heart pumping blood, digestion, breathing) or which may not be apparent to consciousness (like attraction to an idea, or a feeling, or judgment). The automatic processes work without our conscious awareness and influence our behavior and thought. The controlled processes are the ones that rely on conscious attention to execute, such as novel activities, intellectual engagements, learning a new skill, making plans, deliberating, contemplation, and moral reflection. These activities require the controlled processes of the prefrontal cortex (2001, 815).

Haidt (2006) utilizes a helpful metaphor to represent the forces of these divisions. He considers Plato's metaphor of the horses and charioteer, which Plato used to represent reason and the passions, but Haidt opts instead for the metaphor of an elephant and rider. The elephant represents the power and strength of our *automatic processes*, as over and against a relatively small rider for the *controlled processes* which do not actually have much control. He claims that these processes are not in unison. "To understand most important ideas in psychology, you need to understand how the mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict. We assume that there is one person in each body, but in some ways we are each more like a committee whose members have been thrown together to do a job, but who often find themselves working at cross purposes (5). Neuroscientist David Eagleman (2011) refers to this committee as "team of rivals" and concurs with

Haidt that consciousness operates at different levels of automaticity and control (109-110; 204-208).

The rider is the forethinking, clunky, conscious mind, or controlled processes, and it does not control the elephant, but was a later evolutionary development, adapted to serve the needs of the elephant. Haidt seeks to "dispel the Promethean myth" that the evolution of reason (like the fire that Prometheus stole from Zeus) saved humans from their previous life as slaves to their animal drives. "[The myth] assumes that reason was installed in the frontal cortex but that emotion stayed behind in the limbic system. In fact, the frontal cortex enabled a great expansion of *emotionality* in humans" (11 emphasis mine). The Promethean myth promotes the idea that the *controlled* processes can and ought to direct all of our thoughts and actions (2006, 10-11). The reality, however, is that all of cognition has become more sophisticated, emotion as well as reason.

This distinction between of conscious powers and the strength and efficiency of the automatic processes (elephant) explains why we are mostly not rational deciders. The predominance of the intuitive is not a disaster to be lamented. Morality is safe because intuition is actually more effective than we have believed. Haidt joins Selin Kesebir (2010), in claiming that intuition has been doing a tremendous amount of work and very well. Intuition is our primary means of motivating moral action. Moral thinking is for social doing, and that morality binds and builds relationships (809, 814-821). Morality is largely preconscious, often not requiring our conscious attention, save when we need to justify our views or actions to others, or when we are faced with dilemmas which require analytic engagement. "In moral arguments, the rider goes beyond being just an advisor to

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the elephant; he becomes a lawyer, fighting the court of public opinion to persuade others of the elephant's point of view," according to Haidt (2006, 22).

The largely preconscious nature of moral judgments is why, as Hume pointed out, moral sentiments respond in ways similar to aesthetic tastes: "Morals and criticism are not so properly objects of the understanding as of taste and sentiment. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is *felt,* more properly than perceived" (Hume 1748, 120 my emphasis). Haidt agrees with Hume. Our moral feelings are based in our automatic processes and as such respond quickly with aversion or attraction to the given situation. "Reason and emotion must both work together to create intelligent behavior, but emotion (a major part of the elephant) does most of the work" (Haidt 2006, 13). Cognition is a function of both the automatic and controlled processes, with the emphasis on the automatic. The affective character and basis of moral intuition requires a deeper understanding of the nature and workings of emotions in order to fully appreciate their influence on moral judgment and action, as well as how they may be shaped for improved moral character.

Cognition: Emotional and Embodied

As social animals, the emotions are particularly useful for intuiting social situations and expectations, as well as moods and relationships of people. Because emotions work quickly in cognition, they are more efficient perceivers, readers, and messengers of the emotional import of a given situation. Emotions inform us of our own internal states, broadcasting those states through our physiology and facial expressions so that we can *read* the feelings of one another. Neuroscientist Antonio Damasio (1999) explicates the role of the emotions for our very complex conscious and preconscious processes. The basic processes of what he calls *core consciousness* are necessary for

much of bodily and cognitive functioning, both of which depend on the emotions. The emotions report bodily states. "The biological function of emotions is [in part] the production of a specific reaction to the inducing situation" (53). The reactions for most animals include running, freezing, fighting, etc., but for humans these impulses are tempered by higher cognitions. The second biological function is regulation of inner states for wellbeing. Emotions are extremely useful as various stimuli in the world will provoke emotions relevant to survival and wellbeing. "Emotions are curious adaptations that are part and parcel of the machinery with which organisms regulate survival" (54). They are particularly focused on homeostatic regulation, avoiding threats (like mortal danger) and advancing toward potentially positive objects (energy, shelter, sex)

Damasio distinguishes between two levels of consciousness: 1) *core consciousness* which is the collection of processes concerned with systems necessary for basic existence, providing a point-of-view protoself in the present time and place only. The higher level he calls 2) *extended consciousness* "of which there are many levels and grades, provides the organism with an elaborate sense of self—an identity and a person, you or me, no less—and places that person at a point in individual historical time, richly aware of the lived past and of the anticipated future, and keenly cognizant of the world beside it" (16). The increased complexity of extended consciousness facilitates actions we associate with agency such as conscious memory, empathy, a sense of self, etc. See Table 1 (from Damasio 1999, 55) below for a basic description of the levels which show the role of the emotions for basic and complex conscious engagements.

<u>Table 1. Levels of Life Regulation</u>

High Reason   Complex, flexible, and customized plans of response are
                   formulated in conscious images and may be executed as
                   behavior.

↑↓   *Consciousness*

••

Feelings   Sensory patterns signaling pain, pleasure, and emotions
                   become images.

↑↓

Emotions   Complex, stereotyped patterns of response, which include
                   secondary emotions, primary emotions, and background
                   emotions.

↑↓

Basic Life Regulation Relatively simple, stereotyped patterns of response, which
                   include metabolic regulation, reflexes, the biological
                   machinery behind what will become pain and pleasure,
                   drives and motivations

What we should note here is that at the lower levels of consciousness, the

automatic processes are monitoring the systems from basic biological states, to the

emotions, to the feelings and then higher reason and back down. When something is

important or striking enough, the emotions stimulate conscious awareness, at which

point, Damasio designates them *feelings*. Note that the arrows go up and down,

indicating how the messaging travels up and down the levels of consciousness, and how

the messaging loops are mutually informing each other. "Emotions are at a higher, more

complex level [than basic life regulation]. The dual arrows indicate upward or downward

causation. For instance, pain can induce emotions, and some emotions can include a state of pain" (Ibid.).

What is important about this information about the emotions and feelings is that it helps us to understand how emotions can inform our moral cognition. By describing the preconscious emotional experience, Damasio draws attention to the important work of the emotions prior to and apart from our conscious awareness of them, helping us to see the ways in which they are operative in preconscious "thinking." The bodily expressions of the emotions, such as sweaty palms, increased heart rate, etc., influence our automatic thinking and behaving. It appears that it may actually be impossible to act morally apart from our emotions. Bodily expressions provide preverbal forms of knowing, which Damasio calls "wordless knowledge." Many of us recognize this kind of knowledge as intuitions or gut feelings (Haidt 2006, 5-6). Damasio claims that this preverbal form of knowing "…emerges mentally [as] the feeling of knowing—the feeling of what happens when an organism is engaged with the processing of an object—that only thereafter can inferences and interpretation begin to occur regarding the feeling of knowing…from its most humble beginnings, consciousness is knowledge, knowledge consciousness, no less interconnected than truth and beauty were for Keats" (1999, 26). So the emotions and feelings inform cognition. As preverbal forms of knowing, these seem to be the basis for our intuitions that Haidt claims guide our behavior in moral situations. Our emotions monitor our inner states, and our inner states respond to our inner thoughts, as well as our external world. The emotions then are a necessary tool for navigating our social world.

The Moral Emotions and Profound Intersubjectivity

As discussed above, Haidt claims that the data overwhelmingly indicate that we are more persuaded by emotions and automatic processes than reason. Moreover, our moral emotions are the primary means by which we apprehend social expectations and roles, which is why morality is for sociality. Both Hume and Haidt claim that reputation is of paramount concern in morality. Contrary to Plato's view that we are happier being virtuous even if we have a disreputable reputation , Haidt argues that Socrates' interlocutor Glaucon had it right that we are more concerned with *looking* good than *being* good (Haidt 2012, 258). And yet, we may not be satisfied with merely looking good, either. According to Adam Smith (1759) there is a higher pleasure in *being* virtuous than in merely being thought so:

> Nature, accordingly has endowed [a person], not only with a desire of being what ought to be approved of; or of being what he himself approves of in other men. The first desire could only have made him wish to appear to be fit for society. The second was necessary in order to render him anxious to be really fit. The first could only have promoted him to the affectation of virtue, and to the concealment of vice. The second was necessary in order to inspire him with the real love of virtue, and with the real abhorrence of vice. In every well-informed mind this second desire seems to be the strongest of the two… To desire, or even to accept of praise, where no praise is due, can be the effect only of the most contemptible vanity (170-171).

The rewards, then, for genuine virtue, are personal as well as social. How is it that creatures who are purportedly only self-interested, according to recent views of human nature, find internal rewards for being moral and not just looking moral? The answer to this question lies in deeper truths about human primates that have not been fully appreciated since Darwin's theories emerged. Our sociality is more profound than we believed. Understanding our moral cognition in relation to our social needs will have

important implications for our moral cultivation endeavors. We have to take the moral emotions, as means of nurturing our profound sociality, into account as we construct the cultivation program toward whom and how we want to be. As we shall see, we are not just social, but profoundly social and as such need extreme acuity in our cognitive processes that facilitate the navigation of our social milieu.

As I said in the beginning of this chapter, humans are social animals. This drive to be in good standing appears to be more primordially motivated by the need to belong. As Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary (1995) explain, our moral life is infused by our profound social needs. It may be the most fundamental need that we have. And this need is not merely to belong in some general way to a group, but rather

> the belongingness hypothesis is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria: First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and, second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare (1995, 498).

We are not merely social, that is, motivated by a need to be liked and included. We are profoundly social, having deep needs to belong over time, to be cared for and loved. These needs, according to Baumeister and Leary, motivate even the drives for power and achievement, since they are more satisfying when accompanied by esteem and the regard of others than when achieved alone (497). They claim that while we have been aware of our sociality in psychology for some time, we have not fully appreciated either the depth of its importance or its influence on our many personal motivations.

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They argue that, "the need to belong shapes emotion and cognition" (505), and it drives much of our behavior.

> [A] need to belong, that is, a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships, is innately prepared (and hence nearly universal) among human beings. Thus, unlike the Freudian (1930) view that regarded sexuality and aggression as the major driving psychological forces, and unlike the most ambitious behaviorist views that considered each newborn a tabula rasa, our view depicts the human being as naturally driven toward establishing and sustaining belongingness (1995, 499).

Belonging undergirds a sense of well-being and other positive emotions. Feeling that one does not belong produces negative emotions, physical health problems, and behavioral pathologies. People spend vast amounts of time thinking about relationships, real or desired. Baumeister and Leary found two aspects of the need to belong: "affectively pleasant or positive interactions" and "long-term, stable [relations of] caring and concern" (505-6).

Haidt (2006) claims that our "ultrasociality" means that we humans have more complex social units than other primates. He suggests that humans have more hive-like, or bee-like qualities. We are inclined to cooperate and do not approve of ungroupish behavior, which means that we have altruistic tendencies with kith and kin, and we punish exploiters. We do this through a variety of means but one of the key ways we monitor and correct behavior is through language. In the book section titled "You Stab His Back, I'll Stab Yours," Haidt claims that it is language that facilitates our ability to live within groups of about 100-150. One of the uses of language is to create bonds with and correct one another. "Language allows small groups to bond quickly and to learn from each other about the bonds of others…language evolved because it enabled gossip"

(53). Gossip is how we broadcast sentiments and concerns about group members (or outsiders) to other group members and it is primarily why we are concerned about our reputation—to ensure that the gossip about ourselves is what we want it to be. We want to have good standing in the group and in order to do so, we must practice reciprocity. Gratitude and vengefulness are important moral emotions for navigating such complex social relations (56-7). This is why, as Haidt says, morality binds us together.

Moral style is unique for different primate groups. Primatologist Franz De Waal (2009) claims that all primates are very social, living in communities and never alone, but the cultural styles of different species of primates are expressed in their group orientations. According to de Waal, we humans have a dual nature, which is crucial to our environmental and social success. We are like our two nearest primate cousins, the bonobos and chimpanzees. The bonobos are egalitarian, loving, non-aggressive, matriarchal in many ways, while the chimpanzees are aggressive, ambitious and hierarchical. These two sides of ourselves enable us to be both assertive and cooperative in solving problems (178-181). However, as human primates, our group organization is much more complex and therefore, we must be more sophisticated in our social aptitude. Haidt characterizes our duality as *homo duplex* claiming that we have both self-interested (90% ape-like) and altruistic/groupish (10% bee-like) traits. He claims that evolutionary biology has failed to account for our groupish qualities through which we subordinate our self-interest to the needs of the group. This tendency may indicate plausibility of the once-rejected idea of group-selection as operative in our genes (2006, 232-33).   He further claims that religious practices may have developed to strengthen this potential

because religious groups tended to fare better than others, perhaps due to the bonding that occurs in collective practices and rituals (235-37, 259-260).

It is not clear that de Waal would agree with Haidt's characterization of our apelike traits as self-interested[2], but, however we describe our self and group orientations, numbers in human groups compared with our primate cousins indicate that we are quite cooperative. Recent neuroscience of the moral emotions suggests that we have big brains to enable our emotional moral cognition to navigate our extensive networks of sociality (Haidt 2006, 53). Because morality is the primary means of fulfilling our need to belong to and sustain and support our group, our wellbeing as individuals depends on us having genuinely effective ways of improving our moral sophistication and skillfulness. Morality is the means of fulfilling social needs.

Training for Moral Skillfulness

So we are social animals, and as such, we rely on moral intuitions to guide us in navigating the complexities of social life. Our adept neurophysiology allows us to learn the patterns of interactions so as to extrapolate from learned patterns, and to insight insightfully adapt in novel or more challenging situations. We grow in moral skills through practice. But, as Marshall Gregory points out, experience on its own is not sufficient to actually provide instructive insight into the import and implications of moral situations. We require the opportunities to step back and reflect, and to experiment with possible responses. The process of moral self-cultivation (or the moral cultivation of those under one's care or governance, i.e., parents and teachers) provides opportunity to be taught good, effective moral behaviors and attitudes, to imaginatively rehearse and

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[2] See de Waal's (2009) discussion of ape (and other mammalian) cooperation pp. 176-200.

practically employ those behaviors and attitudes, then to evaluate for success, and to correct toward better fulfilling one's values. This cycle is repeated incessantly toward improving moral skillfulness.

Moral cultivation is not something we can sufficiently do alone, however, because we do not create values in a vacuum. Rather, we act, reflect and alter our behavior within and through the communities of which we have a primal urge to belong. Long after Hume and long before Haidt, John Dewey (1922) pointed out our dependence on others for morality. "Our conduct is socially conditioned whether we perceive the fact or not…All of the actions of an individual bear the stamp of his community as assuredly as does the language he speaks" (316-17). In order to navigate the expectations and our roles in society, we need an adept and skillful moral cognition. Knowing the power of gossip, reputation, and even the perception that others have of us, we use our moral intuitions to figure out what we need to do to ensure good standing and find deep pleasure and meaning in the regard of our respective communities.

The imagination seems to be the key means by which we must craft a moral cultivation project. Since the automatic processes follow habits and the quickest courses to satisfaction, it will be the job of our foresight to acquire the right practices and learn the deeper satisfaction of hard-earned satisfactions. If we are to woo the elephant (automatic processes) into more practices of group-interest and regard for the needs and feelings of others (so that we can have the possibility of thriving in community), we (the rider or controlled processes) will have to reach beyond rational argumentation to the moral imagination for persuasion. Aristotle understood the *indirect* process of acquiring moral skill and indicates the aesthetic aspect of moral skillfulness in his *Nichomachean*

Ethics: "Praise belongs to virtue for from this people become apt at performing beautiful actions" (2002, 19). Perhaps that is why the meaning of the Greek word for the *good* includes the *beautiful,* which Aristotle invokes repeatedly (205).[3]

Aristotle also situates ethics within a social framework insofar as the condition for the possibility for a good character depends on having been reared well and having good friends who make you a better person (17). Virtue is the work of a lifetime, and he articulates its dynamic quality as a process by comparing it to the practice of maintaining health. He claims that the good is the being-at-work-of-the-soul-in-accordance-with-virtue/*arête* (20). A skillful person "who is truly good and sensible will bear all fortunes gracefully and will always act in the most beautiful way…" (17). Like an archer seeking to improve his aim to hit the bullseye, we must practice the art/skill of virtue to hit what Aristotle identifies as the mean between excess and deficiency (29). The ability to develop a good character (ethos) is built upon habits (22). Such habits follow from repetition of moral skill. Intelligent (practiced) moral skill is *phronesis,* which Joe Sachs translates as practical judgment (116). *Phronesis* as judgment and execution is "a rightness that results from what is beneficial in the end for which, the means by which, and the time in which it ought to occur" or as others have translated *phronesis* is the ability to apply virtue in the right place, at the right time, and with the right measure (112). Practicing the moral arts, for Aristotle, is an important contribution to a life of flourishing.

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[3] *Kalon* is the Greek word for "beautiful," and Aristotle uses *philokalon* as well. "Philo" means "love of" as in love of wisdom in "philo-sophia."

The nature of flourishing is being studied by Positive Psychologists like Jonathan Haidt, but began with psychologists such as Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi. Csikszentmihalyi offers insight into how we humans flourish and what that might mean for the moral imagination. Pleasure is an enormous attraction for behavior, as we have seen. In his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990), he explains that pleasure in the process and experience of practicing a skill at which one is competent or even excels indicates that such activity is a source of flourishing. Pleasure, however, has different flavors as Hume, Smith and Haidt have already pointed out. Csikszentmihalyi agrees, "Pleasure is an important component of the quality of life, but by itself it does not bring happiness" (46). Merely self-indulgent pleasures "do not produce psychological growth…[or] add complexity to the self" (Ibid.) A fuller, and more psychologically enriching pleasure is found in the experience of the phenomenon which he calls *flow*.

Flow happens when we become skillful enough at an activity that we enjoy, that we become absorbed in it, forgetting self, becoming one with the activity itself or the objects entailed in the action (like a piano or a baseball bat and a pitched ball). Engaging in flow activities brings flourishing because we enjoy learning, growing, and doing things that we excel at. "The self becomes more differentiated as a result of flow because overcoming a challenge inevitably leaves a person feeling more capable, more skilled" (41). The pleasure we find in growing in and excelling at, for example, rock climbing, or musicianship also offers us a richer sense of self. Pursuing excellence appears to afford us pleasure. What about the excellence of virtue? Is Aristotle right that we find happiness and fulfillment in that also?

Haidt makes a related point regarding admiration, claiming that we are more emotionally elevated by witnessing moral goodness than when we simply admire athletic excellence, for example. "People really do respond emotionally to acts of moral beauty, and these emotional reactions involve warm or pleasant feelings in the chest and conscious desires to help others or become a better person oneself" (2006, 196). So, while we can experience flow in any skillful engagement that we enjoy, it seems reasonable to say that, as Hume and Smith claim, there is a meaningful pleasure, an ennobling pleasure in moral skillfulness. When we observe it, we feel elevated and want to emulate it.

Much of our discussion in this chapter has looked at the various ways in which the non-conscious processes are active in daily life. And if propositional argumentation is not the means by which one can persuade oneself to behave more morally, what ought we to do? I think that neuroscientist David Eagleman (2011) offers a clue in his description of the trainability of nonconscious cognitive processes, claiming that unconscious learning accounts for a great deal of how we function every moment of the day. He draws on research that looks more closely at emotional expressions to explain what is happening in unconscious cognition, because our conscious self-assessments are not very reliable. Anterograde amnesiacs (people who cannot form new memories) can learn to play Tetris, and play competently day after day, while having *no conscious memory* of learning or knowing the game. Eagleman states that activities like driving and making judgments, as well as sensations like taste, and even political values are rooted in *unconscious* "thinking" (2011, 110-111). There is a kind of cooperative interplay among the various parts of mind, both conscious and unconscious, which leads Eagleman to

characterize the mind as a "team of rivals." This is why Eagleman compares cognition to an improvisational performance among multiple musicians who attune to one another, allowing solos, but sustaining the tensions toward a kind of harmony (2011, 125).

Empathy, it seems to me, is the key to the process of training the moral feelings. Engaging the moral imagination and teaching us to empathize with others looks to be an important way to aid in the expansion of empathy that de Waal aspires to. If moral life is an aesthetic practice, then whatever our methods are, we will need to entice, to enchant, the moral imagination. The goal of virtuosity in the dance of communal relations will have to be, as Aristotle points out, pursued indirectly. Beautiful encounters with sages and moral exemplars like Socrates, the Buddha, and Gandhi cannot help but evoke our eulogies because of their moral grace and generosity of spirit. How can we learn to be like them?

Moral exemplars in ancient Confucian thought are so practiced that they perform their skill with seeming effortlessness. For the Confucians, following rigorous and prolonged discipline, which allows the self and the effort to fall away, one can achieve a kind of poetry in motion, which they call *wu-wei,* or effortless action. *Wu–wei* is not doing nothing, but the performer does not appear to be striving. His action looks so easy, natural, and effortless. Confucians celebrate this achievement as a kind of virtue. The height of moral achievement is the virtue of *jen/ren,* which means humaneness or benevolence. Study of ancient histories, practice in the arts such as calligraphy, and performance of the ancient rituals are the means by which one develops one's character, the goal of which is to be able to perform them with *wu-wei*. Aesthetics play an

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important role in Confucian moral self-cultivation. This may be because these ancients understood that aesthetics move the emotions.

Social scientist Dacher Keltner (2009) draws on this ancient tradition to explore the moral emotions in relation to the goal of benevolence. He discusses the evolutionary roots of many of our emotions, and claims that our deeply social tendencies are borne out in the simplest of facial expressions. A smile, for example appears to correlate to other primates' signal of submission and cooperative attitude (102-103). Keltner turns to the Confucians for their devotion to the subtle social art of harmony. Keltner claims that emotions are the center of our sociality and utilizes the Confucian term *jen*[4] to express what he regards as the height of human meaning, morality, and fulfillment in harmonious interpersonal relationships (4-5). He agrees with the other thinkers in this chapter in stating that without emotions, we are incapable of creating or sustaining any enduring institutions because we cannot make commitments. He regards commitments as the foundation for a working society and thus essential to morality. Commitments are based in the *felt* importance of resisting the fleeting, self-interested impulses. He uses the smile as an example because it is the window to the inner sentiments. An astute observer can see the feeling inside the smile. It indicates character, mood, and amenability, and can be a clue to trustworthiness (2009, 89). Our emotions are deeply social and can be shaped to facilitate improved social relations.

By imaginatively engaging cultivation practices, we can shape the moral emotions. We can also shape the perceptions to be more astute readers of those

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[4] Keltner uses "jen" as the Romanization for the virtue of benevolence or humaneness. "Ren" is commonly utilized as the Romanization also. They designate the same Chinese character.

emotions. With practice, one can develop what Buddhism calls moral skillfulness, such that for most ordinary social situations, one can effortlessly improvise with grace and ease. Empathy seems to be the key to cultivating the moral emotions, so any cultivation practice will need to move empathy toward greater sensitivity, interpretive skill, and a broader inclusion. Stories, as universally employed imaginative engagements that bring to life the inner worlds of others, may be an ideal site for exploration.

In Sum

I have suggested in this chapter that the moral agent's task is not to overcome self-interested desires with reason, but to guide and direct the moral sentiments toward the practices which reason has identified as the means to one's valued end. This work is a process of slowly growing and refining moral aptitudes, including improving the moral perception which attends to and judges moral situations, and motivating prosocial action through the moral emotion of empathy. Both Hume and Haidt identify the two aspects of moral cognition that require a change in our thinking and approach to moral cultivation, 1) the strong influence of our intuitions, including our feelings and perceptions, on our moral attitudes and behavior, and 2) how deeply social we are.[5] Relying on the insights of Hume and the scientific literature of Haidt, Damasio and others, I have shown how reason alone is insufficient for our moral cognizing because it does not have the power to move us when the automatic, affective processes press us toward a more immediately gratifying end. This means that we need to cultivate the automatic, affective processes toward the goals that we prefer, habituating them to our values: values which are interdependent with the values of our larger culture. I have discussed our profound

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[5] Both of these points were made previously in Haidt 2006, but in 2012, Haidt includes Hume's important contribution to these ideas.

dependence on one another for material and psychological wellbeing, which is why our emotions are so important for moral cognition. My hope is that this chapter has clarified why we need to look at other methodologies beyond propositional argumentation and reflection alone to do the work of cultivating ourselves for a serious program of ethics. To woo our elephantine processes into the habits we prefer, we need to be creative. In my view such a cultivation project in which we plan and practice is geared not toward rational morality, but moral skillfulness, and as such seeks to stimulate the moral imagination toward that end. Empathy is the primary means by which the moral cognition will be sensitized and activated. It is therefore the topic of the next three chapters as I seek to articulate, 1) what empathy is and how it interacts with and motivates moral sentiments and actions, 2) how it enables our meaningful experience and understanding of others, and 3) how we can train it to greater responsivity and accuracy.

CHAPTER II

EMPATHY EXPLAINED

*No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its
consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others,
and to receive by communication their inclination and sentiments,
however different from, or even contrary to our own.*

~ David Hume, Treatise of Human Nature

Human Intersubjectivity and Moral Cognition

In Chapter I, I tried to show how it is that we Westerners have misunderstood ourselves in some fundamental ways, and this misunderstanding, I argue, has undermined our ability to theorize sufficiently and satisfactorily about the ways and means of moral life. Viewing ourselves as autonomous individuals consciously controlling our behavior, has misled our approach to morality by insisting on counterintuitive standards that depend on the slower cognitive functions of the controlled processes, or consciousness. In my view this has impeded more effective moral impulses and practices.

I also laid out recent empirical insights that indicate good reasons for altering our understanding of human nature in two important ways: 1) Resonant with British moral philosophers David Hume and Adam Smith, empirical research suggests that we need to understand that moral cognition relies heavily on emotions, perceptions, and experiences rather than primarily or exclusively being driven by reason and the application of rational moral principles. 2) Rather than humans being radically independent autonomous agents, human beings are profoundly social, depending on that intersubjectivity not only for psychological wellbeing, but also for personal intelligibility, apprehending the social milieu, and for cues for, and giving an account of, our behavior in the world. The automaticity of our cognition serves the crucial function of enabling us to judge and act

expediently to meet the demands of social and practical life efficiently and effectively. Slower, controlled processes justify behavior after the fact, post-hoc, and correct for future improvement.[6] In real moral living, we rely on intuitions and habits to guide us, which is why I will argue that we need moral cultivation projects that shape the intuitions and habits in directions we desire so that we can develop the character that we want. Empathy is the site that I focus on in this work, as a key neurophysiological process to cultivate. Empathy is our moral eyes and ears, as it were, motivating our regard for, and action on behalf of, others. This powerful aspect of our moral cognition operates on both automatic and conscious levels.

I want to briefly explain how our intersubjectivity ought to inform our moral theorizing. Then I will lay out the cognitive science literature that explains empathy as a neurophysiological process. The process of moral cultivation that I will recommend builds on our natural social inclinations and moral emotions. Hume claims that, while we cannot make universal rules, we can inculcate universal sentiments (Hume 1751/1983, 87). Accepting the reality of the automaticity of much of our cognizing, we can learn how to shape these intuitive, spontaneous impulses. As Jonathan Haidt (2006) points out, if there is a tug of war between the elephant (automatic processes) and the rider (controlled processes), the elephant will win (21). The way to move the elephant is through moral intuition, but this does not preclude principles. An improved understanding of our anthropology as morally intuitive, ultrasocial animals suggests the need for a shift in our approach to rational principles. In order to prescribe and

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[6] As Hume points out, calculative thinking measures and judges accuracy. So, when we socially misstep calculative thinking can show us how we have misstepped and possible correctives, while sentiments are what make us care enough to do so, make amends, etc. (Hume 1739/2003, pp. 295-6).

implement an effective moral cultivation program, we need to be informed by an apt anthropology. The goals, activities, and habits we wish to cultivate will have to respond to the way we actually work as human primates.

Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) suggests that moral theories in recent decades falter because in the modern era, metaphysics have ceased be compelling, and as such, we lack the foundations that historical thinkers relied on (55ff). Moral theories seem to need a telos, but might not a telos be general, like John Dewey's (1922) growth for individual and social flourishing? A telos suggests that we are in movement, process, and progression toward a goal/goals. Could it be that an adept sociality as evidenced by a skillful moral life might be such a goal or at least help us to discern such a goal? *Moral skillfulness*, as I define it, is the well-practiced performance of attuning and responding adroitly to a myriad of social situations, such that one has an adept improvisational repertoire of intuition and response, and uses this skill for the good of others. Such a repertoire ought to be well-suited to facilitate one's own wellbeing as a relational being in a social web of other relational beings. A role-playing repertoire is developed through extensive practice in the art of moral improvisation, through a propaedeutic of life experience and the guidance and correction of the adults and peers in one's community.

Empathy is the site in which I propose such a program of moral cultivation will begin because it is the means by which we understand and respond to the cues of the social world. According to Hume (1751/1983), our social dependence, and the sympathy it engenders, is what makes us humane (77). Our mutual interdependence binds us together in human feeling, in sympathy, and love. Empathy is the neurophysiological process that facilitates the attachment and communicative exchanges between

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emotionally expressive creatures. It is just such sympathies that inspired the ancient Chinese philosopher Mengzi (Mencius) in his moral philosophy about cultivating empathy, which he called compassion. Like Kongzi (Confucius) before him, Mengzi saw the importance of the moral emotions for social harmony.

As we will see, we are born with a basic empathy that allows us to apprehend our world, bond with caregivers, and which, with development, can be the means of our becoming increasingly humane over the course of life. Mengzi called these basic social-moral instincts "moral sprouts." Moral sprouts require nurturance or they will wither. Benevolence, or sincere and strong regard for others, is a vital virtue for Mengzi; Hume calls it humaneness. Benevolence, Mengzi says, is developed from the *moral sprout* of compassion, the basic regard for others that we are born with (Mengzi 130). I am calling this basic moral sentiment empathy. The Confucians claim that the development of the virtues depend on the aesthetic practices of Confucian life. This may at been a prescient insight into the responsiveness of the moral emotions to imaginative engagement, revealing that aesthetics are vital to moral growth. Before we can explore ways of cultivating empathy, however, we need a full appreciation how it works.

In this chapter, I will explicate the neurophysiological roots of empathy, and the implications of empathy for intersubjectivity and morality. I will look at neuroscience, psychology, and philosophy to help us see the various forms of empathy and its roles. Our profound intersubjectivity means that individuals need an interpretive system to navigate their social relations. Social groups need to trust that individuals will be genuine contributors to the group's wellbeing, not moochers or abusers, refusing to help in return. So, a system is also needed whereby humans can discern genuine helpers from

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duplicitous pretenders. The system, or confluence of systems, that serves the ends of both of these concerns is empathy. Empathy profoundly influences and shapes our perceptions, experiences, feelings, and relations with others, actively facilitating our interpretation and engagement in social experience.

Empathy: Working Definition and Discussion

Empathy is a word that takes on a broad range of meanings and is used in a wide variety of ways by those in the various disciplines who work on empathy. So, I begin by laying out my working definition, delineating aspects of empathy that will be explicated and justified in the course of the chapter. Empathy's roots reach into the primitive aspects of our automatic consciousness, indicating our shared neurophysiology of empathy with many other non-human species. Franz de Waal and others claim that our more sophisticated neurophysiological attributes exhibited in morally exemplary forms of empathy are built upon these simpler and more primitive systems. As such, an important means of shaping and stretching empathy is by touching the chords of these more primitive forms.

My general working definition of empathy is *a neurophysiological process that facilitates our social cognition and relationality by provoking in us cognitive-affective responses that are resonant with the perceived[7] feelings, experiences, and/or situations of others*. There are several facets of empathy that I am emphasizing which I will explain below: 1) Empathy exhibits a variety of cognitive-affective qualities, which can be either or both pre-conscious and conscious. 2) It is a form of perception, bound up with other forms of perception. 3) It intersects other feelings, and thus is highly complex. 4) It has

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[7] By "perceived," I include non-conscious perceptions.

powerful imaginative dimensions and capacities. 5) Its practical and moral worth are

contingent on the development of self-other distinction, and regard for the feelings and

rightful claims of others.

Facets of Empathy

    1) Empathy is felt and expressed as cognitive-affective experience, receptive and

expressive of the body and its cognition, above and below conscious awareness. The

various views on empathy depict it with differing levels of intellectual and emotional

content, but the more sophisticated expressions of empathy generally require a high

capacity of both cognitive and affective development and skills. Recall also, from

Chapter I, that Damasio describes cognition as both automatic and controlled conscious

processes. The lower levels may occur without our noticing, as we will see empathy

often does. Both levels include "cognitive-affective" content and indicate an

interdependent relation.[8] Higher and lower level cognitions mutually inform one

another.

    2) Empathy is a form of perception and is bound up with other forms of

perception. Empathy resonates in some way with what one *perceives* the other's/others'

feeling, experience or situation to be. Note that empathy, like other forms of perception,

is not passive. In empathic perception, there is selection, interpretation, and judgment

based on the individual's previous experience, which is brought to bear on the moral

situation. Whether habituated and automatic, or consciously attended to and directed, our

interpretations mediate what we see, hear, feel, and apprehend. Empathic perception is

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[8] Interestingly, the ancient Chinese word *xin*, or "heart-mind," appears to have noted this relation long ago
(Ivanhoe 2001, 393).

complicated and mediated by other perceptions, so we can mistake other's needs, or the meanings of another's expressions. Empathy interprets and responds to the empathic stimulus with greater or lesser aptness, depending on its knowledge and skill.

3) *Empathy, as an experience and an expression, is highly complex in that it intersects with a variety of other feelings, perceptions, and interpretations.* Empathy helps us apprehend the feelings and intentions of others such that we *may* feel similar feelings. Or we may, through our own experience, perspective, and interpretation have a very different response and yet fully resonate with the feelings of the target of our empathy. For example, I may empathically understand a toddler saddened by the loss of his lollypop, without feeling his exact feelings. Empathy is what helps me to understand his feelings with varying degrees of depth and fullness. Empathic perception may comprehend the richness of feelings of the other, but not share them. Some theorists, such as Amy Coplan (2011), insist on an affective match from empathizer to the subject with whom he is empathizing. Affective match means that one has the same feelings as the one with whom one is empathizing. Such a demand overlooks the interrelated quality of empathy with other moral sensibilities.[9]

4) *Empathy has powerful imaginative dimensions and capacities.* Empathy moves the imagination causing us to feel reverberations with aesthetic stimuli like faces, voices, sounds, word meanings, the brush strokes of a painting, and importantly for my purposes, with the stories of other people—even short snippets. We are infected with the sense of their world, their feelings, and their humanity. Adam Smith claims:

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[9] As Adam Smith points out, our sympathies may lead us to feel pity, or shame on behalf of the other whom we perceive is ignorant of the significance of the social implications of their situation (Smith 9).

By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive

ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his

body, and become in some measure the same person with him and thence

form some idea of his sensations and even feel something, which, though

weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them (Coplan and Goldie 2011,

xi).

Empathy alone may not be able to motivate ethical actions, but this imaginative access

point seems to be a powerful means of improving our responsiveness to ethical moments

and increasing empathy's range of responsivity.

5) *Empathy's practical use and moral worth are contingent on the development of*

self-other distinctions and regard for the feelings and rightful claims of others. A proper

sense of self-other distinction is necessary for accuracy in empathic perception. Martin

Hoffman discusses the naïve expressions of empathy in infants and small children, like

offering one's own mother for comfort rather than the mother of the suffering child.

Such expressions are limited by the infant's inability to comprehend self-other

distinctions as older children and adults do. Proper moral regard for others is also

necessary for empathic moral perception to have motive force for ameliorating the

suffering of others. This regard must be cultivated. We need to appreciate the self-other

distinction so as to facilitate genuine resonance with the feelings of the other rather than

an obtuse self-projection.

The complexity of empathy means that one can feel conflicted and contrary empathic responses. An empathizer may not resonate with the subject's feelings as such. If we perceive someone as a victim who does not share our perception, we might desire to protect his feelings and his self-perception, and so work consciously to hide commiserating feelings. Additionally, adults can empathize with the feelings of children, even when their responses seem exaggerated to us. If a child is afraid of imaginary threats, we may not share the fear, but out of care for his feelings, we may wish to hide our incredulousness, not wishing to minimize his feelings about his experience. One may sympathize with the feeling of fear, especially of the overwhelming fright of childhood fancies, even if one cannot relate to the *object* of fear, such as monsters under the bed.

These important facets of the process of empathy are not exhaustive, but are the main issues that I wish to consider throughout this work. Empathy's cognitive-affective dimensions span a continuum of conscious and unconscious processes, and are bound up with perception and our self-other differentiation. Empathy is complex, highly imaginative, and subject to the quality of our self-other perceptions as distinct and of value. To appreciate the array of empathic experience, it is helpful to understand the roots of empathy.

The Primordial Roots of Empathy

Franz de Waal (2006) claims that empathy is a very old system. That primordiality is a good thing, according to de Waal, because an old system is more resilient and less likely to fade in successive generations. That is promising news for humans. Empathy's primordiality, in de Waal's view, reveals our shared ancestry with other primates and close genetic ties to some mammals. In *The Age of Empathy*, de Waal

claims that our ways of relating have many similarities to our primate cousins' ways, who are more cooperative and prosocial than we commonly think. "[Some theorists] call human cooperation a 'huge anomaly' in the natural world…They have been quick to write off chimpanzee cooperation as a product of kinship, thus putting it in the same category as the communal life of ants and bees. Only humans, they say, engage in large-scale cooperation" (179-180). This view, which is not anti-evolutionary, but perhaps, speciesist, places a larger gap between other social species and humans. Primates, as de Waal shows, are capable of fairly sophisticated social interactions, but de Waal concedes that there is a distinction between ourselves and our primate cousins. "My guess is that humans show these tendencies to a greater extent, and thus are capable of more complex, larger-scale cooperation" (181).

De Waal cites numerous examples of primates being unwilling to receive rewards if they cannot share them, or if it will harm another of their species (181). The alpha males might be more comfortable being selfish, but most of the rest of the group is not. One of the key emotions of empathy is distress. Whether the feeling is in the form of distress, guilt, discomfort, anxiety, or a fuller kind of suffering on behalf of the other, there is a very unpleasant sense of dis-ease as a result of someone else's distressing feeling and/or situation.

De Waal argues that our feelings of empathy are the expressions of a bodily process rooted in primitive, automatic systems of mimicry, and synchrony that develop into a more sophisticated affective and cognitively complex process of role taking and perspective sharing with others, including imagined others. More primordial forms of empathy include, but are not limited to: basic mimicry and synchrony, emotional

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contagion/infection, and what de Waal calls "mood convergence," in which one feels like-feelings in accord with the subject/target (de Waal 49). I will explain these further below. At the higher cognitive-affective levels are included perspective taking, compassionate regard for the other, and a willingness to sacrifice personal-interest for the other's wellbeing. Empathy as an old, shared system has evolved into a much more complex and variegated system influencing a variety of social-cognitive tasks.

Looking more closely at some forms of empathy, we can begin to see the interrelated functions of primordial empathy with its more complex and cognitively challenging forms. In treatments of empathy, these terms are sometimes lumped together. Here we will see that they have distinct functions even as they often overlap. **Mimicry** and **synchrony** are early and ongoing expressions which can be conscious or unconscious. They operate in imitating or matching the movements of another. Andrew Meltzoff (1983) and his colleagues showed that within minutes of birth, an infant can mimic an adult sticking out its tongue. Mimicry is thus a primitive process that binds us in interpersonal sharing of experience, namely, our primary intersubjectivity. What is required for this is sufficient dexterity, which the infant has from its innate sucking capacity, and the mirroring processes that preconsciously provoke mimicking behavior. Smiling and imitative gestures come later with more developmental dexterity. Infants practice these actions repeatedly slowly developing the skills. Social expressions, like other motor skills, grow after hundreds or thousands of these social exchanges with parents/caregivers.

Initially, the skills are awkward, but with practice they become smooth and natural. Mimicry and synchrony are useful throughout life, allowing adults to develop

and execute new skills, as well as to read situations and people. Performing in mimicry or synchrony with a group can provoke feelings of empathic regard, according to Jonathan Haidt (2006). Theoretically, mimicry and synchrony can be performed without shared feelings, but, as Haidt pointed out when speaking of soldiers marching and singing together, they felt a kind of togetherness, unity, and even a transcendence that they had not felt before (238). So, there may be some shared feeling, but it may not be necessary for the process to accomplish mere mimicry. However, when we begin to feel feelings that resonate with someone else's situation, this is what we commonly think of as empathy.

Emotional contagion or **infection** is related to motor mimicry and synchrony, but with the affective content that evokes feelings that do not originate in *our* experience. Such feelings have infected us by our empathic experience of the feelings of others. Many of these infections are not even consciously perceived by us. De Waal (2009) speaks of the contagion of pandiculating, or yawning: "Yawn contagion reflects the power of unconscious synchrony" (49). Our reflex is stimulated by the sight, sound, or even the thought of others yawning. He refers to this as "**mood transmission**" and claims that it is essential for a traveling species in order to quickly convey relevant information like predator sightings.

Mood convergence can be the experience of shared feelings occurring from synchronized activity as mentioned above. Soldiers have described a feeling of unity and care for their fellow soldiers during synchronized drills. "'I' passes insensibly into a 'we'…and individual fate loses its central importance…I believe that it is nothing less than the assurance of immortality that makes self-sacrifice at these moments so relatively

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easy…[my 'I'] lives on in the comrades for whom I gave up my life (Haidt 2006, 238).

All of these levels from mimicry to mood transmission are shared with a variety of other

mammals, but obvious examples, such as songbird mimicry, shows that many species

have this capacity.

Empathy, in its preconscious expression, can cause us to empathize without

knowing what we are feeling or the source of the feeling. I previously discussed Antonio

Damasio's claims about conscious and nonconscious processes of affective cognition,

empathy responds whether we choose to or not. Empathy is an example of the continuum

of preconscious to conscious affective-cognition that informs moral life. Empathy can

describe this overall process from preconscious and low affective expressions of mimicry

to more sophisticated forms of taking the other's point of view. In common parlance, the

term empathy is used to describe the experience of feeling emotions resonant to another's

affective state. In keeping with other thinkers' general terms, I use empathy as an

umbrella term for the continuum of emotional social cognition as exchanged

interpersonally. Empathy describes this general experience, but also the specific

experience of finding ourselves experiencing a mood more "appropriate to another's

situation than our own" as Martin Hoffman defines it (2000, 4).   In this way, empathy is

a category of neurophysiological processes that range from low to high in complexity and

affective content, but empathy is also the basic sentiment of regard for the other which

can be cultivated for higher moral functions like sympathy and compassion.

Sympathy has had a number of meanings in its use. Two forms are useful in my

discussion. I follow Hume and Smith speaking of sympathy as: 1) as "like feeling," as in

we *have the same taste in music* and 2) as "sympathetic concern for," as in *I have*

sympathy for you in your suffering from illness (Hume 1739/2003, 355). The former is

relevant, even though it is more aesthetic than moral, because it often provides easier

access to sympathetic regard. We tend to care more for those whom we are like. In

Chapter IV, I discuss the challenge of empathic biases which are sometimes based in

such sympathies. The second form of sympathy expresses, for many thinkers, a moral

development beyond empathy: from *feeling with* to *feeling for*. I think that it is useful to

preserve both understandings of sympathy as each describes different sentiments and

social experiences. **Compassion**, is also considered a moral development beyond

empathy, and is often used to describe sympathy. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum

describes empathy in ways resonant to what some theorists call "cognitive empathy" or

perhaps like what is called "analogical inference," being more intellectual and less

affective. This view of empathy understands the other, but from an emotional distance. I

might say that I understand the difficulties posed by being short of the cash for one's

groceries. I get that it is embarrassing, etc., but I am not arrested with the sensation of

that understanding. For Nussbaum (2001), empathy is an "imaginative reconstruction of

another person's experiences without any particular evaluation of that

experience…different from and insufficient for compassion" (301-2). For many

theorists, compassion moves beyond empathy to active care because it *suffers with* the

other and thus is motivated to act on his behalf. Phenomenologist Max Scheler

(1913/2008), sees this sentiment/experience as the height of moral feeling, identifying it

with a kind of spiritual moral achievement. In my use, I do not share Nussbaum's

definition of empathy because I am persuaded by the psychological literature that claims

that empathy is an affective response which may have "cooler" tones, as Hume described

the cooler passions, but are affective nevertheless. I do, however, regard the term

compassion as aptly designated by Nussbaum and Scheler as being beyond empathic

understanding. As such, I use the term "compassion" to indicate when empathic regard

has moved to motivation to act on behalf of the other. Compassion is intently focused on

the other as a unique person deserving of my attentive regard and active care.

Fellow-feeling is another term associated with empathy, and is often understood

as a more universal sentiment of humanity. This is what we feel for all humans when we

perceive them as fellows. Adam Smith, David Hume and Scheler share the view that this

regard forms the basis from which higher sentiments can develop. The moral concern is

to move one's fellow feeling to recognize the other as a fellow human and as such as

having a moral claim deserving a certain comportment and treatment. Sympathetic

regard and compassion are higher moral achievements in overcoming our self-concern

and our resistance to vulnerability by focusing on the pain, suffering, or situation of the

other (Scheler 2008/1913, 232). As Nussbaum (2001) puts it, compassion exhibits acting

on the sufferer's behalf (302). Fellow feeling is the basic sentiment for human ethos.

Fellow feeling, as Scheler employs the phrase, may be understood as general or basic

empathy. Both have a primitive, automatic quality, and a more intentional form of

expression, but are still deficient to sympathy and compassion. It may be, however, that

fellow feeling is the sentiment that emerges when we feel the inklings of our human

likeness, evoking care and regard for the other as a fellow human. If this is so, then it

may be that what we want for ethics is that empathic responses will, when called for, lead

to the sentiment of fellow feeling which can facilitate compassionate action.

My description of empathy includes a range of feelings which can progress in affective intensity and cognitive complexity, from primitive mimicry to compassionate suffering and self-sacrifice. Empathy provokes various moral responses like helping or avoiding one in distress. The feelings of empathic regard alone may be insufficient to motivate the empathizer to act for the good of the other, so understanding the neurophysiology of this process may give us insight into how we can improve empathy's reach, aptitude, and responsivity.

The Neurophysiology of Empathy and Moral Cognition

Current research into the neurophysiological underpinnings of empathy helps to explain 1) how it helps us understand others and 2) how it is foundational (and motivational) to morality. In this section, I explore the first point by looking at cognitive science literature relevant to empathy, and then lay out the relevant issues from the interdisciplinary philosophical debate on theory of mind. I will address the second point by exploring perception and empathic experience as the basis for moral acting.

In this section, I discuss what appear to be the relevant neurophysiological systems that underlie and activate empathy, and how they assist us in understanding others. I begin with Marco Iacoboni and Vittorio Gallese as two of the predominant pioneers in this area of research. *Mimicry* is innate, in both automatic and controlled process, according to Marco Iacoboni, Vittorio Gallese, and others in the article, "Grasping the Intentions of Others with One's Own Mirror Neuron System" (2005). What scientists have observed from fMRIs is the surprising amount of brain activation when the test subject is merely watching others act. It has been assumed by theorists and common sense thinkers alike, that observation is passive, but according to these findings,

observation is preparatory to action. Observer neural simulation was discovered by

Giacomo Rizzolatti, Gallese, and others in Rhesus monkeys whose neural mimicry

activated while watching a researcher grasp a cup (1992, 1996). The monkeys' brains

activated, in the same neuronal areas that would be activated if they were performing the

action. They concluded that the ability to understand the intention of another's actions is

made possible by the activation of *mirror neurons* which neurophysiologically simulate

the experience. Mirror neurons are understood as mimicking what is observed in both

motor and sensory areas of the brain. Such activation enables us to understand and

interpret, with reasonable accuracy, especially the most basic universal functions, like

drinking. "The stronger activation of the inferior frontal cortex in the 'drinking' as

compared to the 'cleaning' intention..." shows the universality of the drinking action over

cleaning actions, according to Iacoboni and Gallese (2005, 33). Actions like cleaning are

at a different level of activation due to cultural determinants.   In this way, practical

experience affects the level of neural excitation with ramifications for the vividness of

understanding.

Experience and perception facilitate our ability to interpret experience. An older

child understands the meaning of train sounds and car honks in ways that toddlers may

not. And adults generally understand the meanings of social disapproval better than an 8-

year old may. This accrual of experience, and the subsequent ability to understand the

social and environmental reality, seems to be aided by mirroring systems by creating

simulations of experiences in our brains and bodies. Iacoboni (2011) points out that

repeated bodily experiences of a given action evokes greater observer neural activation

when observing those same actions being performed by another. When watching actions

related to that bodily experience, the same motor and sensory neurons activate in the observer as were activated when she herself is acting. Broader and deeper activations in motor and sensory areas of the brain occurs in an experienced player observer than a non-player observer. For example, a frequent (skillful) basketball player will have more neural activation in watching a basketball game than a non-player. In each observer, the areas of the brain which would execute these actions activate, but the activation is fuller in the more skillful player. Here is a detailed explanation from Salvatore M. Aglioti, et al. (2008):

> In the first part of the experiment, the researchers had all three groups watch film clips of players attempting free throws. The clips were stopped at ten mid-action intervals and everybody was asked to predict the likely success of the free throws. The players made more accurate predictions at every time interval, but their greatest advantage over both expert watchers and inexperienced students was at the earliest intervals, before the balls had even left the players' hands, when there were no trajectories to watch.

> This indicated that athletes were better than the others at understanding cues from the filmed players' bodies. But the researchers also wanted to know how much their motor systems, primed by their mirror neurons, contributed to reading those cues. So in a second experiment, using a technique called transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), which yields the exact timing of neuronal firing, the researchers monitored the patterns of motor system activity in all three groups as they watched free throw video clips.

> Everyone's motor system perked up watching the action, but the students showed a generalized perk-up, while both players and expert watchers showed activity of the specific motor areas involved in shot-taking. What separated the players from the expert watchers, though, was greater excitation of the hand muscles controlling the ball, especially the muscle controlling the angle of the pinkie finger at the instant the ball left the shooter's hand. There was not necessarily visible movement of the pinkie, but a measurable increase in what's called "motor evoked potentials," which signal preparation for intended action. The most unpredictable result: This activation was greatest when players watched the launch of a ball that was going to *miss* the basket (2008).

The "spectating brain is also a playing brain," according to Iacoboni (2011). This mirroring process appears to assist in interpretive meaning-making processes, indicating a reciprocal relation between observation and action, and action and observation. Observers with more experience in the activity being observed will, it seems, have a fuller comprehension of the significance, ramifications, or implications of events. Mimicking others teaches us the meaning of their intentions, and as experience expands, we can apprehend further meaning. Mirroring processes, then, assist information processing, meaning-making, and the accumulation of meaning.

Some theorists are skeptical about the claims being made about, and even the existence of, mirror neurons. Iacoboni claims that there is evidence not only for the existence of mirror neurons in humans, but also for their evolutionary differences from some other primates. Some of these neurons are not connected to motor areas but instead are bound up with emotions, according to Iacoboni (2011, 55). This may show a relationship to empathy. "All these studies provide compelling evidence in support of the hypothesis that the mirror neuron system is a critical neural system for empathy" (Ibid. 52). Additionally, there are neurons specifically *inhibiting* imitation (53). The inhibitors perform two important functions relevant to my concerns for moral cultivation: 1) the ability to differentiate between the feelings and experience of self and the other, and 2) the ability to resist empathic emotional responses, avoiding the target's need. We can turn away from the empathic stimulus and repress our sympathetic response. This capacity is important for personal and relational regulation. Empathic responses would

disrupt and overwhelm us too often if we had no way to inhibit it. Thus, the inhibitor may perform a role as important as that of empathy itself.

Empathic intelligence enables one to understand others and form relationships, according to Iacoboni. This empathic connection indicates an important contradiction to the traditionally held idea that self and other are deeply discrete. Rather, according to Iacoboni, the functional sophistication and pervasiveness of mirror neurons in humans indicates that self and other are bound to one another empathically: Self without other is incomplete insofar as the very nature of self depends on others. We are effectually and affectively within each other (Iacoboni 2011, 56-57). It seems that empathic processes are a primary means by which we navigate our ultra-social lives.

Mimicry is an important indicator of how the bodily processes are bound up with cognition. Even when we are not physically mimicking an action, mirroring neurons activate, helping us understanding what we see. This embodied cognition is therefore deeply social as we continue building our mimicking repertoire and experiences in ever broadening activations of cognitive-affective processes.

Embodied cognition means that motion and emotion are inextricably bound up in one another, according to Vittorio Gallese et al. (1999). In the article "Perception Through Action," Gallese, Craighero, Fadiga and Fogassi claim that while action and perception are two separate neural domains, they cooperate in ways that indicate that perception might be thought of as action preparation. As we observe the events in the world, particularly the social world, our observations are readying us for action. Space perception is achieved by the cooperation of these two systems (2). The perception seems to have a role in both understanding action and preparing for it (2). "The visual

RFs [receptive field of the visual cortex] of these neurons are anchored to the *tactile* ones

regardless of eye position. These neurons seem to play a crucial role in the process of

visuo-motor transformation necessary to guide arm or head movements toward or away

from visual stimuli" (3-4 emphasis mine). One does not even need to *see* these actions;

just imagining them can activate these systems. "This common meaning [of the

coordination of visual and motor systems] is the representation of an action, that can be

triggered either by the presence of the object or by the memory of it, as it occurs when

grasping is executed without visual control" (4). The imagination is a powerful ally to

empathy.

  Gallese et. al.'s, work in motor theories of perception suggest that perception is

actively engaged when we are observing what some cognitive theorists call "embodied

simulation." [10] Such "motor imagery" may be being used in "high level or cognitive"

work such as "action understanding, mental imagery of action, perceiving and

discriminating objects." Their findings contradict theories of a strict separation of the

"knowing brain" from the "acting brain" (5). They quote Roger Sperry (1952):

> Perception is basically an implicit preparation to respond. Its function is
> to prepare the organism for adaptive action. The problem of what occurs
> in the brain during perception can be attacked much more effectively once
> this basic principle is recognized (1999, pp. 5 my copy from Internet).

Perception, then, is not a passive reception, but is highly engaged in action centers

of the brain, and appears to be a necessary preliminary to action. Such motor imagery is

useful to social cognition, and is not limited to visual stimuli. Kohler, Gallese et al.

(2002), point out that the meaning of sounds is conveyed in a similar fashion to the visual

perception discussed above, and likewise can raise anticipatory responses. Monkey

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[10] See Ben Bergen's discussion in Chapter V.

subjects respond to the sound of a peanut cracking, activating neural areas in their brains for the actions of cracking and eating peanuts.

Human subjects, likewise, hearing paper being torn have neural activations in their brains as if they themselves were tearing the paper. In "Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience," Freedberg and Gallese (2007) demonstrate further the embodied phenomena to illustrate the "neural mechanisms that underpin the empathic 'power of images' and show that embodied simulation and the empathetic feelings it generates has a crucial role" for social cognition (197). Vittorio Gallese uses the term "motor schema" to describe these action perceptions. These interworking systems feed our imagination to aid our affective cognition, our social perception, and intercourse.

I have looked at these discussions in cognitive science to aid our understanding in what informs and motivates empathy. According to Gallese, embodied simulation generates empathic feelings. These systems are so deeply embedded in our cognition that they create a field of shared meaning that is both preverbal and verbal. Gallese (2001) showed the underpinnings of intersubjectivity through his developing work on the motor schema. He claims that the pervasiveness of our motor schema creates what he calls a "shared manifold" of experience and meaning. "We are social animals" Gallese claims, explaining how the systems that enable us to automatically apprehend and comprehend many forms of meaning and their implications facilitate our shared existence. This intersubjectivity as an interpersonal exchange of motion and meaning, is due to the "relational nature of action." Gallese claims that empathy is enacted and meaning made through the "conceptual tool" of the "shared manifold of intersubjectivity" (2001, 34).

Gallese claims that to understand the intention of a goal, and potentially reenact it, there must be a sympathetic link between subject and target. "My proposal is that this link is constituted by the embodiment of the intended goal, shared by agent and observer…[and] that the embodiment of the action goal, shared by agent and observer, depends on the motor schema of the action and not only on a purely visual description of its agent" (36). Motion and emotion are so primordially experienced by each of us and all of us collectively, according to Gallese, that there is a kind of manifold of experience in which we all participate, providing a basis of sympathetic understanding. This shared experience of body, motion, and feelings. In other words, our shared bodily simulative powers, activates our empathic understandings of each other. Our own movement and perception of one another in movement are profoundly intersubjective at levels below conscious awareness (39). Perception feeds comprehension, which participates in what one is observing imaginatively, and it is thus, ready for action. On a cognitive-affective level, this affords shared meaning between ourselves and others. Perhaps this is why wordless exchanges between ourselves and strangers (e.g., standing in the check-out line at a grocery store) that include knowing looks, chuckles, or sad expressions are not only possible, but have the power to touch us and make us feel the interconnections of our humanity.

It is essential that in order to perform this dance of social expression and reception, we be able to almost instantaneously understand the import of the gestures and actions of other humans. Perceptual understanding is essential to the meaning-making project. Action is relational, according to Gallese (2001), "establishing a meaningful link between agent and observer." In order for mirror neurons to be activated in the subject,

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she must observe a goal-oriented action of a relatable being; machines do not activate them (36). The empathic link, our embodied intersubjectivity, for us bi-pedal tool-users provides a *shared manifold* of meaning from which we build a sense of agency for ourselves and recognize the agency of others (43).

We have been discussing an accrual of imaginative structures, like the motor schema and shared manifold, that help explain our perceptual comprehension of the actions of others. We have looked at how embodied simulation conveys meaning for social cognition. Andrew Meltzoff and M. Keith Moore (1995)[11] identified a related schema which can help explain how some action is then instigated. This "body scheme" facilitates not only the ability to mimic, but also memory of the experience which evoked the mimicry can be stored and later mimicked again. They tested forty newborns before they were discharged from the hospital. The youngest neonate was 42 minutes old, and all the infants exhibited the mimicry of lip and tongue protrusion. Infants, with their primitive "body scheme" can imitate such actions, but also have a self-orientation that indicates a low level awareness of their *separateness* from others.

Infant subjects were able to mimic adult researchers in tongue protrusion whom they had seen *on the previous day*. Moreover, the infants were able to replicate the unique style of protrusion that had been performed the previous day, such as tongue protruding on the left or right of the mouth. Infants use proprioception to correct their mimicry attempts when a researcher performs such alterations of tongue protrusion style. Older infants can understand the goal of an unsuccessful effort, and try to complete a

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[11] This research builds on their earlier research with infants in 1977.
http://ilabs.washington.edu/meltzoff/pdf/77Meltzoff_Moore_Science.pdf

researcher's unsuccessful task, like unsuccessfully reaching for a toy. "Infants store a representation of the adult's act and it is the target against which they compare their own acts" (59-60). Infant subjects also showed emotional sensitivity to "judgments" of researchers who emoted negatively to another researcher in the child's presence regarding a certain object. When the "grumpy" researcher was again present, the infant avoided the object. Following this and other studies, Meltzoff joins neuroscientist Jean Decety (2011) in claiming that there is a strong connection between the innate imitative impulse and the development of empathy: "the discovery of early motor imitation suggests a psychological and philosophical foundation for empathy prior to human language and complex adult thought" (60). The relationship is complex, though, and there are multiple systems at work in each system even as some overlap.

The nature of representation and inference complicate our understanding of the workings of empathy. It may prove difficult to tease apart the functions of the physical and cognitive aspects of empathy since even infants seem to have both behavioral and mental influences their empathic response. According to Decety and Meltzoff (2011), mimicry and empathy seem to be underpinned by "partially distinct, but inter-related" processes. Motor mimicry is innate for a number of different species, particularly primates. But, "human infants are the most imitative creature in the world" (58). These neurophysiological processes enable us to apprehend meaning about the interplay of social relations in which we live and move.

Theorists have been wrestling for a long time questions regarding the various cognitive processes, and how they work to facilitate our social understanding. These theories regarding embodied cognition are controversial. Some theorists hold that the

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body has a secondary role to the intellectual processes. Franz de Waal (2009) disagrees.

He holds what he calls a "body first" view of social cognition, which means that the body

is the first to apprehend and respond, and only later, if at all, do conscious processes

engage (81). He claims that many of empathy's jobs are not consciously engaged. Like

Antonio Damasio (see Chapter I) he sees much of our cognitive-affective processing as

generally below the level of consciousness. This body first view is also known as the

"bottom-up" view, meaning that cognition begins in the so-called lower processes, like

mimicry, and moves up to reflective consciousness, or the controlled processes, when

necessary. This view will be explained more fully below in the *theory of mind* section.

Body first theorists see empathy as continuous with other species and more primitive

human systems. De Waal claims that empathy begins preconsciously, responding to and

resonating with the expressions of others, it thus enables our preconscious self to intuit

the meanings of others' expressions. In this way, our bodies may start the engines for a

flight before we are consciously aware of the need to run. De Waal illustrates human

continuity with other primates by showing an instance of *body reading* (as opposed to

mind reading) between two chimps, an alpha male named Rock and a non-alpha female,

Belle.

Belle is a bright young female who learns how to deceive the alpha male, Rock, in

a variety of ways, to keep him from eating all of the (human given) treats, as is his wont.

Both chimps use their empathic perception to *read* one another's actions and intentions.

As part of this exploration of social cognition, researchers would give treats to the chimps

and observe. "If Rock was not present, Belle invariably led the group to food and nearly

everybody got some" (97). But, when Rock is present, she hides the treats. Eventually,

he learns how she behaves when she is hiding the food. He kicks or bites her, pushing

her off of the food and eats it all. Belle then learns to hide the food in a place apart from

where she sits. Rock pushes Belle away from her seat, but finding nothing, he leaves her

alone. Then, when he is gone, Belle is able again to share the concealed food with the

others. According to DeWaal, these primates are not reading each other's *minds* as such,

but their *behaviors,* whose meaning we primates empathically understand (96-97). This

is an example of how our body schemas and motor schemas, and what Gallese calls the

shared manifold facilitate our social cognition.

Theorists like de Waal favor the view that social cognition, in particular, is rooted

in the bodily signs and responses to the social and environmental milieu which we

inhabit. As we move deeper into the discussions on empathy, some terminology and a

sense of the relevant debates will be helpful.   Empathy theory intersects with Theory of

Mind, as both are engaged in the question of how it is that we understand other subject's

minds and anticipate their intentions. Theory of Mind explores the process of what some

theorists call 'mind reading,' and what de Waal calls "reading bodies." Theory of Mind

is relevant here because it deals with many of the questions in empathy research, and

because it is part of the theoretical history regarding knowledge of others. Empathy

research indicates an alternative to the traditional theory of mind view that we know each

other by a rough sort of folk psychology, or an "argument from analogy" (Coplan and

Goldie 2011, xiii), but many ideas from Theory of Mind will help us to develop our

understanding of how empathy operates. Theory of Mind is concerned specifically with

the question of how it is that we can apprehend the inner states of others. What follows is

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a sketch of the basic views and disagreements in the Theory of Mind debates, which will aid us in understanding some key issues in empathy theory and research.

Theory of Mind Relative to Empathy

Theory of Mind inquires into the nature of our knowledge of others, particularly how we know their inner worlds. The discussions below lay out the spectrum of views about how it is that we understand the thoughts, intentions, and feelings of other people, how we know: a) that they have inner worlds similar to our own—that they are "minded" like ourselves, and b) the import of what their expressions convey for meaning and predicting behavior. There are two main views in the Theory of Mind debate, "Theory Theory" and "Simulation Theory." These views are often considered to be a "top-down" or a "bottom-up" theory respectively, which means that Theory theory asserts that we know that others are minded primarily, or exclusively, by intellectual activity, or theorizing, while Simulation theory claims that we know this via bodily simulation primarily. Theory theory claims that we understand that others have minds and internal states by intellectual inference. We draw inferences based on comparisons with our own experiences and states. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie cite Gopnik and Wellman (1994) as an example of the Theory theory view in which the observer views the subject with a kind of "folk psychology" like a "folk physics" and surmises what a subject will do based on theoretical surmises informed by that folk psychology (2011, xxxii).

Alison Gopnik (2011) states that Theory theory is "the idea that children's learning is like theory change in science…[exhibiting] both rich structure and significant learning"(162). This is a kind of "top down" theoretical Theory of Mind, because it begins with a conscious theoretical representation that is inferred to be the state of the

mind of the other. The "false belief test" is considered emblematic of such inferential

theorizing, which one is able to pass by about four years old. The false belief test quizzes

a child's ability to differentiate between her knowledge of the events of a story and those

of the character from within the story (Bloom and German 2000, B25-B31). The child

indicates a low level theory of mind when she recognizes that she knows more than the

character in the story. The child recognizes that while she, the reader, knows that Little

Red is talking to the wolf and not her grandmother, the character Little Red does not.

In contrast to Theory theory, Simulation theory regards the understanding of the

other as being primarily rooted in simulation rather than in theoretical intellection.

Simulation Theory has two branches of thought. The first branch is more explicitly

representational in its view of our understanding of other minds. We intentionally and

consciously simulate the experience of the other in our minds, that is, one is cognizant of

(and even an agent in) one's mimicry of the other's situation. So, rather than making a

theoretical inference to the states of the other, one simulates it, representing to oneself

relevant insight into the other's inner state. It differs from the Theory theory inference in

being more affectively valenced; there is emotional content, but not so much as in the

second branch of Simulation Theory. The other branch of Simulation Theory claims that

understanding of the other is primarily embodied, rooted in automatic processes rather

than conscious or controlled processes. This view is considered "bottom-up" because it

originates in automatic, nonconscious bodily processes with both cognitive and affective

dimensions (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). So, rather than observing and then

simulating my target's experience so as to conjure the relevant insight, my embodied

cognition began simulating before I was even cognizant of it. "According to 'simulation

theory', other people's mental states are represented by adopting their perspective: by tracking or matching their states with resonant states of one's own. The activity of mirror neurons, and the fact that observers undergo motor facilitation in the same muscular groups as those utilized by target agents, are findings that accord well with simulation theory but would not be predicted by theory theory" (Gallese and Goldman 1998, 493). When we watch a horror movie, we are viscerally charged with fear, sweat, and a racing heart. We do not need much if any cognizing about the situation to experience this fear and understand its import relative to the characters.

To recap then, Theory theory asserts that mind reading is conducted beginning in the intellectual, theoretical processes which make inferences from the other's behavior to what the import is. Simulation theory has the more mental and more bodily formations in which the former is an agent in the simulation process, running the simulation as it were, whereas in the latter, the neurophysiological processes are doing it nonconsciously. The insights may become conscious on the second Simulation theory view, but they may not. This is the view generally held by embodied simulation theorists. A simplistic example may assist our appreciation of the differences here. Say I am at a grocery store, watching a mother and her child, who is in the cart. I see their smiling interactions and playful bodily movements. Theory theory would say that I see the smiles and can infer, based on my epistemic understanding of smiles as indicative of positive feelings, that the mother and child are therefore happy. The more intellectually-based Simulation theory would suggest that I would run a simulation of the smiles that I see, and from that basis, know that they are happy. Bottom up Simulation theory would suggest that I do not need to think at all. The smiles automatically stimulate simulation responses in my

neurophysiological make up such that I look at their cheerful interaction and feel happy myself—even if only fleetingly. It is fair to say that if I take the time to actually note their interactions, I will be touched emotionally by their expressions. In the last description, there may be little to no intellectual content to my touched feelings. I will not likely think, "Isn't that sweet?" or "They must really love each other." Instead, I simply feel their sentiments, understanding their feelings for each other, and move on to search for apples.

Philosopher Karsten Steuber (2012) seeks to offer another perspective to these three theories. He thinks that Simulation Theory does not sufficiently capture social cognition. Steuber breaks simulation down to: matching, simulation, and attribution. He broadens the description of empathic inclinations to what he calls Narrative theory. In our living theatre, our empathic matching is imaginative role-playing of the target's inner state and ideas. Simulation is cognizing possible reasons and goals of target. Attribution is basing one's folk psychological interpretation of the target's action on one's reflection from the simulation phase (57). He is persuaded by theories that connect the activity of mirror neurons and empathic responses, but, thinks that they apply for basic empathy only. Steuber sees mimicry as essential for what he calls *reenactment* empathy, which is role-playing. Such role-playing is the sophisticated means by which we can infer the reasons for others' actions; it has a tacit folk psychology and goes beyond basic empathy (60). The meaning of reading the other is for ascertaining the import of the other through role-play, as well as to identify our roles with regard to the other.

Philosopher Shaun Gallagher (2012) claims that it is interaction, rather than cognitive understanding, that motivates our empathic interest in the other. He explores

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what he calls Interactive theory which he claims is non-representational. In the book,

Moving Ourselves, Moving Others, Gallagher argues that since much of what is

happening is a bodily response to external stimuli, calling the experience simulation mis-

describes the phenomenology of the event. The cognitive science evidence does not

seem to support the sort of agency required for a simulation in his view.

> In contrast to both of these approaches [Theory theory, Simulation theory],
> I have argued elsewhere (Gallagher 2001a, 2004, 2005, 2007aandb) that
> our primary and pervasive way of encountering others is not characterized
> by observation, but by interaction. That is, the others we try to understand
> are usually people with whom we are interacting, engaged in some
> communicative act, or in some common task or situated in some common
> setting (173).

Interactive theory, rather than depending on a 1st or 3rd person perspective is more

immersed in an intersubjective experience which Gallagher describes as 2nd person.

Gallagher claims that Interactive theory captures the spectrum of low-level and high-level

empathy. He employs the terms "communicative and narrative competency" to describe

a sophisticated level of sympathetic understanding, which requires an achievement of

proficiency in self-understanding. Such a self-understanding necessarily includes a

narrative, or autobiographical, self-awareness within a larger narrative.

My sense of the embodied simulation theories, like those of Vittorio Gallese and

Franz de Waal, is that the experience being simulated is not representational as such.

That is, it does not seem to entail an intellectually conscious choice to simulate, as the

first version of Simulation theory claims. Rather the simulation is body first, and

provides the elements that come together in import for social cognition. The bodily and

cognitive processes work together to form and discern the social meaning. The ideas in

Steuber's Narrative theory and Gallagher's Interactive theory provide useful nuances and

points of view that the other theories would do well to note, however. Interaction theory make our sociality explicit, and Narrative theory highlights the narrative structure of experience, which we will discuss in later chapters. The latter theory looks like more of an accrual to Simulation theory since we do not need narrative information to simulate and understand the smile, but we do need it to understand the nature of mother and child relations.

The Theory of Mind debate is concerned to identify where the knowledge of other minds is sourced and how it is manifested. For Theory theorists, the process begins with intellectual inference that may then activate the lower bodily and affective states. That is why it is called a top-down theory. For some Simulation theorists, this intellectual process includes an internal representation or simulation, not mere intellectual inference, and has affective content. For the "bottom-up" Simulation theorists, like Vittorio Gallese, the process begins with a (usually) unconscious simulation, including relevant affective responses that may reach consciousness, and lead to cognizance and emotional resonance of the other's situation and/or feelings that we call empathy. This outline of the views should help us track the discussions as we go into further depth on the nature of empathy and its social implications. The views of Steuber and Gallagher add useful insights to the imaginative potentials of empathy, which I think is important for getting a full picture of how empathy works. Empathy theorists tend to lean toward either Theory theory or Simulation theory. I find that Stephanie Preston and Alicia Hofelich make a compelling case for the bi-directionality of social cognition (which Jean Decety, 2011, agrees with). My tentative view agrees with de Waal's body first claim, that the body simulates and then, sometimes higher cognitive-affective processes engage add

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complexity and sophistication, as we grasp the intentions of others, for example the narrative components. Then, as we grow in affective-cognitive skills, our empathic perception includes more bi-directionality, as Preston and Hofelich describe below.

Perception and Experience of Empathy

Perception and understanding, as theorists like Vittorio Gallese and Andrew Meltzoff have shown, work together for social cognition. As we conduct our daily business, and routines, our perception, thoughts, and actions are guided by our automatic processes easily navigating social situations. This is evolutionarily useful insofar as typical tasks, which have been habituated, are more efficiently executed by the automatic processes than the slower controlled processes. This division of labor saves cognitive energy and capacity for tasks that do require controlled processes. The work being done on mirror neurons is helping us understand these processes of social cognition, giving us a rich understanding of the interworkings of bodily cognitive processes. Vittorio Gallese and Alvin Goldman (1998) suspect that the mirror neuron system is an adaptive trait assisting in interpreting an agent's intentions as "cooperative, non-cooperative, or even threatening. Accurate understanding and anticipation enable the observer to adjust his responses appropriately" (496). It appears, then, that we are mirroring in such a way as to apprehend the nuances of social meaning. We are also enabled to retrodict, to reconstruct, what someone may have felt or thought or intended in a past situation in light of new information (497). So, as we reflect on the events of yesterday, we can reconsider what we witnessed, perhaps in light of new information, and *reinterpret* what we saw and what it meant. We can predict or infer the intended goal of an action (498). Thus the mirroring system facilitates both mundane and highly sophisticated social cognition.

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Some theorists like Martha Nussbaum (2001) identify the intellectual aspects of empathy as separate from emotional concern. Psychologists Stephanie Preston and Alicia Hofelich (2011) call this form of empathy "cognitive empathy." They do not see cognitive empathy as absolutely distinct from other forms of empathy, but rather describe empathic processes as operating on a vertical continuum, activating bi-directionally. Most commonly, activation is from the bottom-up, from the viscera to nonconscious and conscious cognition. Mindful of the debate surrounding theory of mind, Preston and Hofelich parse the semantics of empathy by outlining the various expressions of empathy from emotional contagion to cognitive empathy. Preston and Hofelich suggest a *dynamic* view of empathy that is not exclusively *bottom-up* or *top-down,* because we may actually socially cognize in both ways. The process may depend on the type of social provocation. Most of the time, they suggest, we experience the other through the automatic processes of perception which are so habituated as to be invisible. Driving, when all is going smoothly, is an example of this. We immediately read the intentions of others and barely recall exchanges with other drivers unless something unexpected occurs.

Preston and Hofelich (2011) survey the data on empathy research and claim that it indicates a continuum from lowest emotional levels (skin conductance, etc.) to highest cognitive levels, including intellectual apprehension without affective matching. And they see the benefits of the various forms. Cognitive empathy can compensate for the lack of shared experience by drawing on what we already *know* about others. This effortful quality, using the controlled mental processes, may assist the subject in overcoming the temptation to self-focus.

This process combines higher level executive control, attention and working memory processes to generate and internal image of the experience which can then activate personal representations and downstream bodily sensation. This process occurs during perspective taking and theory of mind, both of which are effortful, conscious attempts to understand the target without requiring direct perception (Ibid. 6).

Preston and Hofelich add, however, that mere cognitive empathy may not result in the target feeling fully understood. More affective engagement is needed for fuller empathy.

Cognitive empathy appears to have an important role, though, in the work of building sympathy, as one reaches past one's own experiences, and social biases in order to see other perspectives, role-play, etc., from within the life of another. It seems particularly useful when one has time for reflection and deliberation on the social situation (though based on embodied simulation theories, even reflections have affective charges that motivate our evaluations).[12] Contrarily, Preston and Hofelich claim that urgent altruistic acts tend to be the result of *preexisting representations* that enabled the helper in a "real-world" emergency to rush "into danger without thinking while those who do not help usually report not knowing what to do" (Ibid. 7).[13]

Preexisting representations would refer to ideas and attitudes previously internalized and habituated. If a toddler falls into a pond, most adults have sufficient preexisting representations (the concern for small children, ability to swim, etc.) to

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[12] See Ben Bergen discussion in Chapter V.
[13] This will be relevant in Chapter VI on Narrative Empathy in which I argue that narrative engagements create such representations in readers.

immediately motivate our action to save the child. Like most aspects of empathy, preexisting representations have ambivalent potential to help, harm, or ignore, as they can provoke empathic biases. Empathic bias tends toward only helping those we know, or those like ourselves; so I would be likely to save my child first if he and another child were in danger. Nevertheless, rescuing a child from a pond is fairly effortless for most of us with moderate swimming skills. Challenges that fall outside of one's skillset can impede empathy from moving us to prosocial action (Ibid. 7). Preston and Hofelich (2011) make a compelling case then for a complex system of cognitive-affection communication and social cognition. They state that the evidence does not support an either-or conclusion for bottom-up or top-down exclusively. We mostly seem to rely on bottom-up processes for the everyday variety of empathic needs, but also have need of the more intellectual cognitive processes when experiential or relatable sympathies may be lacking.

Empathy theorists have a number of concerns regarding empathy's ability to promote prosocial action. One such concern is what is called the self-other overlap. The positive utility of the self-other overlap is that we are able to feel resonant feelings with the other and that this can both motivate our helping behavior and give us insight into the nature of their feelings. The negative aspect of the self-other overlap is emotional blurring and non-helping or misguided efforts to help. In the self-other overlap, the perspective and feelings of the self and the other can be unclearly differentiated due to muddy boundaries, projection, poor emotion regulation, etc. Some theorists are concerned that empathy is impaired by an over-focus on self, such as can happen when one experiences personal distress. Personal distress is when the suffering of the other

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overwhelms the subject with psychological pain that can be self-oriented rather than empathically oriented toward relieving the suffering of the other. An example of this would be of sad Bob is describing his feelings and Mary, rather than listening empathically, interjects her own sad experiences of a like nature, cutting Bob off from her receptivity. Or if one is overwhelmed by personal distress, one may abandon the sufferer altogether. Empathic distress for the other is thus limited, or completely derailed by aversion to the sufferer.

Personal distress can also result from blurring of self with the other, distorting perception and judgment for apt action. Preston and Hofelich (2011) claim that there is a lack of evidence for an experience of empathy devoid of any self-other overlap, and that personal distress (focused on self) is not necessarily a hindrance any more than cognitive empathy is necessarily a help[14]. The self-other overlap may be due to the dynamism of the neurophysiology of empathy, meaning that as a dynamic exchange of cognitive-affective information between self and other, it is never purely one or the other. Such an overlap may be a key motivating factor for prosocial behavior because we feel keenly how our own wellbeing is intertwined with the wellbeing of the other. Martin Hoffman, whom I will discuss at length in Chapter IV, claims that personal distress, properly managed, does not interfere with prosocial action, and rather, that it may be a primary motivator to help the other. Self-other overlap is not limited to human relations, which is why we can feel empathy with other species, according to Preston and Hofelich (8).

Many empathy theorists are concerned about the self-other overlap because they worry that it will lead to a self-focus and disable empathy from moving the subject to

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[14] Personal distress will be discussed more fully in Chapter IV.

prosocial action (Amy Coplan 2011, 11). Such theorists claim that empathy, properly so

called, ought to exclude self entirely. However, Preston and Hofelich claim that the

interpenetration of neurophysiological systems does not justify theorizing discrete moral

categories of self and other. The self-other overlap does not appear to be a hindrance for

prosocial action. Like the other complexities of empathy it has the ambivalent potential

to assist or hinder prosocial action depending on a variety of factors. The bi-directional

empathic processes then, entail self-other overlap, and depend on other influences to

become properly moral.

Empathic accuracy may be impacted by the self-other overlap, however, so

theorists have explored the implications of the relation of self and other for prosocial

action. Neuroscientists Jean Decety and Megan Meyer (2008) agree with the views of

Preston and Hofelich (2011) that the overlap does not necessarily mean that the self is

confused as to whether she feels her own or the other's feelings, however. Distinction

between self and other is still intact. It is the psychological clarity of the distinction

between self and other, together with the empathic feelings, that can help motivate

prosocial action, not a lack of overlapping feelings. Decety and Meyer define empathy as

"an affective response stemming from the understanding of another's emotional state or

condition similar to what the other person is feeling or would be expected to feel in the

given situation, *without confusion between self and other*" (1053). They describe some

of the developmental aspects of empathy in relation to the question about self-other

overlap. As they explicate the neurophysiological underpinnings of empathy, they come

to the conclusion that:

a number of components contribute to the experience of empathy: (a) affective sharing, a bottom-up process grounded in perception–action coupling and potentially underpinned by mirror neuron systems; (b) the ability to differentiate oneself from a perceived target, which relies on a sense of agency, self-, and other awareness, and likely involves frontoparietal and prefrontal circuits; and (c) executive functions instantiated in the prefrontal cortex (PFC),which operate as a top-down mediator, helping to regulate emotions and yield mental flexibility (1054).

The three components that Decety and Meyer (2008) deem necessary for proper empathy are affective sharing, self-other distinction, and the ability to regulate and direct cognitive-affective processes for the goal of empathizing.

Affective sharing is the sharing of feelings between self and other. It is underpinned by the perception-action mimicry processes, in agreement with the earlier discussion on mirroring systems and bottom-up processing (1055). Self-other differentiation is developmental. Initially, the overlap is fairly blurred as in the emotional contagion of infants beginning to cry when they hear others cry. Through development, a child's affective sharing preserves a psychological distinctness of self and other, so she no longer dissolves into despair when another toddler cries. Decety and Meyer claim that a level of cognitive-affective control is necessary in order for the empathizer to focus on the one in need. This requires development of the relevant cognitive functions and socialization as to how to guide and regulate affect and awareness (1059). Regulation is an important part of our automatic processes, and emotions assist us in regulating our

conscious experience. Decety and Meyer recount that Darwin and others since have

noted the role that the emotions play in evaluating and reporting the status of social life,

homeostasis being the goal. Social cognition is instigated by the body (1075).

Thus it is that social cognition needs maturation, experience, and training. Mature

and sincere empathy is not possible without developmentally appropriate social skills.

Decety joins psychologist Sara Hodges (2006) in discussing the complexity of the

cognitive-affect of empathy. They indicate two primary components of empathy that

most theorists agree on: "(1) an affective response to another person, which may (but not

always) entail sharing that person's emotional state; and (2) a cognitive capacity to take

the other person's perspective" (103). They seek to identify the "fundamental neural

mechanisms" on which empathy is based (103). As humans, we have the same basic

neural structure in our brains and throughout our bodies. This shared neural structure

facilitates our ability to have shared representations of patterns of actions between subject

and target, which can trigger empathy. Representations will be informed by cultural

styles. As was stated above, shared experience tends to improve shared representation.

"Shared representations rely on common neural coding associated with the *perception*

and *performance* of actions." For example, emotions seen in facial expressions evoke

similar expressions on observer's faces (104). We saw this in Marco Iacoboni's

discussion of the basketball game observers above.

Without shared neural structures, empathy will be more difficult to achieve.

Deficits in one's own emotional capacity significantly limits one's ability to perceive the

other properly. Jean Decety and Sara Hodges state the findings that, "Lesions of the

amygdala may cause paired deficits in both the recognition of fear in facial expressions as

well as in the phenomenological experience of fear (Adolphs, Tranel, Damasio and Damasio 1995)" (104). So, damage in one's ability to experience fear, that is to the amygdala, translates into an inability to recognize fear in another. We need shared neural structures to recognize what we see in the other.

As noted by theorist Karsten Steuber above, there seems to be a narrative quality to our empathic understandings. Our stored ideas also play a role in our empathic skill, according to Sara Hodges. Together with Lewis, et al., (2012), Hodges explored how stereotypes influence one's inferences about another's thoughts. Some of our interpretive functions may be more *behaviorally* directed (reading the body), and others more *inferentially* directed (relying on stereotypes and other representative information). They chose the stereotype of first time mothers to explore the effect of stereotypes on empathic accuracy and found that accuracy was improved by the frames of stereotypes (1042). "However, the gains in accuracy depended on the targets' thoughts being *consistent with stereotypes*" (1044 emphasis mine). Further study found that "perceivers used group-based stereotypes to inform empathic inferences, which helped them to infer some (but not all) thoughts and feelings" (1045). Interestingly, stereotypes diminished in usefulness with fuller knowledge of individual targets (1046). Stereotypes are less useful in understanding the feelings and experiences of friends with whom we are more intimate.

So it is that while reading others is primarily a bottom-up process, it may be that as we develop more cognitive skills and acquire more information from our cultural narratives, our sophistication and top-down processes can increase. Perhaps, top-down processes are needed to adjust for novel developments. And with sufficient experience,

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the internalization of certain patterns of behavior is such that it requires a lesser degree of mimicry to lead to correct interpretations of others.

So far, I have looked at a lot of discussion on the neurophysiological processes involved in empathic perception and its relation to prosocial action. The indications of embodied cognition and embodied simulation give a compelling account of the way empathy works. Such an understanding can lend insights into how empathy can be cultivated, both developmentally as children, and continuing throughout adulthood, as we assume responsibility for our own moral character development. In the next section, I consider clues as to how we might improve the practice of empathic perception for individual and social wellbeing.

Practical Empathy

The developmental implications of empathy suggest that as a form of perception, it is altered by cultivation and experience. The way in which empathic perception can mature into a skillful and sensitive responsivity returns me to considerations of the virtuous achievement of *wu-wei* from Chinese thought. *Wu-wei* is well characterized as "effortless action" because it is not non-acting but acting in a very particular kind of way, without force or self-conscious impediments, and instead exhibiting a spontaneous insight and skill in fulfilling the requirements of the task. A calligrapher whose well-practiced performance has become natural, spontaneous, and even improvisational, exhibits a *wu-wei* kind of excellence. As mentioned in Chapter I, Mihalyi Csiktsentmihalyi claims that it is the repetition of the performance that eventually allows the clunky conscious processes to recede into the background as the automatic processes,

well-practiced in the performance, take over and we subjects can relax into the movement.

One is no longer thinking, but doing, and awkward self-consciousness slips away, as one loses oneself in the performance of the task or skill. Empathy, as a form of intuition, if properly trained and practiced well, can be performed like a musical or dance improvisation. Skillful empathy might spontaneously respond to the nuances of social situations with attentiveness, grace, and moral excellence. "[S]omeone who is truly committed to the values of his society has completely downloaded them into his embodied mind." Proof that this internalization process is complete "shows in the sages whose faces are 'as smooth and untroubled as infants'" (Slingerland 2014, 190).

This is a long process, obviously. Beginning with basic attachment, infants protruding their tongues in mimicry at their loving caregivers will need years of guidance and correction to develop their capacities for proper empathic perception. The automaticity that is achieved with mastery of a skill, facilitates the ease of these perceptions. Habit is the internalization of a practice, once consciously engaged, which our automatic processes can now take over. Automaticity can, unfortunately, also allow unproductive or unhelpful habits to persist without critical reflection. We fall into bad social habits. The profound sociality of empathy suggests to me that it is an ideal site for shifting automatic preconscious attitudes to be in better accord with our conscious values.

Haidt, Hume, de Waal, Gallese, and many of the theorists above, claim that we are not only social, but profoundly social. Our profound intersubjectivity is active even when we are alone in the privacy of our own spaces; those spaces are shot through with

our sociality. Everything we touch, taste, or divert ourselves with is the product of visible and invisible social relations, from the books we read, the computers we use, to the food we eat, tended, picked, and perhaps prepared by unknown hands. Even our ideas are not our own, but are formed, informed, deformed, and reformed by our culture—for good or for ill. Empathy is how we understand and navigate these social spaces. Like our five senses, empathy functions as an interpretive and communicative tool. The evidence of the data surveyed in this chapter leads me to the view that the cultivation of morality depends on the cultivation of certain feelings, perceptions, and responses which are bound up with empathy. We have yet to explore, however, how empathy can grow, or what attracts empathy toward growth. What is the influence of the imagination on empathy, or empathy on the imagination? Any cultivation project will need to appeal to the imaginative qualities of empathy so as to draw it into the shaping influences. I will thus turn to philosophical and aesthetic theorists to help us understand the experience of empathy which may shed light on its relation to the moral imagination. We begin with Theodore Lipps, the 19th century aesthetician, who brought the term empathy and the experience of it to the attention of aesthetic, psychological and philosophical thinkers. Aesthetic experience, experience of the senses, leads empathic perception into the worlds of others. What is revealed through empathy is not only our deep dependence on one another, but also the shared reality that binds us together, bodies and heart-minds. The nature of such experiences may be the tipping point between helping, hindering, or ignoring the other.

CHAPTER III

SEEING THE OTHER:

EMPATHIC PERCEPTION AND PROFOUND INTERSUBJECTIVITY

In a word, I am now with my feeling of activity, entirely and wholly in the moving figure. Even spatially, if we can speak of the spatial extent of the ego, I am in its place. I am transported into it. I am, so far as my consciousness is concerned, entirely and wholly identical with it. Thus feeling myself active in the observed human figure, I feel also in it free, facile, proud. This is esthetic imitation and this imitation is at the same time esthetic empathy.
~ Theodore Lipps

Human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty — it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it.

My own <u>experience</u> and development deepen everyday my conviction that our <u>moral progress</u> may be measured by the degree in which we sympathize with <u>individual</u> <u>suffering</u> and individual <u>joy</u>.
~George Eliot

Empathy and Imagination

In the previous chapter, I discussed the way empathy works neurophysiologically, and some of the implications of that for ethical regard for the other. What we have not looked at is what the experience of empathy feels like, what it does to us as subjects, or how it impacts our comportment in the intersubjective experience. As the epigraph above suggests, empathic experiences can sometimes lead to a kind of transport out of self-concern. Engrossed, even entranced, by the one engaging our empathic attention, we forget self, forget thinking, and maybe even forget our bodies. We feel only our absorption in the experience. While most empathic experiences are fairly mundane, they facilitate understanding of our world, social and environmental.

In the previous chapter, we saw that empathy is a form of perception and as such, interacts with other forms of perception. The American Psychological Association

defines perception as "the processes that organize information in the sensory image and interpret it as having been produced by properties of objects or events in the external, three-dimensional world."[15] This is a good starting point insofar as it describes the variety of perceptual duties and leaves open the element of consciousness in perception. What it leaves out, however, is the way in which perception is actively engaging the world by selecting what it looks at, interpreting, judging, and responding to it. I am interested in both the receptive and the active functions of empathic perception.

Much of perception is below the level of consciousness. Proprioception is the form of perception that enables us to walk, balance, and physically navigate the world. It is not something that we very often need to be conscious of unless something disrupts habitual performance. If one closes one's eyes and attempts to touch one's nose with an extended hand, one does not immediately find the nose because human proprioception relies heavily on sight. If the ground is irregular, one will also pay conscious attention to the alterations so as to adjust step, etc. So it seems to be with other forms of perception. Once we habituate to a perceptual field, whether jogging on sidewalks, mountain biking, or driving in rural or urban areas, we are often able to navigate movement and terrain without conscious awareness, or perhaps only fleeting awareness. This is the usefulness of automaticity for perception, but of course it is an achievement of cultivation and practice. Many hours are needed behind the wheel of a car for one to automatically navigate traffic well. That is how the habits necessary to the task are formed.

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[15] Definition of Perception from: http://www.apa.org/research/action/glossary.aspx?tab=16

Habit is precisely how perception is cultivated; repetition in experience is what facilitates habitual automaticity. As a young person, unfamiliar with painting as an art form, seeing Van Gogh's Sunflowers may not signify much. The meaning of Van Gogh's style, his play with color, texture, perspective, and so on, do not usually strike the young/inexperienced observer as significant. Only when we understand something about painting, color, light, perhaps a little about art, or art history, or the meaning of representation and non-representational art, etc., will the piece begin to speak more fully to the observer. One literally cannot *see* what one is looking at. So, we must learn to see. Then gradually, aspects of a painting can emerge for us as meaningful elements of the whole, deepening our experience of the painting and perhaps, even of life itself. Empathic perception, like other forms of perception, has its roots in our neurophysiology, but can be developed and refined. As we train the ear to hear the tones and rhythms of a particular style of music, or the eye to appreciate the stylistic patterns and uses of color in painting, so can empathic perception be shaped and refined for moral sensitivity and responsiveness. In the last chapter, I suggested that the empathic perception might be touched and moved by imaginative engagements. In this chapter, I would like to explore the imaginative potential of empathy as a means of shaping it for moral life. I begin by looking at the Confucian ideal of benevolence which is the matured development of basic empathy (Mengzi/Mencius calls this compassion).

A Story of Empathic Perception: Limits and Possibilities

The ancient Confucians were very interested in developing the virtues, and advocated for programs of aesthetic practices, accompanied by study of the poetry and thought from history, to facilitate such development. The famous Confucian, Mengzi

(Mencius), noticed the way in which seeing and hearing mattered for morality. He pointed out how perception was a matter of inclusion and exclusion, how we tend to see what we expect to see and overlook the rest. In his view, our perception could be shaped to include more of the meaningful elements of a given moral situation. Such shaping is necessary, according to Mengzi, to grow our "moral sprouts." In Mengzi's (2001) view, we are all born with the potential for virtue in the form of moral sprouts. Among them are the nascent inclinations to care for others, which he calls compassion, but which I think compares to empathy as I am using it here.

The sprouts are the basis of being human, but developing them is necessary for becoming humane. "If one knows how to fill them all out, it will be like a fire starting up, a spring breaking through! If one can merely fill them out, they will be sufficient to care for all within the Four Seas. If one merely fails to fill them out, they will be insufficient to serves one's parents" (2A6). Filling them out is growing them into their mature states, which for the sprout of compassion is benevolence. And if one does not do this, one will not have sufficient virtue to perform the most natural task of caring for one's parents. So, undeveloped moral sprouts are fairly disastrous for wellbeing.

Compassion is a moral sprout of much importance for Mengzi. In his discourse with King Xuan of Qi, he elaborates on its vital importance to genuine rulership. The Confucians were concerned with just governance as a means to creating social order and harmony. A just ruler is analogous to (and an exemplar for) an individual's self-governance, a father's governance of his family, etc. Cultivation of compassion, the bud of social feelings and impulses, is essential for the maturation of morality. When cultivated, compassion matures into the virtue (*de*) of benevolence, or *ren*.

For the Confucians, *de*, like the Latin *virtue*, connotes strength, and like the Greek *arête,* connotes *excellence*. *De* adds the quality of moral power, or charisma. Developing the virtues allows one to have a personal strength and moral appeal. Compassion is a leading virtue, especially for leadership, and so one of Mengzi's followers recorded the following story. He tells a story of his encounter with King Xuan of Qi. King Xuan comes to Mengzi to ask whether he has the right *de,* or virtue, to be king. Mengzi had previously heard from the king's attendant Hu He of a situation that exhibited the king's moral sprout of compassion. In a recent bell consecration ceremony, as they brought the ox for sacrifice, the king was distressed.

> The King was sitting up in his hall. There was an ox being led past below. The King saw it and said, "Where is the ox going?" "We are about to consecrate a bell with its blood." The King said, "Spare it. I cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground." "So should we abandon the consecrating of the bell?" The King said, "How can that be abandoned? Exchange it for a sheep." Mengzi (Mencius) 1A7 Lines 14-21

When King Xuan later asks Mengzi what is necessary to be king, Mengzi relays this event, pointing to the king's compassion for the ox. "This feeling is sufficient to be a king…I knew that Your Majesty could not bear the frightened appearance of the ox" (Mengzi 1A7). More is needed, however, to be what Mengzi calls a "genuine king." This basic compassion for the ox is the sprout of the *de* of benevolence, the generous and practical regard for all who are within one's province of responsibility and concern. Benevolence motivates a man to care for his aging parents, for his wife and children; and that benevolence is expressed in the attentiveness given to cultivating the moral sprouts

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in one's children and the children of one's state. Compassion is innate, but benevolence requires the work of cultivation.

Mengzi praises the king's regard for the ox. The king laughs at himself wondering at his concern for the ox, "What was this feeling really?!...the commoners …say I was stingy." "This is just the way benevolence works," Mengzi says. The generosity of benevolence extends to all whom it sees. Mengzi reveals the king to himself, showing his regard for the fear and suffering of the ox. As the king muses on his feeling and Mengzi's interpretation of it, he is reminded of an Ode,

"Another person had the heart,

But I measured it."[16]

"This describes you." The king says to Mengzi. "I was the one who did it. I reflected and sought it out, but did not understand my heart. You spoke and in my heart there was a feeling of compassion." What is happening here between Mengzi and the king will be important in later chapters as we look at the role of reflection and guidance in the development of empathy. What we see here is that the king's understanding of the nature of empathy and empathic experience is growing, and Mengzi uses this opportunity to help *stretch* the king's empathic perception, to help him see more.

Praising the king's compassion for the ox, Mengzi begins to draw the king's eye to other aspects of the scene, which the king had overlooked. He points out that while it is virtuous that the king had compassion for the ox, such compassion did not extend to

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[16] Mao #198.

the sheep. Slowly, Mengzi reveals the most important aspect that the king is *not seeing*

in his rulership. Mengzi states, "your kindness is sufficient to read birds and beasts, but

the benefits do not reach the commoners." Mengzi shows how the deficiencies in

governance have left the commoners without proper structures such that they themselves

may pursue *de*. They are too busy tending to the indulgences of government officials to

have proper time and resources to meet the needs of their families and communities

(Mengzi 1A7). The resultant disharmony leads not only to a lack of flourishing for the

commoners but for the king, as well.

Mengzi understood that the king's problem was not a problem of sentiment so

much as problem of an uncultivated perception. Not only does he help the king to see

what he has been not seeing, but also to understand his own responsibility for the failure,

and further, the risks in not seeing things properly (acting self-indulgently denies him the

protections of honor, leaving him open to violent rebellion). This problem of not seeing

properly has limited the king's ability to fulfill his duty as moral leader of the people.

This is a failure of imagination according novelists George Eliot and Henry James.[17]

Perception and imagination are bound up with one another in our intersubjective

relations as ways of seeing the actual—as the king saw the suffering of the ox—and the

possible—as the king envisioned relieving that suffering. Through our empathic

perception we feel feelings resonant with the feelings and experiences of the other.

Empathy infected the king with the feelings of anxiety that he read in the behavior and

cries of the ox, but it also motivated him to find a solution to relieve both the ox and

himself from the distress. Empathy provokes the sense of experience from the

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[17] See *Mill on the Floss*, Eliot, & *The Golden Bowl*, James.

perspective of another and proffers meaningful ways of navigating that experience. This imaginative component of empathy is the source of not only our fellow feeling, but can be a profound sense of recognition of the meaning and import of the subjectivity of the other with whom we feel. Mengzi is aiding the king's dullness of sight to a keener vision by appealing to his imagination. He helps the king to begin to see the people of his realm.

Understanding the imaginative aspect of this experience provides understanding of how empathic perception can be led to see, to pay attention, and to appreciate the meaning of what is seen. In the next section, I will look at the thought of Theodore Lipps, who brought the concept of empathy to the discourses of philosophy, aesthetics, and psychology. Lipps, the 19th century aesthetician who instigated much discussion with regard to empathy, elucidated the phenomenological experience of empathy. What is important about his contribution for my work is his elucidation of the way in which we enter the world of the other. Lipps shows how we empathically feel like we are in the other's body.

Theodore Lipps and Einfühlung

Lipps' word for this experience of empathy is *Einfühlung* (Lipps 1979), which literally means "feeling into" (Coplan and Goldie 2011, xiii). This is distinct from *Einsfühlung,* which is "feeling one with" (Coplan and Goldie 2011,xiii).[18] According to

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[18] In the introduction to Empathy: Psychological and Philosophical Perspectives Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie explain that it was Edward Titchener who was elaborating on Lipps' themes and introduced the term empathy in English in 1909 borrowing from the Greek empatheia: "Not only do I see gravity and modesty and pride and courtesy and stateliness, but I feel or act them in the mind's muscle. That is, I suppose, a simple case of empathy, if we may coin that term as a rendering of *Einfühlung"* (Coplan & Goldie 2011, xiii).

Lipps, *Einfühlung* is experienced as if we were inside the body of another, or inside a the scene of a painting. As an empathic observer of art, we feel into the object, experiencing the perturbations of the piece from that vantage point. We may strain with the body of Laocoon as he writhes with his sons avoiding the snake's fangs. Or we may feel the sweet peace of a bucolic painting. The piece of art entices us into it imaginatively, and our viscera respond to the imagined world suggested by the piece. Lipps elucidates the dynamic relation between the viewer and the object of art as a "…projection into definite sorts of objects, especially into the movements, postures, and positions of man, whether real or represented in sculpture" (Lipps 1979, 371). Lipps claims that we respond empathically to art as we do to other humans because, "aesthetic objects elicit the same responses in us that are elicited by expressions and movements of the body, and we project these inner subjective qualities onto them" (Coplan and Goldie 2011, xii).

Lipps identifies the salient feature of empathy as an inner experience that takes one out of oneself and into another. The object (human or aesthetic) is not the cause of the empathic response: "Rather, the cause of esthetic enjoyment is myself, or the ego" (Lipps, 371). When we are moved by art, we *feel into* the other (work of art/artist), thus experiencing "esthetic empathy" as if *from within* the other. It is not a passive experience, but one that not only evokes pleasure, but also provokes an urge to yield or resist. Lipps describes his own experience of watching someone extend her arm. He feels a resonance in his own arm as an active striving. He feels both effort and resistance in his own muscle. This is not mere observing. "Different is the doing or the activity, the endeavor, the striving, the succeeding, that I feel. These belong to the ego; more than that, they are the ego or constitute it: I feel *myself* active" (Lipps 1979,. 373). This

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esthetic imitation, as he describes it, has a voluntary quality. The willful element is evidence of the ego's involvement. This experience is not yet "esthetic empathy," however because in esthetic empathy will is lost and forgotten. Because I still feel the inclinations of will, it is only imitation, not yet esthetic empathy, in which one loses oneself and one's ego. It should be noted that Lipps' account is not in full agreement with embodied simulation, but I think that he helps to draw out into relief some of the salient feelings involved in the experience of empathy.

In esthetic imitation, one may still be aware of oneself, whereas in esthetic empathy, the subject is transformed. One does not feel *oneself*, but is alive only to the feelings of the empathic encounter. The deep absorption of the subject evokes powerful feelings devoid of conceptualizing categories, only pure feeling. He calls this "contemplation" and indeed it is the person, piece of art, architectural structure, etc., that has engaged one, but one is not contemplating as a separate subject, on his view. One has forgotten oneself, and conceptual thought in general, in the absorption. This is why the experience is not felt as sensation per se. "…sense-feelings…do not in any way enter into esthetic contemplation and into esthetic enjoyment. It absolutely belongs to the nature of esthetic contemplation to eliminate them" (Lipps 1979, 378). The sense-feelings seem to refer to bodily awareness which is lost in the other or object. The engagement in contemplation forgets self and self-concern.

From the initially imitative position, one may surrender, or succumb to the absorption. "[T]he more I surrender in contemplation to the esthetic object…preoccupations disappear entirely from my consciousness. I am completely and wholly carried away from this sphere of my experience" (Ibid. 376). As self-awareness

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recedes, the joy of the experience floods in, even when it is full of sorrow, there is a kind of joy. "The sorrow is empathized" (Ibid. 378). Though he does not say so explicitly in this article, it seems that the transformative quality of the experience marks the empathizer in an enduring way. There is a flavor of mystical or spiritual experience in this aesthetic engagement. He uses the word *unity* several times. "The two are simply one" (Ibid. 375). As one is projected into the other, one is altered by it. "In a word, I am now with my feeling of activity entirely and wholly in the moving figure" (Ibid. 377). The will impedes esthetic empathy, for Lipps, because one cannot be completely absorbed if one is holding back. "The more I am absorbed in the contemplation of the seen movement the more involuntary will be the imitation…I am no longer conscious of my outward imitation" (Lipps 1979, 374-375).

This point about surrender is important to the experience of empathy. In the final chapter of this work, I explore the nature of surrender in empathy. I will suggest that a giving over to the empathic encounter or aesthetic absorption is necessary for the fullness of the experience to do cultivation work. There is something in this experience of the loss of self that seems to be a useful aid for growth. There is resonance between Lipps' description of absorption and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's description of flow. In both experiences, as these thinkers describe them, there is a loss of self, absorbed in the work or the other. Lipps' point about surrender is relevant also because surrender is necessary for performing a familiar task in that we have to let our body do it for us. Finally, note that there is an element of risk in the idea of surrender. Risk will be an important obstacle for empathy, so cultivation practices will need to aid us in facing risk.

The more famous example of Lipps' empathic experience of a tightrope walker describes a complete absorption in what he sees. His body's tense reverberations of holding his breath, and anxious fear, and exhilaration, were thrilling Lipps with the same sense of danger that the walker himself might feel (de Waal 2006, 65). While Lipps speaks of unity and describes the qualities of absorption as if from within the body of the other, it is not clear what he believes the import of the experience may be. Is his anxiety really from the perspective of the tightrope walker, or from his own concern for the tightrope walker? My own experience of watching fearful feats of daring is that I am totally engrossed in watching them, tensing with them at every moment, but my fear is *for* them. I fear that they will fall and my subsequent sadness would be for *their* loss. My anxiety and concern, while manifesting a strong reaction and maybe a very similar one to the acrobat's, still express from my point-of-view as a spectator rather than from his aerial view. I do not disagree that my body is responding with a resonant anxiety to the tension of the acrobat, but I am not sure that it is right to say that it is the same. It may be, however, that I am too worried for the safety of the acrobat to be able to surrender sufficiently to the empathic experience. Nevertheless, Lipps' account of empathy reveals a profound sociality in human nature that helps us to appreciate its import for the self-other relation, and that other thinkers have since developed.

Primordial Intersubjectivity and the Perception of Subjectivity

Phenomenologists Edith Stein and Max Scheler both agree with Lipps that empathy is foundational to aesthetic and social cognition. Neither agree with him that there is a fusion of self in the experience of the other. Each has different ways of characterizing the role of empathy for social relations. Scheler picks up Lipps' insights

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by focusing on the moral and humanitarian implications of empathy, while Stein is more interested in the way empathy helps us to understand each other in a deep, full-bodied, and possibly mystical, way. Scheler regards sympathy, which seems to be equivalent to the broader understanding of empathy as we are discussing it, as a moral foundation and a means for creating more humane relations among people. It is not necessarily itself moral, but it is also decidedly not projected empathy as Lipps claims. Stein seems to be more interested in the spiritual potential of intimacy between people, the special way in which we *know* someone. I will begin by discussing Scheler's thought and follow with Stein's who continues the conversation which Lipps and Scheler began.

Scheler (1913/2008) lays out the forms of sympathetic responsivity in such a way as to give insight to the possibilities for empathy, and also, perhaps, levels of empathic development. In *The Nature of Sympathy*, Scheler gives a phenomenological account of the various forms of sympathy, and esteems *benevolence* as the developed sensibility born of *fellow-feeling*. The five kinds of sympathy one may have are: *identification, vicarious emotion, fellow feeling, love of humanity or benevolence*, and *non-cosmic personal and divine love* (96). *Identification* is seeing oneself as in the situation of the other, regarding what that would be like. An example of negative identification, according to Scheler, is the Buddhist view that all is suffering, whether one is suffering oneself or not. On his view, the Buddhist ethos identifies with the suffering of all who suffer (79). Identification is a feeling of likeness or connection that is below the level of consciousness. In a positive view, Scheler describes the identification that people have with nature or with the divine (82-83). This discussion is in the chapter "Unity with the

Cosmos" and identification describes the experience of unity (83). Nature mysticism would be inspired by a felt identification with nature.

Identification provides the ground for *vicarious feeling* which is the infection of the subject with the feelings of the one observed. Such feelings may only be partially felt. Scheler explains their relation as follows:

> [T]he total subjective field (A) of which the vicariously felt emotion forms part must at least be accessible to identification on the part of the vicariously participating subject (B)…Hence such an identification may be either concrete or abstract, and this to any degree. I can identify myself with the animate universe, with mankind as a whole…without [including] all the particular emotional states actually possessed by the subject with whom I identify (1913, 96-97).

Whereas identification is a non-conscious bodily process that occurs automatically, vicarious feeling is enabled by the choice to take up the feeling of the other and allow ourselves to feel them. One might, for example, find oneself feeling identifying feelings with someone crying at a funeral. She has lost her husband and has young children. I find that I identify with her as a mother of young children and join her more fully in the vicarious feeling of how I would feel in her situation if I'd lost my husband. I could have quelled the rising identifying feelings if I did not want to enter into the pain of such a possibility. I could have retained my composure at a safe distance despite the inclinations of identification.

Vicarious feeling is consciously noted as various feeling states following identification. This in turn underlies *fellow-feeling*, which is a recognition of the other as

like oneself. Scheler distinguishes fellow-feeling from Lipps' view of empathy insofar as the feeling is *on behalf of the other*, not felt within oneself. That is to say, it is more relationally instigated rather than a product of one's absorption with the aesthetic stimulus which the other provides. In my example of the funeral, if I remain in vicarious feeling, I remain in absorption with my own anxieties about the possibilities of losing my partner and do not take the further step of joining the widow *in her grief*. Fellow-feeling reaches out to the other, embracing what she must be feeling. I may remain resonant in my understanding of how I would feel, but my focus is on her suffering. Vicarious feeling has the potential danger of excessive self-focus in personal distress, getting caught up in one's own feeling to the point that it supersedes one's ability to care about the other. Fellow-feeling avoids this pitfall by focusing on the other.

Scheler distinguishes fellow-feeling from *community of feeling*, which is a shared feeling such as two parents would have at the loss of their child. Fellow-feeling does not share the qualities of the community suffering because, as in my example above, it is not my husband who has died. Community of feeling is experienced when we have immediately shared interests. Fellow-feeling may not yet get one to prosocial action, because one does not feel at stake in the suffering—again it is not my husband who has died. So I may not do anything to mitigate her situation going forward. Taking an active interest in the other's needs or concerns requires something beyond fellow-feeling (Scheler 1913, 12-13).

Fellow-feeling provides for the development of the sentiment and experience that will motivate personal response to the other. One must achieve the level of *benevolence* (*humanitas*) to feel troubled on behalf of another (8, 98-99). Benevolence is the sense of

community of feeling as regards all humans and the recognition of the other as a subject (98). Fellow-feeling can extend to animals, but benevolence cannot since, by definition, it is love of humanity only. The unfortunate limitation of this view is that it does not capture what Franz de Waal has aptly shown regarding the continuum of empathy between humans and many animal species. Not only are we able to *feel with* our animal cousins, perhaps deeply, but our shared neurophysiology makes it possible for them to empathize with us, too (de Waal 2006, 118-157)[19]. In the last chapter, we saw how concern for the vulnerable, a primal urge that helps us protect human infants, extends to include many young animals, especially fellow mammals. And there are many anecdotes of animals caring for the young of another species indicating that they have a similar capacity to extend regard beyond their own species. Dogs show signs of distress when their owners are hurt or upset. While non-human animal empathy may be less complex than our forms of empathy, their capacity for the empathic intelligence and care admit of greater inclusion in our benevolent regard than Scheler may have understood.

Benevolence, for Scheler (1913), does, however, extend to all humanity unprejudically. "A genuine love of humanity does not discriminate between fellow-countrymen and foreigners, the virtuous and the criminal, the racially superior and inferior, the cultured and the uncouth or between good and bad generally. Like fellow-feeling, benevolence embraces all men, simply because they are men, though marking them off distinctly from the lower animals and from God" (99). Non-cosmic personal love is a spiritual regard for the other, related, he claims, to theism. This love is love of neighbor as a spiritual person, and like the other sympathetic feelings, builds upon its

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[19] In de Waal's chapter "Oscar the Cat," de Waal describes the uncanny ability of Oscar to detect when someone was dying.

predecessor benevolence (99-102). It is the highest regard for the other that one can experience. According to Scheler, one cannot have either fellow-feeling or benevolence for fictional subjects, so its aesthetic reach is more limited than Lipps' view.

These various forms of sympathy are the basis not only for our relationships, but also for self-understanding as emergent in sociality. In contrast to Lipps' view that empathic experience is a projection, Scheler views the experience as between two subjectivities; we do not "transfer something of our own mind and life onto and into the body of others" (Scheler 1913, xxxix). Scheler's view of the range of sympathetic responses is more interactive between subjects. One is not merely motivated by *one's own* fascination and absorption by the other's movement, but is rather *being moved* by the other. It is more like an ekstasis, or Platonic eros, taking one outside oneself. Rather than the motive force coming from the ego, as Lipps describes, for Scheler, the subject is propelled out toward the other by the imposition of the other's feeling on himself. Scheler's view seems to accord with the science that claims that the body responds first; the experience begins involuntarily (de Waal 2009, 27). The feeling imposing itself on the subject is what enables our understanding of very basic to highly complex feelings. This view of the phenomenon of fellow-feeling is based on a very different view of how we know ourselves and each other. Rather than beginning with a solid and clear knowledge of self as most Western philosophers assume, for Scheler, even self is uncertain.

For Scheler (1913), intersubjectivity is prior to subjectivity. Scheler thinks that our common sense understanding that we know ourselves and each other fairly easily is mistaken. In his view, self-perception emerges only within the relations of fellow-

feeling. And that knowledge of the other is similarly complex. "Originally, the experience of self and…others is in no way differentiated…there is one broad roaring stream of living in which he is totally immersed…Even when we come to integrate our own self…we continue to see it against the background of a surviving, although progressively receding, common consciousness which contains…the experience of others…[and] the self" (250). We come to understand ourselves as selves in and through these intersubjective experiences.

Our self-understanding is not a given. We become who we are through intersubjective engagement. For Scheler, empathic experience offers understanding of the self as well as of the other. Self is not a secure edifice from which one engages the mystery of the other. In this way, he contrasts his view with the predominant views of mind-reading theorists. Scheler uses the term *empathy,* based on his reading of Lipps and like-minded projection theorists, in his critique of the basis on which they found their inference views, namely that the subject is known to herself transparently, and from that solid ground can project her inner knowledge onto the other.

> It is a fundamental weakness of theories which seek to derive our
> knowledge of other minds from inferences or processes of empathy, that
> they have an inveterate tendency to underestimate the difficulty of self-
> knowledge, just as they over-estimate the difficultly of knowing other
> people...so that Nietzsche, for example, could utter the pregnant words,
> 'everyman is farthest of all from himself'…this is just because [everyman]
> is closest to himself in practice (Ibid. 251).

For Scheler, we are unfolding to ourselves and rely on the intersubjective relations to develop an understanding of ourselves. As one's selfhood matures through multiple and myriad intersubjective relations, one is able to develop a more mature regard for the other.

Fellow-feeling is a more advanced achievement than basic sympathy (or what I am calling empathy) since it is not automatic and entails a response to the well-being (or not) of another. Fellow-feeling can develop into benevolence as an outgrowth of loving familial and community relationships. Love is not mere attachment to another. If genuine, it is like a Platonic *Eros* that draws one out of oneself and toward the good in the other, which love manifests in both lover and beloved. While the movement of sympathy and love follow the trajectory of Eros, the form of love is decidedly Christian. For Scheler, the God of the Bible is the source of such love and those wishing to see God as moral must follow

> Augustine, in treating love as the inmost essence of God Himself, and identifying Him as Infinite Love. It is to this heart and centre of the Divine activity that His infinite mercy and absolute moral perfection belong as attributes. Hence there is but on basic moral relationship between men of good-will: as fellow-servants, *partisans of a common Ideal and co-partners in a common Love* (164).

So for Scheler, we are profoundly intersubjective, and our self-understanding is shaped in and through our intersubjective relations. On a cosmic level, relations with the divine infuse our worldly relations with depth of concern and responsibility for the other.

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Lipps' view, according to Scheler, lacks depth of concern for the other. He worries about a kind of "auto-eroticism" or solipsism in empathic projection as Lipps describes it. He cites a Lippsian brand of sympathy: "The compassionate man finds in the suffering of others a corresponding solace for his own discomforts" (Scheler 1913, 52). In response to theorists who claim that benevolent love grows out of romantic love, he argues that romantic/sexual love is focused on the self. Benevolent love, and non-cosmic personal love, however, are entirely focused on, and absorbed by, concern for the other, not as object, but as a unique and precious subjectivity. "Love calls explicitly for an understanding entry into the individuality of another person distinct in character from the entering self…coupled indeed with a *warm and whole-hearted endorsement* of 'his' reality as an individual, and 'his' being what he is" (70 Emphasis mine). Receptivity to the subjectivity of the other, and her concerns taken up as important to me, is vital to this kind of relating for Scheler. So, generic fellow-feeling must be developed to be receptive, responsive, and adaptive to the need and invitation of the other.

For Scheler, the experience of the other received through the medium of fellow-feeling, then responded to with benevolence, is deeply charged with moral feeling and obligation. This obligation is a kind of attentiveness to the reality of the other for who she herself is, rather than my projections of her. Arguably, he is attempting to explicate the phenomenon of religious compassion, inspired by Christian thought and mysticism, particularly in the description of Kierkegaard's love of neighbor. There is a level of earnestness that goes beyond the more basic forms and expressions of sympathetic regard. Scheler's view of empathy then moves beyond Lipps' interest in the phenomenon

of experiencing the other's feelings into profounder humanistic and existential concerns of deep and genuine relating in social and personal life.

Edith Stein (1917/1989), though less focused on the moral implications of the encounter with the other than Scheler, similarly sees empathy as a site of profound insight into the other as a subject. Among other aspects Stein looks at "empathy as the cognitive source of foreign experience" (1). She uses the term "foreign" to designate experiences that originate with the other. She agrees with Scheler that it is an experience provoked by the external stimuli of another person and her experience, in contrast to Lipps' view of the experience as originating in the self. Empathy is not a projection, as Lipps claims, but an encounter. She also disagrees with Lipps' view that empathy creates of a kind of union between the self and the other. She objects to the assumption that the other is ever given wholly to us as if it were an inert object: "This individual is not given as a physical body, but as a sensitive, living body belonging to an 'I,' an 'I' that senses, thinks, feels, and wills. The living body of this 'I' not only fits into my phenomenal world but is itself the center of orientation of such a phenomenal world. It faces this world and communicates with me" (5). For Stein, the phenomenon of the other is an encounter with a living human person. The other's inner life is communicated with a fullness and poignancy. She uncovers an existential quality of subjectivity in the empathic encounter.

It is in this way that Stein objects to the dormancy of Lipps' other in his depiction of their givenness. Such dormancy is not possible on Stein's view because the self that is engaged by empathy is what she calls a *pure I* (38). The *pure I* seems to be a metaphysical entity of sorts which is the subject of our personhood and which prevents us

from complete fusion, as Lipps' claims, with the other. Rather, our individual subjectivity is preserved for each of us through our respective *pure Is.*

While Stein and Scheler agree that there is no fusion of subjects in empathy, Stein differs from Scheler in characterizing the pure I in a way perhaps more Husserlian and even Platonic. Schler's self cannot be fused because it is embodied, based on a dynamic relation between self and other, but Stein's pure I is unfuseable because it is immutable. "Lipps says that as long as empathy is complete…there is no distinction between our own and the foreign 'I,' that they are one…This assertion is not only refuted by its consequences, but is also an evidently false description. I am not one with the acrobat but only 'at' him" (Stein 1917, 16). Stein draws a distinction in the quality of experiences as either *primordial*, that is, originating in me, the subject, or *empathic*, originating in the other and infecting me.

This primordiality seems to be both qualitative and epistemic insofar as 1) one has what William James describes as an *intimacy* with one's own inner feelings versus those of another, and 2) the understanding that one has of the other, through empathy, is neither as intimate nor unmediated.[20] What Stein means by the distinction of primordial versus empathic is that the selfness of the subject remains. One is not unclear about where the empathic feelings are coming from, i.e., the other. "What led Lipps astray in his description was the confusion of self-forgetfulness, through which I can surrender myself to any object, with a dissolution of the 'I' in the object. Thus, strictly speaking, empathy is not a feeling of oneness," according to Stein (17). The subject may forget herself, but

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[20] It does seem that Scheler, by contrast, wants to allow for a kind of unmediated experience of the other. See Scheler 1913 pp.230-233.

she does not lose that self in fusion with the other. She may experience a shared feeling, or a communion, but not a complete unity.

Stein gives an example to show how the 'I' and the 'you' rise above respective individuality without losing agency. If a political barrier such as fortress, that separates loved ones from each other, falls down, we all feel joy. The subject feels both *primordial* and *empathic* joy because she has as much joy as those who have been separated from her. "We all have 'the same' feeling…[but] I *feel* my joy while I empathically comprehend the others'…I empathically arrive at the 'sides' of joyfulness obstructed in my own joy…we empathically enrich our feeling so that 'we' now feel a different joy" (18-19 Emphasis mine). This might be compared with what Scheler describes as community of feeling. In this way, Stein helps us to see the way in which empathy, being not our own feeling, thus expands our feelings, teaching us new 'sides' of a feeling that our own perspective did not admit before. In experiences in which we do not have shared interests, Stein contrasts with Lipps in claiming that it is not as full or as complete of a sharing[21]. A lack of shared feeling can limit the depth or breadth of empathy. If one does not care for sports, one will have a difficult time entering into the joy or sadness of the other who suffers due to game losses. The feeling of loss, which is universal, can be shared, but not the specific emotional investment in sports.

Stein gives an example of a subject receiving news of a friend who has passed an exam and how the subject rejoices with the friend. The joy is empathic because it is not personal, meaning that it is not her own elation for passing her own exam. She feels

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[21] As shown in the previous chapter, the science bears this out. Experience and neurophysiological limitations can limit empathy range.

empathic joy for her friend's achievement. Stein shows the complexity of feeling by showing how we can feel torn by our primordial and empathic feelings. She gives an example of a subject who is grieving a death, when a friend comes with joyful news, and how the subject's overwhelming grief inhibits her sympathetic joy for her friend. "This grief does not permit predominance of sympathy with joy. There is [a phenomenal] conflict…involving two levels…And now the 'I' feels pulled toward two sides at once, both experiences claiming to be a 'cogito' in a specific sense (i.e., acts in which the 'I' lives and turns toward its object). Both [experiences] seek to pull the 'cogito' into themselves…being split" (15). The subject's cogito is divided by two demanding sentiments but also by two ways of being in the world. The subject feels her subjectivity as a cogito in being thus torn. Like Scheler, Stein views empathic experience as formative of an ever-developing subjectivity, as well as complexly involving a dance between points-of-view. Stein states that in the torn place one may be so happy for the friend that one's own suffering weakens. We have the opportunity of following either the primordial or the empathic invitation. And depending on which path we follow, we may be altered (Stein 1917, 15-16).

Scheler and Stein resonate in a kind of existential emphasis on something like a sacredness of subjectivity in their respective accounts. Both have a religious kind of esteem and respect for the self and other, even as they emphasize different aspects of the communion of subjectivities. They both owe to Lipps the insight that such deep experience of the other is possible through the experience of empathy. While I disagree with Stein's view of the *pure I* because as I have argued, empathy is a neurophysiological process, inseparable from the body, I agree with her insight into the subtle possibilities

between the self and other. Her account invites further thought for ways in which empathy can be taught to see the other more fully. In Stein's account, we see the nuances of feeling and the barely perceptible ways in which our feelings follow a route depending on the intersubjective relation. She opens for us the moments in which empathic perception is capable of being led. In this way, I think that Stein's metaphysics are not essential to her account of the phenomenon of intersubjective engagements.

I agree with Scheler's view of the self as emergent from within intersubjectivity, and even the apparent transience of that subjectivity. [Inference theorists] have an inveterate tendency to under-estimate the difficulty of self-knowledge," (Scheler 1913, 251). His view resonates with how consciousness itself seems to operate, rising to awareness and slipping back into automaticity. It also makes apparent how self-awareness can get in the way of empathy and other valuable social and environmental navigations. And yet, when experiencing the meaning of intersubjective empathic sharing, self-awareness is an important part of the process. In loving experiences, we want the other to be aware of both themselves as the subject whom we are loving, and of ourselves as their beloved subject.

Stein's estimation of the other as a sublime uniqueness, and of the separateness of the self and other, bridged through empathic regard, evokes the sense of a deep interpersonal intimacy. Stein treats the subjectivity of the other with a serious moral weight that I think is important. The engagement of the self and the other, on Stein's view, is a profound and subject-altering experience. Stein and Scheler resonate in their valuation of empathy as profoundly formative of subjectivity. We are somehow both bound up in intersubjectivity and also unique, separate selves, with our own unique

stories. Our intersubjective life shapes and influences our subjective perspectives; through our empathic transports we are altered.

Lipps was not wrong about the *felt* experience of transport. Both Scheler's and Stein's accounts agree with the feeling of losing oneself in the empathic encounter. I will explore later in this work how such transports occur not only in person to person subjective encounters, but also imaginative empathic encounters such as we find in reading stories. Psychologists Melanie Green and Jordan Carpenter have highlighted the experience of *transportation* in which the reader is carried away by the narrative. Transportation depends upon perception and perception depends upon experience, and as we shall see, upon the conceptual frames which we are given. The reach of empathic perception is limited by our sphere of experience and our cultivation practices. Only by cultivating the perception to open up to a responsive relation to others can we broaden its vision and improve its judgment.

Empathic Perception: Habits for Moral Practice

I have been looking at these powerful accounts of empathy and their descriptions of how, through empathy, we can not only see from the perspective of the other, but enter into their suffering and their joy to such a degree that we not only share their feelings and provide receptive responses, but also achieve an experience of the other *in her subjectivity*. The reality of her inner life is made manifest to me and I understand her as an *I*. This realization works on my perspective of myself, and our relations to one another as subjects. These insights aid our understanding of our profound intersubjectivity: the deep way in which we are part of a web of subjects, without whom we could not fully become ourselves. This realization facilitates attitudes and behaviors that recognize the

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value of others. Out of such realization, one can learn to see others in light of this enriched understanding of interconnection, building moral practices with regard for the subjectivity of the other, and one's own dependence on that.

The title of this chapter, "seeing the other," is about how we see empathically, and how we can learn to see more fully the moral realities that surround us. The intersubjective experiences of empathy can teach us about the humanity of others by letting us see into their inner world. Our seeing can be impaired, however, or mere projections of our own feelings onto the other. So, we need critical practices that can help us to pay attention to the ways in which our own ways of seeing may be impeding accurate and sensitive appraisals of the situation. John Dewey (1922) pointed out that character is the interpenetration of habits. The collective of our patterns of behavior is what we are known by (38). So it is that our perceptual habits form a character of our way seeing the world. Below, I look at some insights into the nature of empathic feelings and perception that should help us see the ways that empathic perception can impede genuine understanding and how, if we understand the way it works, we might work to correct it. I also look at David Eagleman's discussion of visual perception as an insight into how, analogously, empathic perception is subject to framing and instruction. By teaching empathy to include more morally salient aspects of moral situations in its purview we may be able to improve empathy's responsiveness. Empathy is both a neurophysiological process that operates automatically, and a form of perception that reaches out into the world shaping the way we interpret, judge, experience, and respond to the world. It will be necessary to appreciate both its automaticity and our influence on it if we are going to insightfully cultivate it for moral practice.

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David Depew (2005) highlights the ecstatic aspect of Lipps' view of empathy to elucidate what is important about empathy and to limit our expectations of its potential for ethics. His discussion of some of the technical history of the term is useful to our understanding of the term, and to the phenomenon of empathy. Depew states that *empetheia* means a state of emotional undergoing. In 1910, Lipps reached back into the Greek for the term *empetheia* which gives us our word "empathy," though with a different meaning. The word "em patheia" denotes in the ancient Greek an "intense passion or a state of emotional undergoing." Pathein means "to suffer or undergo." Depew references the NeoPlatonist Plotinus' claim that empetheia is the opposite of apathy or emotional neutrality (100). It seems to function similarly to the term "en thusiasmos," which is like a possession of divine inspiration. What this means for Depew, is that rather than the word connoting a projection as Lipps claims, it suggests a kind of possession.

In his discussion of Lipps' mistake with the Greek term, Depew claims that Lipps was nevertheless correct in capturing the phenomenon of empathy. Rather than empathy being a kind of inferential projection into the other, it is an *undergoing* of the *sense* of the target's feeling. Depew cautions us to avoid naively regarding it as a universal metaphysical sentiment that will bind us all together in human love, because according to Lipps, we are still enclosed in a circle of our own feeling (104). That is to say, we do not undergo the actual feelings of the other, but our own responsive feeling is what possesses us. For Depew, empathy is "the shared or mutually projected feelings of human beings, or those of animals where we experience some resonance of human psychology," and only if we take seriously its limitations can it be a useful insight into intersubjectivity

(105). Empathy then, must not be understood as a kind of magical access to the other, nor as a panacea to cure us of insensibility or insensitivity to others. As a form of perception, it can be limited by what it has been cultivated to attend to. As with any form of perception, much may remain unnoticed and unseen.

What Depew misses, however, that Stein (and Scheler also) point out is how we are shaped and influenced by our empathic engagement with the other and respond to the other's feelings, often letting go of our own for a time. In this way, we are not always enclosed by our own feelings, but our feelings are taught to feel with the feelings of the other. What Depew, relying on Lipps' account, is characterizing is the more immature forms of empathy, such as Scheler calls vicarious feeling or identification. Stein and Scheler both show how empathy grows in regard for the other, as well as how the self may be transformed by empathy with the other.

What we see and do not see, whether through our visual perception or our empathic perception, is often a function of habit. John Dewey (1934) argued that human individuals, like all other creatures, are organisms interacting with an environment. The relation between organism and environment is inseparable, and is embedded in all experience. Indeed, the environment is the condition for the possibility of experience in the individual. "Every experience is the result of interaction between a live creature and some aspect of the world in which he lives" (45). One of the key aspects of perception in many creatures is habit. Even with as ubiquitous of a perception as sight, we do not all see the same. We understand now because of entomologists, ornithologists, and biologists that bees, birds, and dogs do not see as we do because of the structure of our respective eyes according to our hunting and navigating needs. Yet, many of us might be

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surprised to understand that the habits of humans can also dictate differences in how we see. Dewey's point about habit will have an important influence as we explore the cultivation of empathic perception. Before delving into cultivation, however, we need to learn more about why Depew is right about how empathy is encircled. What many of us may not appreciate is the degree to which not only empathy, but all perception is a bit "loopy." Neuroscientist David Eagleman helps us to understand how situational frames can dictate what we see.

David Eagleman (2011) explains that while we see through our eyes, it is not our eyes that do the seeing, per se. There are neural apparatuses that facilitate the connection between the visual stimulation and the mind's comprehension of the images. This is accomplished by electrical signals "coming into the brain: at first they are meaningless; with time they accrue meaning. In the same way that you immediately "see" the meaning in these words, your brain "sees" a timed barrage of electrical and chemical signals as, say, a horse galloping between snow-blanketed pine trees" (43).

In contrast to the traditional understanding of perception as a linear path from object to eye to sight, Eagleman shows how the neurophysiological path is more circular and what he characterizes as "loopy". "[I]t was discovered that brain wiring does not simply run from [point] A to B to C: there are feedback loops from C to B, C to A, and B to A. Throughout the brain there is as much feedback as feedforward—a feature of brain wiring that is technically called recurrence and colloquially called loopiness" (46). What this means for perception is it is always building of complexity, through an ongoing process of loops that, in a given situation, lead perception through loops of previous perceptual experience, which relate to what one is actually seeing in the present moment.

He refers to this as "nested feedback connections" and claims that they are "so extensive that the system can even run backward" (Ibid.). So, if I see a wildebeast for the first time, and do not understand what it is, I will study it to place it within my areas of experience. I will see that it has horns and process that with previous horned animals I have experienced and surmise that it is related to them. I will note its size in relation to other horned animals, and I will look at its size and mood in relation to myself, assessing any potential danger. In this way, my visual perception is linking up with my experiential knowledge to help me get a sense of its genus or class, and perhaps more urgently, whether it is a threat to me, which will activate the affective responses of increasing my heart rate and send my eyes searching for escape.

Rather than a straight line of percept entering the eye to neural comprehension, a complicated series of neural loops enable the sense of sight. Add to that that the senses are not discrete in their functions. According to Eagleman, vision dominates hearing in perception, so that a visual contradiction with a heard perception will result in us "hearing" what the visual dictates. This is mostly true, but sometimes hearing will dominate as when a single flash is perceived as two flashes because one simultaneously hears two beeps (47). We have long known that our sense perception can give us an inaccurate understanding of states of affairs, such as when a straight straw appears bent in a glass of water. So perception, whether visual, auditory, or otherwise, is susceptible to mistakes. What we may be less aware of is how perception also works cooperatively among the various receptions of stimuli to harmonize the experience and unify it into meaningful data for the subject. Perception does not operate linearly, but loops, meaning that there are many other influences on reception than bare stimuli. The traditional idea

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was that an object, witnessed through our receptive visual processes, then becomes intelligible by neural recognition. Object→eye→mind/intelligibility. Rather than this straight-forward process, visual perception in coordination with other forms of perception, loops through various relevant processes to culminate in the experience of seeing.

We thus need to correct the old model so that we can properly understand the function of perception accordingly. Perception is impacted by the expectations of the perceiving subject. Eagleman cites the experiment of psychologist Alfred Yarbus in 1967 to show how what we see is largely driven by what we expect to see. In the experiment, test subjects were asked to look at a photograph and each group was given different questions. Using the eye tracker, Yarbus was able to see that the subjects focused their attention on different objects depending on their question. One group was asked how old the people in the photograph were, and they looked repeatedly at the faces, while another group, asked about material circumstances, looked at worn accessories, furniture, and ornaments in the room. The eyes attended to the objects that could elucidate the answer, while overlooking other perceptual data. Rather than being passive recipients of information, according to Eagleman, "brains reach out into the world and actively *extract* the type of information they need."

> The brain does not need to see everything at once…and it does not need to store everything internally; it only needs to know where to go to find the information. As your eyes interrogate the world, they are like agents on a mission, optimizing their strategy for the data. Even though they are "your" eyes, you have little idea what duty they're on. Like a black ops

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mission, the eyes operate below the radar, too fast for your clunky

consciousness to keep up with (Ibid. 30).

Eagleman further clarifies the function of perceptual gestalt switching, in which

the eyes can move between two interpretations of a black and white image, seeing either

a vase or two faces, but that one cannot see both pictures at the same instant. This

process reveals that "*nothing has changed on the page, so the change has to be taking*

place in your brain" (Eagleman 2011, 31). These types of visual selection often go on

below the level of consciousness.

This raises the interesting question of how selecting occurs if one is not

consciously aware of such actions, and I think that Eagleman's discussion of framing

provides insight. What might be the frames at work as we view the world, as we

empathically engage the world. Habitual practices will influence our frames. In John

Dewey's (1922) discussion of habits, he notes the differences between the animal feeling

of hunger and the developed experience of appetite for particular foods and drinks. A

Thai child will desire a very different breakfast than an American child. When we feel

hunger, we often feel hunger for certain flavors. This is a result of our enculturation. As

I said above, Dewey points out how our behavior shapes our character.

So it is that our perceptual habits form a character of our way of seeing the world.

I share these insights about sensory perception for the purposes of deepening our

appreciation of the nuances of the experience of perception. Empathic perception, like

other forms of perception, is subject to a variety of factors and thus can be mistaken,

misleading, and allow us to have inaccurate or unhelpful responses to situations. Perhaps

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we have been taught to hate or disdain certain groups of people, and in this way, when we

see them, we effectively deny their subjectivity, their dignity, their right to opportunities

for same goods that we ourselves have. Having been taught immoral attitudes, one's

moral sight is impaired such that one may not empathically recognize the subjectivity of

the other. This can change, however, because like other forms of perception, empathy

can be cultivated to attend to the cues of others more astutely and responsively,

understanding the meaning of our shared humanity.

Parts of Lipps, Scheler, and Stein's descriptions of empathy accurately resonate

with findings about the neurophysiological workings that enable empathic perception and

experience. Empathic systems cover the range from very primitive mimicry to highly

cognitive perspective taking. Lipps focuses on the more sophisticated forms, but his

account entails the more primitive forms, as well, as when he feels urges in his arm to

reach like the arm that he is observing. Scheler and Stein show the moral range of

empathy, its implications for social relations, and ways in which empathy can grow as

our complex feelings interact through the intersubjective overlap. As I have said,

empathy is both conscious and non-conscious or pre-conscious and it is shaped by

experience. Once certain empathic perceptions become habitual, automatic processes can

more efficiently facilitate our social navigation. This loopiness seems to be further

evidence of the strong relationship between primitive and sophisticated forms of

empathy.

As I discussed in both Chapters I and II, consciousness processes manifest in

automatic and controlled ways. Vittorio Gallese (2007) links the process of empathy to

primitive systems of cognition. He refers to the "neural exploitation hypothesis" as the

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means by which a primitive process can develop into a more sophisticated one or even be useful for an altogether different processing task (660). A process that was initially developed for simpler evolutionary goals, can, over time, expand to assist with more complex tasks.

Social and moral cognition rely on a complex system of perception, interpretation, behavior, and cognitive-affective assessment. Antonio Damasio (1999) shows how cognition, including affect, operates at both conscious and nonconscious levels impacting our interpretations and thus our perceptions. Much of the work that shapes our empathic perception, or how we interpret our empathic feelings/experiences, occurs below the level of consciousness. Empathy is influenced by emotions, perceptions, and both conscious and unconscious interpretations. As I described in Chapter I, Damasio(1999) differentiates between emotions (pre-conscious) and feelings (conscious), and places them on a cognitive spectrum. For Damasio, emotions, as automatic processes, are constantly engaged in simulation, and as such, are the ground of our more sophisticated skills in what some theorists refer to as *mind-reading* (120-123).

What this means for empathic perception is that what Damasio calls core consciousness is always operative in extended consciousness. When we are stepping back from experience, even a little bit, we reflect, question, analyze, and assess how well our perceptions and interpretations are matching up with our experience of the world. Such stepping back interrupts the pattern of behavior that may or may not be working effectively. This move is a product of extended consciousness, but eventually, it will feedback into and assimilate core consciousness to form an adaptation of the previous pattern. So, some loops in our perceptive experience may be corrected, but it requires

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clunky conscious thinking to do so. This is the value of conscious processes, or what Jonathan Haidt calls the rider of the elephant. The rider/controlled conscious processes can observe errant behavior, out of accord with our larger goals or values, and implement processes to correct such errancy. We work in the slower processes to critique and correct what we are doing in the automatic and habituated processes (Damasio 1999, 123).

The loopiness of perception is extremely useful even as it means that we can get caught in unhelpful modes of perceiving, interpreting, and reacting socially, because we can interject new ways of thinking and perceiving into the loop. While we may be habituated to overlook those who are marginalized by systemic injustice, and participate complacently in keeping people invisible and unheard, interventions by means of parents, teachers, mentors, peers, and others can disrupt the complacency of such habits. As we discussed in the previous chapter, some aspects of empathy are outside of our control, such as lacking certain experiences, which can disable us from fully empathizing with someone going through that experience. If you have never really loved anyone romantically, as for example a child or youth likely has not, it is difficult to really grasp how painful it can be to have such a relationship end. This is why younger siblings may be unsympathetic to the pains of their older siblings.

Neurophysiological anomalies can also impede empathy, as discussed in the last chapter. When the brain's fear receptors are damaged, one's ability to perceive fear in the other is impaired. Empathic perception is only as useful as it is neurophysiologically whole and developed. Skill also plays a role, however. Skillfulness is acquired in the practice of reading others, and the subsequent check for accuracy. Mentors initially

instruct us in this process, which we practice in childhood and youth. Once we have internalized the moral habits of our mentors, we will have to continue the practice of empathic perception and responsivity, implementing new insights to the process as we encounter them. Empathic skillfulness entails reasonable success in navigating the various social situations of one's life, with healthy psychological self and other-regard and treatment. To increase skillfulness and avoid getting caught in unhelpful modes of social perception, one needs to have an ongoing, developmentally responsive practice of self-critique.

As Max Scheler and Edith Stein have shown, the self and other are not only relationally bound, but also are bound up with, and provide the possibility for, our self-knowledge. Empathic skillfulness is vital not only to social relations, but also to apt self-understanding. They are interdependent. Good reading of others is contingent on a level of accuracy in self-appraisals and vice versa. Thus, it is crucial that we regard the work of practicing and critiquing empathic perception as always lighting on self and other. The moral sprout of reading social cues that grows into a proper ability to attend to the import of social situations and the ability to fulfill one's role in such situations is learned in countless trial and error experiences throughout childhood, youth and adulthood. Such a process of self-evaluation begins when parents correct their infants and inform their toddlers of how their behaviors impact others around them.

In the next chapter, I will explicate Martin Hoffman's account of the process whereby empathy, as a basic social process in infancy, can be cultivated into a genuine concern for others. Initially, children comply out of a fear of love withdrawal or possible physical punishment, but, in time, with support, the appropriate amount of moral pressure

and myriad repetitions, children begin to internalize the meaning of misbehavior toward others and feel guilt. Guilt is an important moral emotion for the transformation of basic empathy to genuine concern for others, but so is our care for the other. In the next chapter, I will begin by laying out some key problems for empathy and then bring in Hoffman's discussion of childrearing as key for developing empathy.

Empathic experience enables our imaginative entry into the worlds of others. Through this perception we are enabled to perform an array of roles in our emotional and intersubjective lives. As Scheler and Stein point out, empathy is the means through which we can commune subjectively with others and attend to their needs. We can be mistaken empathically, however, and we can misuse our empathic insight to hurt others. Empathy is no panacea for injustice, systemic or otherwise. In the next chapter, we will look more closely at some important problems and limitations of empathic perception. Then, I will explore how empathy can be taught and cultivated.

CHAPTER IV

CARING FOR THE OTHER:

CULTIVATING THE CHARACTER OF EMPATHIC MORAL PERCEPTION

Human speaking is necessarily tuned to the various nonhuman calls and cries that animate the local terrain.
~ David Abram
Those in the world who do not help the grain to grow are few. Those who abandon it, thinking it will not help, are those who do not weed their grain. Those who help it grow are those who pull on the grain…[this] …harms it.
~Mengzi 2A2, 127
What cannot be understood cannot be managed intelligently.
~John Dewey HNC 3

Empathy and Sociality

Empathy is vital to our apprehension of the events that surround us and to our ability to see the significance and the implications of those events. It is our primary tool for making sense of our surroundings and becoming actors within it. It is crucial to our sociality, but like all forms of perception, its accuracy is contingent on multiple factors, internal and external to the subject. Further, its efficacy for ethics depends on emotional and moral development. So, while empathy is necessary for social cognition, its existence is not sufficient to ensure ethical behavior. Like any other form of perception, empathy requires experience and guidance to attune it to the salient features of experience and critical thinking that can affirm, redirect or correct behavior toward preferred outcomes. The Confucians recognize that a good society depends on the cultivation of such virtues in its people. The symbiotic relationship between the individual and her society requires a mutually attentive relationship. Without the efforts of moral cultivation, empathy has potential to facilitate the darker tendencies in human behavior.

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Character is, in an important way, the heart of my project. By that I mean that there is a reason for us to return to practices of moral self-cultivation as a means of developing personal character and community character. I am identifying the cultivation of empathy as one of the primary means through which such cultivation can occur. The automatic processes, which dictate most of our behavior, tend to be forgotten in our discourses on morality. And yet, the general tendencies and tenor of our automatic behavior forms the general impression of our character in our community. The pragmatic goal of crafting a life of flourishing profoundly depends upon one's relations within that community. Because empathy is the confluence of perceptual and intuitive processes that facilitates our understanding of ourselves and our social world, it is important to ensure that it is operating optimally. And if it is not, it is necessary to perform the correctives necessary to improve its skillfulness and aptitude.

In this chapter, I will look at the vulnerability of empathy to negative potentials. First, I lay out some of the more serious weaknesses of empathic perception for ethics. Then, I look at the work of Martin Hoffman who identifies key features of discipline in childrearing that assist the growth and development of empathy for improving cooperation with and consideration of others. I then touch on the aesthetic stimuli for empathy to segue into the next chapter in which we explore how engaging in narrative empathically shapes moral feeling and sensitizes moral perception. Empathy is how we see and understand the other—but this perception is only as good as its cultivation practices have made it.

Recall my working definition of **empathy** as *a neurophysiological process that facilitates our social cognition and relationality by provoking in us cognitive-affective*

responses that are resonant with the perceived feelings, experiences, and/or situations of others. I further claim that empathy is a form of perception that, through guided development, may become morally sensitized and responsive. In this way, *empathic moral perception* is the means through which we perceive and engage the moral import of the various situations of our social and environmental milieu. Like other forms of perception, empathic perception is geared toward apprehending and navigating social meaning and as such has a morally ambivalent quality. Even a sadist must navigate her social context. While we are neurophysiologically driven to pursue wellbeing, and that wellbeing depends on our social wellness, we obviously have the capacity to behave and think in a manner contrary to such goods. Empathy facilitates social cognition, but its moral usefulness depends on its being habituated to *see* well, and overcome preoccupation with self-concern. We can ignore empathy's cues, and rationalize immoral responses, if we think it is in our self-interest. Or we can misperceive or misinterpret the meaning of what we are feeling and perceiving, thus leading to mistakes in empathic response. It is important to look at the problems of empathy, both of inadvertent or unintentional failures of empathy, as well as manipulative uses of it, so as to have an accurate account of empathy, and to mitigate its harmful potentials.

Some Problems for Empathic Moral Perception

Any definition of empathy must address a number of significant problems that arise from the complexity of the concept and empathy's many relations to other emotional and moral phenomena. Some of the more important problems for empathy as a form of moral perception are: 1) *self-other differentiation,* 2) *personal distress and egoistic drift,* 3) *emotional/empathic obtuseness,* 4) *biases* (kith and kin, proximity, in-

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group out-group, differentness of gender, race, sexual-orientation, religion, ethnicity, culture, species, etc.), 5) *schadenfreude, or even sadism and* 6) *poor emotion-regulation.* These problems are not discrete, so a brief explication should enable us to appreciate the nature of the problems. Mitigating efforts in a given area can often improve another area as we shall see.

Self-other differentiation relates to problems discussed in the previous chapter. Neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni claims that it is an inhibitor in the empathic processor that enables proper self-other distinction (Iacoboni 2011, 53). When working properly, the subject has a clear sense of herself and what feelings belong to herself, thus facilitating her ability to *see* the other in his own right. Sometimes, however, our ability to recognize that separation is impaired, making empathic mistakes of over-identifying with the other. One of those mistakes is misperceiving the other's suffering as one's own. In the last chapter, I described the differences in vicarious versus fellow feeling for others. I used the example of a mourner at a funeral who shares the experience of the recent widow (having children to raise), and how in vicarious feeling, the mourner would be absorbed in the imagined suffering she would experience if, like the widow, her husband were to die. If this mourner let herself get carried away with this worry, and did not bear in mind the many differences in the widow's and her own situation, she might get overwhelmed by her imagined suffering and believe that her suffering was as acute as the widow's. She might offer "comfort" to the widow by focusing on her own feelings, making offers of help that pertain to herself and not to the widow. This mourner's sense of her suffering and the widow's are confused and, as such, she is likely more distressing than comforting to the widow.

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If one does get carried away with self-focused feelings, it generally leads to *personal distress*. Personal distress is the suffering or emotional pain that we feel when we empathize with someone else's pain. It generally connotes the situation in which the subject is so overwhelmed by the pain of empathic feelings that he avoids the empathic encounter. This might be the case when we walk faster upon seeing a homeless person looking unhealthy and forlorn; we want to avoid the distressing reality of their suffering. As we will see, Hoffman does not view personal distress as an impediment to empathy, but rather a response that needs to be governed so as to prevent its impeding empathic action.

The other mistake of over-identifying with the sufferer can lead to the empathizer *projecting* her wishes or feelings onto the other mistaking the actual needs of the situation. The former problem leads a potential moral actor away from the distressing cause, the person in need, due to being emotionally overwhelmed. Hoffman calls this *egoistic drift* when the needs of the other lose command of our attention and we instead focus on ourselves. This would fit into my description of the funeral mourner's moral failing above. These problems overlap with one another and it can be difficult to separate them.

Personal distress is considered by many empathy theorists to be a cause of non-helping behavior, but it can also lead to a variety of mistaken intended helps and may be due to *emotional/empathic obtuseness*. An example of a poor empathizer's *projection* and/or *obtuseness* might be when she insists on "helping" when to a more astute observer, the assistance does more harm than good, as was seen in the funeral example. Alternately, emotional/empathic *sensitivity* enables an empathizer to read the genuine

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need or desire of the sufferer, attending and responding to the real needs of the sufferer[22].
Using Scheler's discussion of fellow-feeling, we can imagine the mourner above
managing her own anxieties regarding the existential realities that her husband *could* die,
recognizing that there is no immediate danger, and instead guiding her imagination to
considerations of the anxieties that the widow must be feeling. This might lead her to
offer assistance with sensitivity to the widow's wishes. The widow might then find a
responsive space in this mourner's empathy from which to garner support for the painful
transition ahead. Moral obtuseness, as Martha Nussbaum (1990) points out, is a moral
failing. The empathic mistakes that we often make may not result in overt harm, but they
are neither helpful nor morally skillful, and can seriously impede or damage relations.

Many theorists worry that empathy is not only not sufficient, but may even be
problematic for morality (Prinz 2012, Keen 2007). This is, in part, because of its *biases*
for kith and kin. We preferentially empathize with loved ones, near ones, familiar ones,
or just similar others. This leads to injustice when groups in power favor their own
groups in benefits, resources, protections, etc. Another moral problem of empathy is that
we can malevolently empathize with the suffering of an enemy as the German word
schadenfreude suggests, literally taking pleasure in the suffering of another (de Waal
2006, 72). This might be an innocent form of pleasure such as Franz de Waal's (2006)
laughter at the fall of an alpha male chimp during a boisterous show of power. None of
the chimps who witnessed the fall of the alpha male showed any pleasure in it. So, while
these primates share our capacity for empathy, they do not exhibit this form of it (160).
Schadenfreude can have the darker tones of revenge and torture as well. Without

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[22] Personal distress can also be a cause of helping, particularly if one is unable to escape the distress of the sufferer.

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empathy, such pleasure might not be possible. Max Scheler (1913/2008) claims that this is only possible in vicarious feeling, however, not in fellow-feeling, and Martha Nussbaum (2001), likewise claims that compassion excludes such bitter sentiments. Literary theorist Susanne Keen (2007) expresses concern that a naïve faith in empathy as a means of mitigating or eradicating harmful inclinations could have disastrous results for ethics. She surveys readers' empathic experiences in reading by asking questions like whether novels had altered their beliefs or evoked behavior change. Her analysis reveals very mixed results, noting that many readers identify with the antagonists and selfish characters (75).

Emotion regulation is an important developmental skill that facilitates the accuracy and aptness of empathy. Good parenting helps a child to channel and direct emotions and feelings into productive expressions rather than disruptive or harmful ones. A toddler learns to say, "I'm angry" or the like in lieu of hitting her brother. A pre-schooler learns how to sit at the dinner table and manage the urge to get up, which not only inculcates mores for her conduct at a meal, but prepares her for the extensive self-management of elementary school and so on. Adult life requires even more sophisticated skills, insofar as the snide attitude of an adolescent will not likely garner success in the work world. Poor emotion regulation leads to many problems, but for empathy it can spell a stronger self-focus because the unregulated feelings can overwhelm the empathizer. Good emotion regulation is bound up with the self-other(s) relation insofar as one is more capable of managing proper psychological boundaries, separating one's own concerns from the other, at the same time one exhibits and feels concern for the

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other. The problems of empathy, apart from neurological impairments, seem to be at least partly rooted in the lack of self-management skills and proper self-other distinctions.

A lack of a proper sense of agency, a lack of the ability to genuinely see the other in his own right, a propensity for egoistic drift, or invariably returning focus to self are all serious problems for empathy as a moral impetus. And if one has poor emotion-regulation skills, many empathic distress encounters will dissolve into mere personal distress which is no use to anyone. According to psychologists Nancy Eisenberg and Natalie Eggum empathy generally becomes either sympathy or personal distress, so there is not much neutral ground (2009, 71)

Psychologist Martin Hoffman contends, however, that *empathic distress,* which is what we feel when observing another in distress, will always have some amount of personal distress in it. What is at issue, then, is the *degree* of concern for the other versus that for one's own feeling. *Sympathetic distress* is actively motivated to attend to the sufferer, while empathic distress, which may be the middle ground between sympathetic and personal distress, may not (Hoffman 93-110). Much of what is at stake in empathic perception and the feelings of empathic distress becoming prosocial action is a subtle but crucial matter of degree. Emotion-regulation is an important aspect of empathic responsivity and therefore an important moral skill to develop (Ibid. 87-91). And yet, emotion-regulation is on the spectrum with emotion suppression, and suppression may impede one's ability to feel at all for the other. One may have sufficiently perceptive empathic perception such that one can read the import of the other's expressions and situation, but insufficient concern to motivate action. This is precisely what makes empathy dubious for ethics.

Jesse Prinz (2011) is worried about reliance on emotion for ethics, and claims that empathy is insufficient to promote moral behavior and can even be a barrier, since one may avoid the feelings of distress that accompany empathy. "It can promote compliance and complacency" (14). Feeling with the other may not be enough to mitigate the interference of self-protective impulses or the many biases that plague empathy. Worse, it may promote injustices against those with whom we do not empathize (Ibid. 15-16; § 5-6).

Martin Hoffman might agree with Prinz's concerns. He elucidates the many weaknesses of empathy including being a bystander and egoistic drift, which leads back to self-focus and self-concern. A vital mitigating factor appears to be an imposition of guilt. Hoffman explains the process by which we cultivate empathy in childrearing, claiming that in childrearing the induction of guilt-scripts is a necessary part of learning to *act* on empathy (2000, 161-4). Like de Waal, Hoffman claims that there is an internal motivation to help. He is in agreement with Hume who claims that there is a pleasure in helping and relief in helping. However, we need the provocation of internalized guilt-scripts to motivate cooperative and helping behavior (164). So, while empathy is a tool for prosocial action through its mimicry, sympathy, and distress for the other, it is not sufficient on its own to achieve moral behavior.[23]

So, there are several problems for empathy. No wonder theorists like Prinz prefer a more rationalist system; empathy seems too wily to be reliable. I cannot help agreeing

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[23] Note: I do not discuss empathy deficits in individuals with certain forms of autism and psycho/sociopathy. There is recent work exploring the size of the amygdala in those lacking in emotional resonance (See http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5568609.) These are serious concerns for social morality, but they are beyond the scope of this work as they may have more biological than psychological foundations.

with Hume and Jonathan Haidt, however, that flawed and fickle as our moral emotions are, they are highly responsive to the judgment of our community. And as I understand the cognitive and social science literature at this point, such empathic responsivity may be as good as it gets for our social cooperation and prosocial action. As Hume pointed out, and social science seems to agree, the emotions (or passions) provide the impetus to act. No amount of principled discourse will get us to sacrifice creature comforts for service to non-kin needs. Empathy alone cannot create more humane moral sentiments and actions, but it does command care and other-oriented behavior. My query is how empathic concern and skill can grow to a broader reach.

It may not be necessary to choose between rationalism and sentimentalism exclusively, because as Martin Hoffman argues, empathy can be *bonded* with ethical principles. Guilt is an important moral emotion for Hoffman's process and it may be promising at least as an antidote to apathy and complaisance. Cultivation of empathy entails application of guilt in what Hoffman calls induction-based discipline encounters. Like the cultivation of Mengzi's moral sprouts, the shaping of empathy is a delicate process. One must not force it, nor must one neglect it. One must have the right sources of nourishment and the right approach in care such that the sprouts mature into trees that bear real fruit.

The darker side of empathy is not overcome in my discussion. Nor can it be, I think. I believe we will struggle against our baser inclinations to merely please those we like rather than those we do not, and we will struggle in some degree against the inclination to demonize, vilify, and revel in the losses of those with whom we differ. As we saw in Chapter II, empathy is an old system, which might explain why it is so

complicated. Since we cannot isolate the boundaries of a solely good empathy, it seems to be more productive to focus on shaping empathic perception toward greater moral skillfulness. My discussion is motivated by the concern that if we do not do the work of cultivating empathy, we may not be able to mitigate its darker inclinations.

Empathy and Moral Development

Empathy, being primordially imitative (whether conscious or unconscious), is nature's way of assisting our connectivity with others, since we humans are stronger in groups than we are alone. This imitative quality is the primary means by which we express and understand our sociality from infancy onwards, and is vulnerable to its social context for development. Childrearing is the primary beginning point for the empathy's maturation, so much of our later empathic potential is contingent on our parents' relative empathic skill. Aristotle was right to note that it is a matter of luck as to whether one can identify and cultivate the good. Whether one is born to caring, moral parents, necessary material and social resources, availability of education, as well as a social/political structure that facilitates the wellbeing of its citizenry will impact one's relative potential for moral maturity. The success or failure of moral life depends greatly on the factors of one's social conditions. As creatures responsive to our social situation, our moral sprouts will grow out of the garden in which we live. Confucians celebrate the wisdom of the sage Mengzi's mother. She understood mimicry in children. She knew that a child's responsivity and identification with its social milieu would provoke the child to emulate what it was exposed to. Knowing the important influence of those whom we imitate, she is renowned for the following story.

Mengzi's Mother, three moves:

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In the beginning when Mencius was still very little, the mother and son lived in a house nearby a cemetery. Because of this, Mencius and all the neighbouring children had plenty of opportunities to witness the funeral rites of the time. One day, Mother Meng noticed that her son enjoyed playing in the cemetery. He would bury things, build tiny mounts out of earth and emulate the burial proceedings. "This is no place to raise a child," said Mother Meng when she saw this.

So she decided to find a new home. Mother Meng and Mencius found a house nearby the marketplace and they moved there. And they both soon settled comfortably in the new environment. Some time passed and Mother Meng noticed that her son had mixed well with the neighbouring children. They were playing games together. Mencius was pretending to be a street vendor selling his merchandise at the market while the other kids were the customers. When Mother Meng saw this, she once again said, "This is no place to raise a child." She decided to search for a new home once more.

After careful consideration, Mother Meng and Mencius found a house located nearby a school. Again some time passed and Mother Meng saw her son settling into the new environment. One day, she saw her son enjoyed performing Confucian rites and emulating the proper etiquette of the literati. "Now this is a place to raise a child!" Mother Meng finally declared. To her great joy, Mencius grew up to become a great Confucian philosopher, second only the founder, Confucius himself.

~ http://chinesecauldron.com/story-index/mother-mengs-three-moves/

The Confucians see the practice of rituals and other aesthetic practices such as calligraphy, painting, and martial arts as a means to improving moral character. The highly imitative nature of empathic processes can lead one either to a more adept and sympathetic empathic perception or to a weaker, muddled, or self-absorbed perception. As a social-cognitive process, empathy is deeply complex and intermingled with many other processes that influence our perceptions, our feelings, and our willingness to help. In Chapter III we saw how Mengzi regards the sentiment of general sympathy or fellow feeling as a moral sprout. Awareness of the contingencies that facilitate growth in moral feeling, or impede it, can assist us in better attending to its cultivation as Mengzi's mother did.

The neurophysiological systems that enable empathy are what most of us have in place as infants. Martin Hoffman explicates the process through which empathy can be cultivated for social morality. This process is based on our shared neurophysiology. Recall from Chapter II Vittorio Gallese's (2001) view of intersubjectivity which he calls a "shared manifold," and his claim that we are social animals. The shared manifold is the shared experiential basis of our mutual understanding. Having the same bodies and neurophysiology, we come to social interactions with many of the same conceptual and emotional structures, like motor schemas and body schemas, which then lead to shared understandings. It is through this shared manifold that we are able to automatically apprehend and comprehend many forms of meaning, and their implications facilitate our shared existence (34). Our shared body structures allow for our shared meaning as humans beginning in infancy. They allow for, but cannot enable shared meaning without attentive nurturance in parenting. Empathy needs stimulation and support for proper development and ongoing maturation. Once empathy has been properly cultivated for young adulthood, it needs maintenance and refinement to attune it to the complexities of ongoing adult life. As is the case with good health, which is the metaphor that Aristotle uses for flourishing in the *Nichomachean Ethics,* empathic skillfulness requires lifelong practices that keep it fit and healthy. Those practices begin in the interactions between parent and child. In infancy, we have only the buds of empathy that facilitate our social cognition.

In *Empathy and Moral Development*, Hoffman (2000) describes the preconscious process of mood mimicry in emotional contagion as the beginning of empathy. Initially, a child feels *personal distress,* or self-oriented anxiety, when she is infected with the

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upset expressions of another child. A newborn seeks personal comfort by crying or fussing until she is consoled by a parent. By 6-12 months, she may be disturbed but is less intensely so. An 18-month old child, capable of seeking a soothing solution for another may offer her favorite stuffed toy or her own mother to a crying child (26). This is an interpretation error in empathic perception. The child is not merely feeling personal distress, but *empathic distress*, or distress for the other, but she is not yet able to take the other's point of view sufficiently to appreciate what will console him. By two years old, the empathizing child learns that the crying child does not want someone else's toy or mother, but his own.[24] This is a development in interpretive skills, in the capacity to take another's point of view, and an advance in empathic skills. This development does not, however, mean that the child experiences no personal distress.

An empathic relation between mother (primary caregiver) and baby is essential to infant survival and wellbeing. Infants empathize by detecting the emotional displays of others such as the parents' happy babbles or worried eyes. Hoffman claims that infants empathize with the distress of others by being infected with the feelings. This is why crying can be contagious among infants. Initially, they feel this egocentrically as a point of view protoself, but along with physical and moral development, empathy also develops an other-focused orientation (6). With cultivation, one may acquire the ability to imagine empathetically those not present and those very different from oneself. Hoffman claims that empathic development eventually joins a sympathetic (that is more fully other-oriented) concern, but it is still mixed with empathetic *personal* distress. This distress is

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[24] This is possibly in disagreement with the view of the "false-belief" test in theory of mind research as discussed in Chapter II. The discrepancy may be due to the fact that the false-belief test requires language to indicate, whereas the situation Hoffman describes is an observable development without the use of language.

identified by many theorists as problematic for ethics insofar as personal distress demands the emotional focus toward the self rather than the victim. *Empathic distress* is what we feel for the victim, and Hoffman claims that some of that distress will be personal. *Sympathetic distress* is a stronger form of empathy that prioritizes the feelings of the other as the center of one's attention and offer of help (6-7). Personal distress, on the other hand, if strong enough, can lead to egoistic drift (loss of empathic connection) or to empathy avoidance in which we turn away, avoid eye contact, etc. (57, 61).

Concerns about empathy for ethics often invoke the vulnerability of empathy to these focuses away from the subject. Amy Coplan (2011) argues that for empathy to be genuine, it must be absolutely devoid of personal distress. Empathy, for Coplan, requires affective matching and clear subject-object/target distinction, and particularly, other-oriented perspective-taking. The subject or observer must feel as the target feels, be clear that it is the target's situation and not her own that evokes the feeling, and feel solely on behalf of the target for the experience to be called empathy (6). A number of theorists share her view that genuine altruism must be devoid of personal distress, but Hoffman (2000) claims that personal distress may be precisely why we are motivated to help, and therefore, claims that the empathic relief we feel is still other-oriented. So long as we avoid helping, we continue to suffer (unless we leave the situation, in which case it may or may not dissipate). "Subjects who did not respond overtly continued to be aroused and upset...When children helped others their empathic distress appeared to diminish; when they did not help their distress was prolonged" (32). And, interestingly, if aid was offered but did not alleviate suffering of victim, empathic distress did not subside. "This implies that empathic helpers do have their eye on the ultimate consequences of their

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action for the victim and it does matter whether their actions reduce the victim's distress," according to Hoffman (32-33).

To respond to criticisms that this empathic relief that we feel when in response to the sufferer's improvement, and our own suffering abates, indicates a self-oriented motivation, Hoffman refers to studies that give evidence of his claims (Batson and Weeks, 1996, Batson and Shaw, 1991). The caveat is that when there are many helpers, individuals may be prone either to "pluralistic ignorance" where we believe that nothing is actually wrong because others are not concerned. Or we may be duped by a "diffusion of responsibility," assuming that someone else has called the police, etc. But, when one feels the onus, one then feels a distress which either must be followed with action or it may not abate and may cause deeper discomforts of cognitive dissonance. "It seems reasonable to conclude that although empathy-based helping makes people feel good by reducing empathic distress and providing empathic relief, the main objective of empathy-based helping is to alleviate the victim's distress," according to Hoffman. "Empathic distress is, in short, a prosocial motive" (33). Of course, the pull of the self is strong in young children, so parents and care-givers have to press children into looking at the feelings of others.

Hoffman claims that the right amount of developmentally appropriate moral pressure on growing children is what is needed to turn their self-absorbed point of view to a view that includes the experiences, needs, and feelings of others. Hoffman defines empathy as "an affective response more appropriate to another's situation than one's own" (4). This definition is sufficiently broad to include the spectrum of responses from infancy to later moral development. He claims that as a product of natural selection, it is

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a "multidetermined response that can be aroused by cues of distress coming from the victim or the victim's situation" (4).

Hoffman lists five modes of arousing empathy which operate on two levels, 1) a preverbal, automatic/involuntary level which includes *motor mimicry, afferent feedback* and *classical conditioning,* (which is a variant of classical conditioning entailing a *direct association* of cues from the victim or his situation with one's own painful past experience). 2) A higher cognitive level which includes: *mediated association,* and *role-taking*, which can be self or other-focused, or a combination thereof (36-59)*.* More automatic forms require less effortful cognitive processing, while more intentional forms require higher cognitive-affective skills (5).

From our previous discussion in Chapter II, we have an understanding of motor mimicry, but the other terms need some explanation. Feedback is a form of mimicry according to Hofffman. When feelings are expressed around us, our automatic processes mimic them and then we begin to receive feedback that evokes feelings in us. "The way people know how they feel is by sensing it from their muscular as well as their glandular and visceral responses" (40). He quotes William James (1890): "We feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, and afraid because we tremble" (Vol. II, 450). This describes afferent feedback. Afferent feedback carries the sensory stimulus to the brain and efferent feedback carries the message to the relevant systems for reaction, (e.g., to jump out of the way of an oncoming vehicle).[25] Hoffman (2000) claims that the research is not conclusive as to whether the feelings that result are produced by afferent feedback

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[25] From website: http://www.wingsforlife.com/en/latest/afferent-vs-efferent-nerve-fibers-1058/

or whether it is associations that produce the feeling due to "perceived …changes in facial-expression kinesthetically associated with certain sentiments" (41). He describes the association experience as, "When I'm angry, my jaws are clenched and my brows are down" (41). Whether it is afferent feedback or associational, what is useful to understand is that there is an important and meaningful connection between the mimicked production of facial-expressions and one's feelings.

A child, then, is conditioned through his experience of his parents' facial and bodily responses to various stimuli and his own feelings about such experiences. As he imitates his parents' facial expressions, especially those spontaneously evoked by the parents' experiences, the child builds associations of the meanings of the expressions. This kind of conditioning is called direct association because one learns to directly associate certain facial expressions and their corresponding experiences such as fearful faces and fearful events (45). Distress experienced on behalf of another is mediated association through language and role-taking, which requires advanced levels of cognitive processing and includes the self/other foci as mentioned above, according to Hoffman (53-59). The import of what one sees alters with the position of the imagined point of view. For example, one can ask oneself how one would feel in such a situation, or how it might be for the other person being in that situation. Projecting oneself into the scenario will afford a different sensibility than intuiting how the other herself, given her particular temperament, situation, etc., will feel. The latter is other-focused role-taking. Asking how one would feel in another's shoes, is self-focused role-taking and it produces more intense feelings in the observer. This has positive and negative implications for empathy. If one imagines oneself in the situation, it can detract from the experience of

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the other through preoccupation with one's own feelings. It may also serve to heighten one's regard for the other in knowing that one is "safe" from such troubles, and may then motivate one to mitigate them.

Hoffman argues that a combination focus may be the "most powerful because it combines the emotional intensity of self-focused role-taking with more sustained attention to the victim of other-focused role-taking. Indeed, fully mature role-taking might be defined as imagining oneself in the other's place and integrating the resulting empathic affect with one's personal information about the other and one's general knowledge of how people feel in his or her situation" (58). These different modes, according to Hoffman, enable a broad base of responsivity to the various social cues and situations that each of us must navigate daily (59).

Hoffman's discussion of the focus of role/perspective-taking as either a self-focused, other-focused or a combination of the two, provides nuance to the issue of personal distress and sympathetic distress in ethics. Many theorists who share Coplan's view of empathy seem to be replicating the age-old debates about selfishness and altruism. Some theorists want to claim that any amount of personal or self-oriented feeling precludes the action being genuine empathy or genuine altruism. While it may make one a consistent ethicist to claim that the moral worth of an action performed on behalf of the other depends on its unequivocally expressing a purely other-focused regard, I would argue that such an absolute requirement is psychologically unrealistic. Such purity is not pragmatically necessary to achieve the goal of care for the other.

Hoffman's account admits of such alloys and even conflicts of feeling. His theory is based on empirical data, and squares more with what, it seems to me, real efforts in ethical practice look like. For a psychologically valid ethics, we should leave aside questions of purity and concentrate our attention on the critical degree of other-focus and how to facilitate that. Empathy's accuracy and efficacy might even be impaired if there is not some back and forth checking between self-feelings and other-feelings. Additionally, accepting a conceptualization of an *impure* empathy contributes to the case that I want to make for regarding ethics and empathic moral perception as a matter of dynamic moral skillfulness rather than a matter of attaining some impossibly pure other-directedness. In my view, it is not empathy's purity, but its trainability that makes it useful for skillful ethical practices.

We have talked in previous chapters about how our regard for the other can motivate empathic action. That regard has positive and negative impulses, one of which is reaching out in care, and the other is recognition of guilt and so either helping or avoiding hurting. Hoffman discusses guilt as a motivator for correcting behavior, because I think that it is also an important corrective for unskilled empathic perception and response. Guilt is an important part of the cultivation practice because it induces the pain of moral failing, or the anticipatory pain that seeks to avoid that failure. Empathy enables and provokes our feelings of shame and guilt, according to Hoffman. And helping the victim mitigates and helps with management of guilt (117). These are essential social motivators that weaken inaction and the subsequent *bystander guilt,* so as to strengthen prosocial action (8-9). Initially, parents induct children into the meanings of these moral emotions, but in time, children internalize them. Hoffman regards this as a

process of acquiring autonomy. The sense of guilt which one initially felt toward the parent (and/or the victim), is eventually internalized such that one feels a sense of personal responsibility. Rather than guilt before an authority figure, or simple fear of love withdrawal, one feels an inward shame, and an outward guilt before the one whom we have harmed. Through internalization, one comes to feel what Hoffman calls *anticipatory guilt* as one imagines how one will feel if one acts harmfully (162-3). Empathy is one of the main processes by which this internalization is possible. So, I will now lay out Hoffman's discussion of the process by which parents induct children with the guilt-scripts that eventually become internalized as a sense of personal responsibility for their action/inaction.

Empathic distress, which for Hoffman is a prosocial motive (we might say moral sprout), requires nurturing and training to activate appropriately, so that a child learns how his behavior impacts others and how to respond accordingly. This relies on mimicry insofar as how we care for and nurture our children gives them the experience to mirror to others. So, parental nurturance will be vital for empathy's growth. Hoffman (2000) shows how this nurturance is then augmented or weakened depending on parental discipline style. He highlights two types of discipline, 1) Power-assertion and 2) Induction.

Power assertion (Hoffman 1960) utilizes the power differential in parent-child relations to coerce the desired behavior from the child. Hoffman does not favor this as he believes it undermines the development of empathy by causing the child to focus on the self in fear (Hoffman 2000, 146). If the child is absorbed in her own suffering, she cannot attend to the meaning being ascribed to the event. This is an important clue for

induction as well, since it does apply moral pressure on the child and if it is too heavy, the child again dissolves into self-focus. "Too little pressure obviously gives children no reason to stop, attend, and process inductive messages. Too much pressure, as long known by information-processing researchers, directs a person's attention to the physical features of a verbal message, to the relative neglect of deriving meaning from its semantic content (Kaheman 1973; Mueller 1979)" (Hoffman 2000, 153). [26]

Induction, by contrast, is a form of discipline "**in which parents highlight the other's perspective, point up the other's distress, and make it clear that the child's action caused it**" (143). In this way, the parent leads the child to induce the causal relation between her behavior and the reaction of the other child, to comprehend and appreciate the moral import of the harm she has caused, and then to make amends, taking responsibility for the pain given. This is the style which asks, "How would you feel if someone did that to you?" and the like. It is the style of discipline that is referred to for empathic cultivation.

Pressure is used in both discipline techniques, but power assertion tends to exploit the physical and developmental disparity between parent and child, while induction utilizes the child's own empathic feeling to help him improve his social and moral cognition and behavior. Mengzi also cautions against forcing things. In a discussion over the way to accumulate righteousness, he advises his disciple Gongsun Chou to avoid

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[26] This strikes me as an insightful intuitive check for discipline practices. Particularly, as different temperaments respond more or less sensitively. I have two sons and the elder required/requires more dramatic pressure to penetrate his self-oriented view point. The younger boy required that I use more care because he was highly sensitive to moral failure or empathic distress when he was responsible and his guilt response would be so strong that he would have overwhelmingly negative self-assessments negating his ability to focus on the other. Such attentiveness and responsivity in discipline are skills that are incredibly difficult to develop.

being like the farmer from Song who was concerned about the growth of his grain. "One must work at it, but do not aim at it directly. Let the heart not forget, but do not help it grow." This farmer from Song (a place notorious in Confucian writings for its slow-witted inhabitants) returns home after "tending" his sprouts by pulling them up a little. "Wearily, he returned home, and said to his family, 'Today I am worn out. I helped the grain to grow.' His son rushed out and looked at it. The grain was withered" (Mengzi 2A2, 127). The "help" that the farmer offered destroyed the crop; this is an important insight for the cultivation of empathy. It is a process that requires attentiveness, sensitivity, and insight in its application so as to apply an apt and not too forceful amount of pressure.

Hoffman does not presume that power-assertion is never used, but claims that it is less effective toward these ends. If the child is lost in personal distress he cannot attend to the meaning of the disciplinary encounter. So, it is important that the parent keep the induction encounter's intensity attuned to the emotional responsivity of the child. If the child is able to pay attention properly, then she can be directed to the feelings of the sufferer.

As Hoffman describes the induction process, one is struck by its resonances with theatre. You construct the scene for your child's imagination to enter and witness the events of her actions from the standpoint of the recipient. There are characters, events, a scene, and scripts. Inductions,

> like all discipline attempts, communicate parental disapproval of the
> child's harmful acts…but unlike other types of discipline, inductions do
> two additional things: First they call attention to the victim's distress, and
> by making the victims' distress salient they exploit an ally within the

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child, the child's empathic proclivity. That is, inductions activate certain empathy-arousing mechanisms—mimicry if they get the child to look at the victim, role-taking if they encourage the child to imagine how he or she would feel in the victim's place and mediated association if they bring up the child's relevant past experience. In this way inductions elicit empathic distress for the victim' pain, hurt feelings, and (if relevant) suffering beyond the situation (157).

Parental disapproval awakens the child's need to belong, so that she pays attention. The parent then illustrates the experience of the other so that the child can imagine empathically what it felt like to be the recipient. Having gotten the child's attention and turned it to the recipient, the second part of the induction is partly logical and partly imaginative. The logical part is to show the cause-effect relation of her actions. For example, "You threw the golf ball and hit Timmy and it hurt. That's why he's crying." The imaginative part is in making the recipient's feelings salient for her. "That ball is very hard. Do you remember when you got hit with the soccer ball? This ball is much harder. Look at the bump on Timmy's head."   With optimal pressure, the child will see her role in the hurtful event, resulting "in a self-blame attribution that transforms his or her empathic distress, at least partly, into guilt, that is, *transgression guilt*, in contrast to bystander guilt over inaction" (158). Transgression guilt is the emotional acceptance of responsibility for harm done. This moral emotion is then responsive to guidance in proper reparations.

Over the course of many such repetitions, Hoffman claims that moral schemas build up and scripts develop. When we have a new experience, our minds set up a new schema of the moral import and implications of behavior (Nelson 1993). Through repetitions of similar experiences, a script begins to develop building from initial

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episodes. Hudson and Nelson (1983) claim that it takes about 5 repetitions for us to begin building a script. Hoffman extrapolates from this to his account of what is happening in inductions. Following Nelson's model, Hoffman suggests the following sequence: "child's transgression…parental induction…child's feeling empathic distress and guilt." Initially, these are mere episodes, but with repetition, the discipline encounters form scripts. "Once a discipline-encounter script is formed, relevant information and details from subsequent discipline encounters are integrated into it. The full script may include reparative acts…[such as] apologizing, comforting, hugging, kissing the victim" (158). When parents show approval through affection, words, etc., the child's empathic distress is relieved and guilt is reduced. These experiences are stored in the child's memory as the process that leads to successful relief of empathic distress.

The full script for Hoffman is "Transgression→Induction→Empathic Distress and Guilt→Reparation." Hoffman's emphasis is motivation and so for brevity's sake he calls it **Transgression→Induction→Guilt script**. "It has motive properties due to its empathic distress and guilt components" (159). He credits Piaget for the idea of the moral script since Piaget claimed that emotions are stored in memory (159). Hoffman adds that cause-effect scripts are an integral part of the Transgression→Induction→Guilt script and that the cause-effect scripts are morally enriched by the Transgression→Induction→Guilt script because the scripts are infused with affective content. This affective content, or what he also calls affective charges, can activate the proper moral sentiment and action. Over time, those affective charges, which Hoffman calls "hot cognitions," form more automatic, faster responses. He refers to cold

cognitions as those that do not have affective charge yet bonded to them. They are the

initial formative communications during which the child must attend and do a lot of

conscious processing to follow the moral meaning of the event and his culpability. For

example, a parent says, "You have to wait your turn, Lisa." Initially, Lisa obeys (if she is

reasonably compliant) because she accepts her mother's authority in this matter.

Eventually, she will feel angry (hot cognition) when that more is violated by her peers, or

guilty (also a hot cognition) when she is caught violating it.

> When these [cold] scripts are activated in children in conflict situations,
> they are at first no match for the pull of the prospect of egoistic gain. In
> time, however, cognitive development enables children to 'decenter,' that
> is, to transcend the egoistic pull, free themselves from the grip of their
> own perspective, and take another's perspective as well. But, the newly
> acquired cognitive ability to decenter is not enough to keep children's own
> viewpoint from capturing most of their attention in a conflict situation,
> unless they are compelled to exercise this newly acquired cognitive ability
> (160).

This inculcation of moral responsivity relies on parental intervention until the child is

mature enough to have an internal motive system based on successful internalization of

the guilt-scripts. Hoffman (2000) speculates that for rearing young children inductions

may occur up to fifty times a day. These scripts continue to adapt and integrate new

material throughout adult life. Hoffman cites evidence for his theory of induction's role

in moral development referring to numerous articles on parental discipline's contribution

to guilt and moral internalization (Brody and Shaffer, 1982; Crockenberg and Litman,

1990, etc.). He points out that mothers who use induction (fathers' results are mixed)

produce children who respond with "guilt over harming others" without the influence of

external sanctions. He also observes that the Germans who helped Jews in WWII had

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been reared by parents who were nurturing, and generally used induction over power assertion (Hoffman 165).

At this point, I hope that I have given sufficient attention to empathy's complexity and ambivalence, but also shown that is amenable to shaping influences. Hoffman's description of induction shows empathy being shaped in an affectively charged theatrical-like experience complete with characters, an event structure, scripts, and themes. The regularity of such phrases as, "How do you think that makes him feel?" "Wouldn't that hurt your feelings if someone did that do you?" and the like, suggest that we have been using some form of induction in discipline for some time to help our children see the importance of considering the feelings of the other.

We must be nurtured by our caregivers in order to be able to mimic their care in regard to others. So, caregiving is essential to empathy's development. We sometimes emphasize this point, however, to the detriment of some of the other important moral emotions like guilt. Hoffman shows how the emotion of guilt can be used (without too much pressure) as a means of inculcating empathic moral feeling for others, and instigating anticipatory feelings that can prevent us from causing harm. Guilt and even fear appear to be important parts of the process of attuning our awareness to the many ways in which we may harm one another, however inadvertently. Mengzi sees the value of these emotions for morality. Recall Mengzi's compassion education for King Xuan. The king is reluctant, claiming weakness, inability and finally avarice as inhibitors to benevolent action on behalf of his subjects. Mengzi turns to threats of personal safety to motivate the king. He points out that feeble, greedy men are not noble (but only mere fellows), and that only a noble leader deserves the respect and protections that the

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mandate of heaven provides to a virtuous ruler. The ignoble one is a "mere fellow,"

deserving of the ills of personal harm or rebellion. "I have heard of the execution of a

mere fellow 'Zhou' but I have not heard of the killing of one's ruler" (Mengzi 117-120).

For Mengzi, *ruler* is a morally laden term, not merely he who has the power, but

he who has the "mandate of heaven," the right to rule, because he is following the way of

virtue. In this way, Mengzi shows that even the king is subject to the expectations of

virtue. *Genuine* rulership is required if King Xuan wishes to have the protection afforded

a *ruler*. So it is that the king, no less than his subjects, is beholden to the rules of

character and conduct for his role. If we subscribe to the view that we are ultrasocial, and

therefore absolutely dependent upon our community for our material and social

wellbeing, then we must acknowledge that we are also beholden to that community for its

support and maintenance, both material and moral. It is because of this beholdenness that

guilt, responsibility, and accountability are essential to individual and communal health.

While empathic moral perception is a primary means of achieving the responsibility and

responsivity of such health, it will not do so without attentiveness to its instruction and

correction, which is provoked by guilt and fear before those by whom we are bound.

Hume, Smith, de Waal, Gallese, and Hoffman see the roots of our social and

moral cognition in the shared feeling experiences of empathy. None of them see empathy

as sufficient for social morality. Arguably, one may follow social conventions

sufficiently without empathy, or without much, but mere compliance with convention is

not sufficient to ensure communal health. We must learn how to attend and respond to

what situations require and acquire skills to meet such needs. Learning to see and hear

requires the cultivation of perception. Getting from empathy as a mimicker for social

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cognition, to empathic distress as a prosocial motive, as King Xuan of Qi felt it when looking at the suffering ox, is the work of good parenting.[27]

Conclusion: Fellow-Feeling, Love, and Empathic Moral Perception

Getting from basic empathy, which one can regulate to suit various situations, to an empathic moral perception that sees and hears the needs of people, other animals, and even the planet itself takes more cultivation and will likely expand on the imaginative work begun in childhood. If quality relations between self and community are necessary for wellbeing, and if empathy facilitates receptivity and responsivity in such relations, then a skillful empathic perception is essential to flourishing.

In the U.S, our social structure is based on ideas of individualism and the unit of the so-called nuclear family. The insights of my research on empathy suggest that not only do such practices not lead to flourishing, but they may be responsible for weakening the fabric of social and environmental wellbeing. My research prompts the question of whether there might be better ways of sociality than the way we are currently living.

We want to belong to human groups and to be cared about by members of those groups. Being profoundly social, our flourishing depends on the wellbeing of our social milieu—the wellbeing of one's relation to one's community and the wellbeing of one's community itself. As Mengzi and other thinkers have shown, our sociality disposes us to care about each other and about what each other thinks of us. The sociality of our empathic perception is not only a means by which we can understand each other, that

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[27] I say that this is necessary, but it is not sufficient since, as ultrasocial animals, we require communal support for our moral skillfulness and correction of our misbehavior.

sociality is an apt enforcer of our morality. Our morality is a key means of sustaining strong, healthy bonds.

As induction guides children, so there are ways of guiding adults aptly through the complexities of adult morality. Adam Smith (1759/2000) claims that we find pleasure in sympathy, whether in sorrow or joy. We find reprieve from suffering in companionship, and joy is sweeter when shared. This is true for both sufferer and sympathizer (30). This ground of shared feeling is the basis that parents, care-givers, family members, teachers, coaches, ministers, rabbis, imams, masters, and other mentoring guides use to help their children, students, teams, acolytes, etc., to develop care, to expand inclusion to others, to deepen their regard for others, to build attentiveness to the nuances of our behavior and its impact on those with whom we are in relation. We cannot help emotionally resonating with others, but this does not mean we always apprehend what is needed or how to best fulfill a necessary role. Recall that empathic avoidance, according to Preston and Hofelich, is often due to lack of training in an emergency.[28]

So, getting from basic empathy to compassion can be difficult, and further, getting to skillful responses is even more challenging. All of the aforementioned problems for empathy plague potential sympathizers. Varieties of unskillful emotion-regulation, or self-other differentiation can muddle one's competence in reading empathy correctly and helping others in the right way. Since most moral living requires spontaneous, unplanned responses, the moral improvisation I spoke of earlier seems to be an important point of focus for refining one's emotion-regulation and self-other

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[28] See Chapter II.

differentiation, as well as other morally salient skills. And stories may be an important means not only of helping us to remember the hows and whys of our moral values, but even further, of writing those values into our very neurophysiology itself.

Story is one of the main structural frames through which we see and experience our world, according to Paul Ricoeur (2007, 163). Not only does our social understanding rely on culturally shared narratives about our lives and our world, but our personal identity is shaped in and through these shared narratives as well. These narratives facilitate clarity, meaning, and development of an ethos as they represent our cultures in distilled forms. Immersing ourselves in such narratives, we can find ways to expand our empathic limits and deepen our empathic engagements. Nussbaum (1990) claims that it getting lost in narratives that allows us to change minds and to aspire to a fuller moral life (364). When we engage narratives, our worlds are expanded through experiences beyond the reach of our own singular existences.

CHAPTER V

NARRATIVE AND EMPATHIC MORAL PERCEPTION:

ENTERING THE WORLD OF THE OTHER

I can only answer the question, 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question
'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'
~Alisdair MacIntyre

We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being
narrated…The whole history of suffering cries out for vengeance and calls for narrative.
~Paul Ricoeur

My discussion so far has focused on the kind of creatures we humans are, how we are profoundly intersubjective, how our emotions are important resources for our moral cognition, and how empathy, in particular, motivates moral responsiveness. In Chapter I, I argued that, rather than the rational autonomous deciders that we have long believed ourselves to be, we are actually profoundly social, navigating that sociality primarily through emotional intuitions. In Chapter II, I showed how empathy enables us to read and respond to social cues, thereby anticipating the roles that we might play in the ethical dramas that surround us. In Chapter III, I then described the aesthetic and phenomenological qualities of empathy that make it susceptible to social mimicry, synchrony, and role playing, all of which contribute to empathy's use for ethics. I explored how empathy can be seen as a form of perception and that, like perception, it is influenced by how and what it sees, and does not see.

Neither perception nor empathy are passive, but actively select, albeit often preconsciously, what we pay attention to. Because they automatically interpret the nature of the situation as they have been shaped to do by our habits of thought and feeling, we are not consciously aware of the selecting and interpreting process that perception and

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empathy are engaged in. In Chapter IV, I explained the ways that, beginning in

childrearing, empathy is shaped toward greater or lesser prosocial impulses and skills

such that we may influence empathic perception and response. Childrearing forms the

very habits of attitude and judgment that activate our automatic responses. Psychologist

Martin Hoffman thus suggests that what is needed for moral development is active

cultivation of the empathic sensibilities such that our automatic cognitive responses and

behaviors are more morally sensitive to the needs and claims of the other. This requires

that we have internalized both the regard for the feelings of the other as well as the

anticipatory guilt should we fail in that regard.

In this chapter, I argue that stories are an essential part of this cultivation and

internalization. I further claim that one very important way that we continue to sensitize,

refine, and expand empathic moral perception and moral responsivity in adult life is

through engagement with stories.   Stories are not merely enjoyable augmentations to

moral education; they are indispensable to moral development. As Alasdair MacIntyre

(1981) claims, "Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious

stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence, there is no way to give us an

understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories

which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the

heart of things" (216). Stories are expressed in the various forms of storytelling and

narrative, for example, dramatic theatre, TV shows, films, novels, children's literature

and live storytelling. As short distillations that follow and imitate real life, stories are a

vital source of moral insight and exploration. We seek stories, I argue, because they

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nourish us emotionally, morally, and experientially. In the next three chapters, I will explain how.

Why Narrative?

Some ethical theorists may question the relevance or value of narrative engagement for the cultivation of empathy or ethics. How can stories have bearing on serious ethical inquiries and argumentation, particularly as many are entirely fictitious or even fanciful? I hope that my discussion so far has offered insight into an answer to this question. If we are not rational, consciously deciding agents most of the time, then we require other means than propositional argumentation to move our moral emotions and automatic processes in the direction of what we morally value. In Chapter I, I explained the ways in which we are not rational autonomous moral agents, but rather are ultrasocial animals who largely rely on feelings to motivate behavior. Rational argumentation has little impact on moral agents in a morally charged moment. And while a story or its characters are no more likely to jump to mind when in the midst of a dilemma, stories have a way of embedding themselves in our psychology and our imagination that goes beyond conscious reflection. They walk us through experiences and give us insight into potential outcomes.

What I suggest here is that the stories actually shape our automatic impulses, such that we become the stories that we consume. Whether these stories lead us toward or away from what we value will be up to individuals to judge, but the power of story is too important to overlook. I will demonstrate how narratives are intrinsic to human life and therefore are already cultivating us morally. Whether we mean them to or not, stories infiltrate our preconscious ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. Being aware of their influence

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allows us not only to be selective in what we will consume, but also to consider how stories could aid us in our moral self-cultivation projects.

There are a number of reasons why narrative is a necessary part of any moral cultivation project. 1) *We are narrative creatures*. Jonathan Gottschall (2012) calls us *Homo fictus* or fiction man, speaking of the seduction of stories which "can sneak up on us on a beautiful autumn day, make us laugh or cry, make us amorous or angry, make our skin shrink around our flesh, alter the way we imagine ourselves and our worlds. How bizarre it is that when we experience a story—whether a book, a film or a song—we allow ourselves to be invaded by the teller" (xiv-xv). It is natural for us to tell stories, whether for humor, to gossip, to pass the time, or to go on imaginative journeys to faraway places.

Engaging stories is more than a way to pass the time, however. They are an important vehicle for understanding ourselves, our lives, and the lives of others. This is because 2) *Narratives are meaning-making structures of experience*. They provide particular scenarios in which our imagination can experiment with general ideas, claims, behaviors, and attitudes. We can envision life from a particular perspective, not our own, try it on or see how it plays out. This is a kind of deliberation, which according to John Dewey (1922), is a "dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action" (190). Stories take us through experiences that we might not otherwise have and then open for us insight into our own lived experience. They provide us with information that enriches such imaginative deliberation insofar as they help us see what might be missing from our visions of possibility. The imagination expands and increases

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in complexity by engaging stories and can then instruct us in the nuances of living with others, showing us both the successes and failures of moral living.

Finally, narratives are important to a moral cultivation project because 3) *Narratives entice us into empathic experiences that change our unconscious attitudes and feelings*. When we immerse ourselves in narratives, we enter the life of another. If the narrator has access to the interior world of the character, we can see from inside the character's perspective, feel her dispositions, desires, and distastes. This sort of experience helps us to see through another's eyes, but also shows us what it is like within another's life, given her constraints and limitations. In his book, *I Know That You Know That I Know,* George Butte (2004) describes the subtleties of wordless knowing that take place in fiction. He shows how characters like the shy and constrained Anne Eliot in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* communicates what she knows in her shamefaced blush. Participating in the wordless exchanges between Anne, Captain Wentworth, and Anne's sister Elizabeth, we see the subtle communiques of body language, and the narrator helps us understand what it means. Anne is ashamed that her classist sister Elizabeth regards the man that Anne loves as socially inferior, despite his wealth and success in the British Navy. "It did not surprise, but it grieved Anne to observe that Elizabeth would not know [Captain Wentworth]. She saw that he saw Elizabeth, that Elizabeth saw him, that there was complete internal recognition on each side; she was convinced that he was ready to be acknowledged as an acquaintance, expecting it, and she had the pain of seeing her sister turn away with unalterable coldness" (186). As Anne reads the others in her situation, the reader also attends to the tentative glances between Captain Wentworth and Anne toward the sister who does not deign to acknowledge him. Readers share Anne's

anxiety, frustration, and concern in the matter, and in the process, perhaps learn to understand such social nuances and their potential meanings more fully for themselves.

Butte claims that as a novelist, Austen ushered in an experience in deep intersubjectivity for the reader by attending to the internal movements of intersubjective meaning, bringing them to the reader's awareness.

> When Anne Eliot watches Wentworth and Elizabeth negotiating complex force fields of memory and protocol, the enabling strategy of her story is a new layering of human consciousness, or a new representation of those subjectivities as layered in a specific way. Deep intersubjectivity has made its appearance in storytelling in modern culture, and it has altered our sense of self and community and the discourses that construct and reflect them (4).

Austen teaches her readers the nuances of reading bodies and minds. By drawing us in to the inner worlds of others, stories allow us to see what they see and empathically feel what they feel, attracting our attention and perception to what we may not have seen or felt before. They bring the subtleties of our ultrasociality to the fore such that we may see their implications for the characters and comprehend new *meanings*. As readers we can see how her sister's social snub puts more distance between Anne and Wentworth, and we understanding that, as a 19th century English woman, Anne is restricted by social mores as to what she may assert on her own without the support of her family. That, together with the shyness and reserve of her own character, *means* that these looks and lack of recognition create a difficult obstacle for Anne's connection to Wentworth. Such insights aid us in understanding attitudes and expression both similar to and different from our own as 21st century Americans. In this way, stories give us insights into possible meanings of social exchanges by distilling lived experience into tighter, more cognitively manageable sizes for us to imaginatively enter. They make explicit what is implicit in our own lives and in this way afford us greater self- and other-understanding.

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Once we are inside these stories, we are moved as the characters move, empathizing, sympathizing, expanding, and deepening our moral perspective.

We Are Narrative Creatures

What is it that draws us to stories in the first place, one might wonder? How is it that they are able to enchant us over and over such that, almost like a drug, we can hardly resist them when they offer their alluring beginnings. "Once upon a time…" is a phrase that signals the beginning of a particular kind of story, one that we generally believe is completely made up. Notice, however, that it nevertheless feels like an invitation. Even if we adults are too sophisticated to be completely drawn in by such an introduction, there is an appeal to it. We may think that fairy tales are hardly necessary for children anymore now that we have cartoons and movies to entertain them, but these, too, are forms of storytelling. Recent research in the cognitive sciences is revealing that stories play an important role in social cognition. Literary theorist Jonathan Gottschall (2012) states that people are mistaken when they think of reading as passive: "When we read stories, this massive creative effort is going on all the time, chugging away beneath our awareness...The writer guides the way we imagine but does not determine it" (4-5). Our imagination joins the author's creative effort fleshing the images in our imagination. Recall my discussion from Chapter II regarding the work of mirror neurons for mimicking and how that pertains to empathy. Similarly, such simulations are occurring in narrative engagement. This is how "authors [can] trick readers into doing most of the imaginative work" (4). When we are reading, just like when we are observing action, neurons in our motor and sensory areas of the brain are lighting up in sympathetic

response to the imagery suggested in the author's words. Gottschall calls this the witchery of story.

Cognitive scientist Ben Bergen (2012) explains that this suggestiveness of the brain is due to *embodied simulation*. As I have discussed in previous chapters, cognition is a complicated business that, rather than being an intellectual ratiocination, is a deeply embodied experience. I have highlighted how this works for empathy and understanding the other's inner world, but it also has implications for how we think and experience the world in general.   According to Bergen, embodied simulation is due to the activation of mirror neurons in motor and sensory areas of the body which not only simulate, but also create meaning (33). When we think, we are calling up simulations to aid our conceptualizations. We have these simulations stored in groupings that we elicit when we need to think. When we try to answer the question whether gorilla's have noses, we visualize their faces—a familiar pattern from which to discern the particular part in question. "It seems that routine mental activities, like deciding whether a gorilla has a nose or whether blenders are loud, engage the specific parts of the brain dedicated to different modes of perception and action. Simulation abounds" (47). Through such simulations, we can imagine the experience in much of its sensory richness.

Bergen describes how visualization improves the performance of athletes because "we humans, more like birds of prey and honey bees, prioritize our sense of sight" (49). Our many metaphors connecting sight and understanding indicate this, as in "You *see* what I mean? The argument was crystal *clear*."   This is because vision can play an important role for understanding. When we read or hear sentences about visual experiences, we "perform embodied simulations of the events they describe—using [our]

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brain's vision system" (51). The simplest actions, like hammering a nail into either the floor or the wall evokes visual imagery that corresponds to vertical or horizontal movement respectively (55-56). Such spatial simulations are often carried out in these narrative descriptions as the situation for Anne Eliot above. When she looks at her sister and her beloved, we simulate the direction of her gaze and immediately intuit the meaning of Elizabeth's cold snub. Embodied simulation is how we assimilate and make meaning of our experiences in the world by making connections and expanding previous understandings. As I previously discussed regarding the mirroring system, we automatically (that is, nonconsciously) simulate what we see (recall Iacoboni and Gallese's experiments from Chapter II). Due to our ability to see in our mind's eye through embodied simulation, we are able to experience the scenes of the story as if we are in them physically, according to Bergen. This perspective is called the "*immersed experiencer* view" (66). What this means is that when we are immersed in the narrative, we are actually experiencing what is happening in it.

Through embodied simulations, we are not only simulating what we see, activating motor areas of the brain as if we were acting ourselves, but in so doing, we are also creating an interpretive import for the actions. "It appears that language does manipulate what perspective you adopt when you mentally simulate objects. This implies more generally that people reading sentences project themselves into mentally simulated experiences of the described scenes" (69). Bergen claims that metaphors may augment embodied simulation by adding concrete images. Metaphors evoke simulations from bodily experience, like describing Anne's sister's bearing as "chilly," which combine images of mood and cold. Bergen refers to the works of George Lakoff and

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Mark Johnson as pioneering theories that show the importance of metaphor for cognition.[29] Bergen suggests that we consider the *metaphorical simulation* hypothesis as the work that is being done concretely beneath our embodied simulations, stating that "maybe simulation goes way deeper than we ever thought" (198). Metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, and the like, work in narratives to provoke the simulations that create the experiences of the characters. These simulations create experiences for us that then link up with other experiences and in this way, we make new meanings.

Gottschall (2012) claims that the mind itself is a storyteller because it is constantly interpreting events in the world, as well as our own behavior. He refers to the research of Michael Gazzaniga on split brains in which it was discovered that the left brain craves explanations even for inexplicable events and so confabulates interpretations (96)[30]. Gottschall uses a simile based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous detective, whom he claims is not so much of an astute observer as a brilliant confabulator. "We each have a little Sherlock Holmes in our brain. His job is to reason backwards from what we can observe in the present and show what orderly series of causes led to particular effects" (102). He claims that this hunger in humans for the reasons for things, or the meaning of things, has been useful for our survival and wellbeing. "The storytelling mind is a crucial evolutionary adaptation. It allows us to experience our lives as coherent, orderly, and meaningful" (102). This adaptation of our species is not without fault, however. Because our mind does not like uncertainty and ambiguity, we tend to invent clarity and meaning and impose that on reality (103). Nevertheless, the impulse to tell and engage stories seems to be prevail in the human psyche.

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[29] See *Metaphors We Live By,* University of Chicago Press: 1980.
[30] See Gazzaniga's book *The Ethical Brain,* Dana Press, NY: 2005.

Just as physical and imaginative play in childhood facilitates cognitive and physical development, so stories continue to facilitate creativity in thinking and problem solving throughout human life. This play is not always fun; in fact a story of too much ease will often bore readers. We are attracted to stories which take us on excursions into darkness and trouble. Psychologist Jerome Bruner (1991) describes this as a normative breach. We do not need stories about what is working or what is going well. As Tolstoy says in the opening line of Anna Karenina, "*Happy families are all alike*; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." We need stories about hitches, breaks, and holes in the road. Much like Martin Heidegger's (1927/2010) description of tool use, we do not take note of either the tool or our use of it until it stops working. The mostly unconscious process of tool use works because the tool is basically an extension of our body, "ready-to-hand," until it stops working (71-73). Then we have a problem and need to figure out what to do to fix it. So it is that we hardly notice how we are doing on a given day until something disrupts it, causing us problems, often troubling existential problems. And only then do we need imaginative solutions to work through these emerging difficulties.

Solutions to social problems are particularly tricky due to the complexity of human nature. Because stories take us into the inner world of others, our empathic perception is able to experiment with interpreting and anticipating others. With such hermeneutic practice, aided by the guidance of a good writer, we can learn how to fill out the contours of the meanings of what we see in the faces of the people in our living social milieu, what we hear in their words and tone, and feel in their bodily expressions. I refer to this as *narrative empathy* and will explain it more fully in a later section. As Marshal Gregory (2009) puts it, "From the time we are born, the narrative cradle of story rocks us

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to the collective heartbeat of our species, ushering us across the threshold of consciousness and into the domain of humanity" (1). Stories do this by exploring truths about the human condition. As we read and listen to stories, as we tell stories, we understand a bit better what it means to be human.

According to Bruner (1986), narrative is our primary way of organizing our knowledge about the social world. The other form of exploration and analysis is what he calls the *paradigmatic mode,* which is useful for abstracting data and symbolizing it for theoretical computations and analyses, such as we utilize for mathematics, the sciences, and logic. He focuses on the *narrative mode,*[31] however, as an essential guide for understanding intersubjective relations and engagement, which makes it a primary source for ethical knowledge. Further, Bruner (1991) claims that narrative is how we construct reality. Narrative gathers what we learn in life into a kind of a unity. This is necessary because, according to Bruner, knowledge does not accrue in a linear and cumulative fashion toward universality. We cannot achieve a Gestalt, or complete whole, for what we know because knowledge accrues in aggregates that are domain specific.

> The growth of knowledge of "reality" or of the mental powers that enable this growth to occur, the critics argue, is neither unilinear, strictly derivational in a logical sense, nor is it, as it were, 'across the board.' Mastery of one task does not assure mastery of other tasks that, in a formal sense, are governed by the same principles. Knowledge and skill, rather, are domain specific and, consequently, uneven in their accretion. Principles and procedures learned in one domain do not automatically transfer to other domains (2).

These aggregates of knowledge are also partial and particular even as such clusters may overlap. Knowledge clusters are built up by experience and education which clumps particular elements together relationally in groupings that are never exhaustive and are

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[31] In Ricoeur's Time & Narrative, he refers to the narrative mode utilizing the semiotic term "syntagmatic" (1984 31, 56).

culturally determined by the experiencer/thinker's social milieu. "[Such a cluster] is a little "reality" of its own that is constituted by the principles and procedures that we use within it," according to Brunner (2). This challenges notions of the universality or translatability of knowledge and of knowledge as point-of-view-less. In this way, knowledge is built up for "know-how." Perhaps this is how embodied simulation is involved in the accrual and use of bodies of knowledge.

These "cultural tool kits" are what we use to construct our understanding of the reality that surrounds us, according to Bruner. When we come to social knowledge, it is even more clear that our knowledge acquisition is not through being "little scientists" as children (4). The way in which we construct our understanding of social reality is through narrative. Narrative is thus not just the way we represent reality to ourselves; it is how we construct reality. "The central concern is …how [narrative] operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (5). According to Bruner (1991), we engage narrative early and often in the form of "stories, excuses, myths, reasons for doing and not doing, and so on" (4). And its measures of reliability, or verisimilitude, are "convention and 'narrative necessity' rather than empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false" (4).

He describes a number features of narrative among which are: *diachronicity*, which shows how we experience ourselves and others over time; particularity of individuals and their problems; hermeneutic (interpretive) composability; canonicity and breach. Throughout my discussion in this and the following chapters we will look at some of these elements of narrative in trying to understand the role of narrative in our

lives and for our ethos. Bruner (1991) draws on Paul Ricoeur's work in *Time and Narrative* to which I will now turn to develop this point about our narrativity, how it is at work when we engage stories, and what happens to us as a result. Ricoeur builds upon Aristotle's discussion of mimesis as art's imitation of life, developing a rich and comprehensive phenomenology of narrative engagement.

The Narrative Structure of Experience: Ricoeur's 3-fold Mimesis

A great deal of social experience and understanding is accumulated and disseminated in and through narrative. These narratives can be public and shared or the smaller, private narratives of family and interpersonal life. We begin to feed on stories as soon as our caregivers, parents and family members begin to tell them to us, and as the stories develop complexity, so does our ability to interpret our world. "The telling of a story and its comprehension *as* a story depend on the human capacity to process knowledge in this interpretive way," according to Bruner (1991, 9). This interpretive ability, like moral skillfulness as I have discussed earlier, is developed through experience and practice, which for many of us entails reading, being read to and being told stories from childhood on.

The structure of narrative mirrors that of life, as Aristotle points out, with a beginning, middle, and end (50b 26). This structure facilitates what Paul Ricoeur (1984) calls a *threefold Mimesis* of *prefiguring, configuring, and refiguring* (54). For Ricoeur, there is a cyclical nature to narrative insofar as it is both the background from which we act and the way in which we describe, explain, and defend our actions. Each act is then folded back into the fabric of one's individual and shared narratives, harmoniously or discordantly.

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Ricoeur highlights the phenomenal and temporal experience of narrative. He shows the way that narrative opens us to the other while the present also is being opened. The present moment is "exploded" into three "ekstases:" Mimesis[1], Mimesis[2], and Mimesis.[3] These perform this *prefiguring*, *configuring*, and *refiguring* function on readers and writers alike (61, 54). Narratives that we tell and read *configure* the actions into a cohesive whole bringing intelligibility to the events. But action is itself narratively *prefigured*. When we come to the text, we are *prefigured* by all the narratives that we bring to our perceptual and hermeneutic practices, including our personal dispositions, cultural mores, and moral commitments. As we experience the *configuring* process by engaging the narrative, we ourselves are also *re-configured* by virtue of the experience with the narrative.

Mimesis[1]

Mimesis is the Greek word for imitation, and art is understood in this way to be an imitation of life and action. Mimesis reveals the relationship between time and narrative, action, and normativity. Mimesis[1] is the narrative character of experience itself, prior to our encounter with fictional or historical narrative. Ricoeur claims that our ability to understand narratives is based on the way experience and action are already narratively prefigured. "...if it is true that plot is an imitation of action, some preliminary competence is required: the capacity for identifying action in general by means of its structural features" (54). What this means is that action, as an intelligible event, is construed through a narrative structure. The narrative features that Ricoeur identifies in action are: *action structure, symbolic import, and temporality.* They facilitate the intelligibility of action for us, even if we are not cognizant of them as such.

Narratives presuppose our competence in understanding such features of action structure as "agent, goal, means, circumstance, help, hostility, cooperation, conflict, success, failure, etc.," (55). Action structure is itself narrative. When we describe an event, we follow the narrative arc and utilize narrative's structural elements. "I was driving home from the grocery store when the truck in the left lane made a right turn into my car, and I hit the fire hydrant." The two agents are myself and the other driver, I am motivated to drive home and the other driver was motivated by the need to make a right turn, insufficiently ensuring that the lane was clear. We may not notice the narrative qualities of our thinking and explaining, but Ricoeur brings it to our attention. Actions are understandable as they are embedded in narratives. Understanding narrative,

> is to master the rules that govern its syntagmatic order. Consequently, narrative understanding is not limited to presupposing a familiarity with the conceptual network constitutive of the semantics of action. It further requires a familiarity with the rules of composition that govern the diachronic order of a story. Plot understood broadly…as the ordering of the events (and therefore as interconnecting the action sentences) into the total action constitutive of the narrative story, is the literary equivalent of the syntagmatic order that narratives introduce into the practical field (56).

The structure of action itself thus parallels plot structure. The narratives that we create intuitively grow out of the way we experience our lives as actions structured in a narrative arc.

The symbolic import of Mimesis[1] is concerned with the meaning of events. "If, in fact, human action can be narrated, it is because it is always already articulated by signs, rules, and norms," according to Ricoeur (57). The symbolic element provides mediation between action and knowledge, "symbolic forms are cultural processes that articulate experience" (57). He suggests that our abstract explicit signs and symbols (like written language) may be built upon deeper implicit symbols. It is in this symbolic element that

we get to the normative content of narrative insofar as the symbols mediate rules and prescriptions for action (58).

Signs are representations from a given culture, and culture is by definition normative. "The term 'symbol' further introduces the idea of a rule, not only in the sense we have just spoken of about rules for description and interpretation of individual actions, but in the sense of a norm" (58). Therefore, cultural narratives express this dual sense of norms as "What we (our group) do' and also 'what we ought to do." "As a function of the norms immanent in a culture, actions can be estimated or evaluated, that is, judged according to a scale of moral preferences" (58). Such evaluations are relative to the goals of a given culture and are thus deemed better or worse according to those goals. All actions are performed and assessed within such structures. "There is no action that does not give rise to approbation or reprobation, to however small a degree, as a function of a hierarchy of values for which goodness and wickedness are the poles" (59). Symbolic import then is inherently normative and readers of those signs know this, albeit often implicitly and nonconsciously.

Knowledge of symbolic import is presupposed by our competence in life itself. Once we have developmentally acquired the symbolic values of our culture, we intuitively know how to navigate them. This is what Aristotle means by *phronesis*, or practical understanding (61). The skillfulness of practical understanding increases with experience, and such experience depends on the final element of Mimesis[1], which is time. Narrative embeds human action in a temporal structure which synthesizes it into a unity. For Ricoeur, we humans experience time narratively; it is the process through which time becomes human because it is bound up with our life concerns (61-63). We care about the

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causal changes that bring about what we call day and night. Even the demarcation of the time duration of a "day" is rooted in our regard for the import of that passage of time. "…a day is not an abstract measure; it is a length that corresponds to our Care and the world in which it is 'time to' do something, where 'now' signifies 'now that...' It is the time of works and days" (63). Our care invests those changes with the meaning of time. When Paul McCartney laments the losses of *Yesterday*, we understand the pathos of a time that is past, full of fond feelings or regrets. It is because of our regard that yesterday matters in a different way than today. Time becomes human through narrative.

Ricoeur borrows from Heidegger's discussion of time in *Being and Time,* in which humans are defined not only by mortality, beings-towards-death, but also by their care. Our care is what makes time explicit for us. "Within-time-ness is defined by a basic characteristic of Care, our being thrown among things, which tends to make our description of temporality dependent on the description of the things about with we care" (62). Our attempts to speak of the present moment as "now" expresses our concern with action as it is occurring: "we say 'now' in our everyday acting and suffering" (63). The present moment, or now, felt as a unity, is, according to Ricoeur, comprised of three movements in time, namely past, present, and future.

In the act of mimesis, of the artful and creative imitation of life, in this case in narrative, the present moment is opened up into three "ekstases" as Ricoeur puts it. By this he means that the present is revealed in its threefold complexity as always being bound up with the past and the future (60). There is never a pure present as such. The present instead contains this threefold tension of what we might call a past-present, a present-present, and a future-present, which Ricoeur describes as memory, attention and

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expectation (21). I will explain this more in the next section as it pertains to all three mimeses at once.

Mimesis[2]

Mimesis[1] is then the narrative prefiguration of action, the way in which action is meaningful as an event. We experience and interpret action through the prefiguring narrative structures of cognition. As I said, the mimesis is threefold in that it *prefigures, configures, and refigures* (54). In mimesis[2], the *configuration* of action in the plot mediates the *prefigured* understanding that we bring to the narrative and the *refigured* understanding (mimesis[3]) with which we emerge from the story. Narratives open up our present reality, facilitating deeper intelligibility for us as subjects and for our relations with our worlds, as well as our responsivity to those relations (77). The *prefiguring* of mimesis[1] folds into the *configuration* of the plot by carrying forward our expectations based on who we have been up to the point of the configuration of the plot. "To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand what human acting is, in its semantics, its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed and, with it, textual and literary mimetics" (64). We readers and storytellers understand, mostly unconsciously, the import of human action as full of relational meaning as expressed in story form. Mimesis[2] is the movement from narratively prefigured action to the configuration of the plot, or *emplotment*. Ricoeur creates this neologism to characterize the action of ordering the events of a plot into a narrative, showing the dynamic quality of its creation.

Emplotment is the narrative process of configuring events into a unified whole with a beginning, middle and end. It is an abstraction, insofar as stories are taken out of

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the larger intersubjective web of experience and meaning, isolating a particular arc of events, and distilling those events into a cohesive plot. Emplotment is shaped by mimesis[1]. Because human time is narrative time determined by our care, we construct plots according to our care. Regarding the accident which I described above, we care about such events—bad things can happen in such events—so their components are charged with dramatic import. It is a mutually defining process as our care shapes the plot and the plot "transforms the events or incidents into a story…mediating between events and a narrated story" (65). Care motivates our action and our understanding of that action as narrative. In mimesis[2], we explore possibilities for our care.

Ricoeur calls mimesis[2] the kingdom of "*as if*" (64). This *as if* allows the storyteller and the reader to imagine. The structure through which such imaginings are possible is the plot. The plot according to Ricoeur mediates in three ways: between individual events and the story as a whole; by unifying disparate elements such as "agents, goals, means, interactions, circumstances, unexpected results;" and by synthesizing temporal characteristics (65-66). The plot transforms the series of events into a story, a unified whole comprised of events, agents, and periods of time. This need not mean that the time or events occur chronologically. Such events may appear to be completely unrelated save for the way the plot brings them together in relation to the protagonists or antagonists. There is a "grasping together" in the work of emplotment that synthesizes the various elements, and, in so doing, creates a wholeness replete with meaning.

> To follow a story is to move forward in the midst of contingencies and peripeteia under the guidance of an expectation that finds its fulfillment in the conclusion of the story. This conclusion is not logically implied by some previous premises. It gives the story an 'end point,' which, in turn, furnishes the point of view from

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which the story can be perceived as forming a whole. To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story (67).

The acceptable, congruent qualities of the ending are what give us a sense of a story's being satisfying, but this is not merely a subjective assessment. Plots have intentions in the form of a point or theme, and these themes are rooted in the temporal orientation of the story. The point of the story is reached in the end. Whether it is a tragedy or a comedy, its fulfillment completes the thematic meaning. And the sense of the passage of time in the narrative also repeats certain either thematic elements or refers to events previously in the story and in this way repeats and closes the cycle of the story (67-68).

Ricoeur shows how narrative is both normative and bound to its history. Human life is penetrated by narrative thought and, as such, narrative is accountable to human life. He draws an analogy between narrative and a tradition. "A tradition is constituted by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation" (68). So it is that narratives take up the history of stories, even as they problematize them or our relation to them. Narratives both articulate and structure human life. Our engagements with them assist our own efforts to *configure* meaning out of the events of our lives. Through our repeated engagements with narratives, our own pains can be transformed into sources of meaning and value that ease our suffering and connect us to our fellow humans. Such an effect can only be realized by our proper comportment toward the text, "This only takes on its full scope when the work deploys a world that the reader appropriates" (50). Thus it is that we transition to mimesis[3] and understand the accountability that we have toward the text.

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Mimesis3

In mimesis[3], narrative *refigures* the reader's life by entering the world of lived experience through the reader and her worldly engagements. Time is a key feature of this because narrative affords the opening of the present into the past-present, present-present, and future-present. The past-present is our memory, our history our very selves as intersubjective beings up to that point. The present-present is the opening up of attentiveness and receptivity to the narrative and its implications. The future-present is the anticipation, expectation, and yearning that reaches into the future, bringing the present forward into the next existential moment (63).

Mimesis[1] is the way in which the present reaches into the past through memory, history and the like, as well as how the past moves in the present. Mimesis[1] carries the *prefiguring* background of the cultural milieu forward into Mimesis[2] which is the *configuration* of action in the narrative. Mimesis[3] is the *refiguring* future-present mediated by the configuration of the narrative. The cycle of narrative engagement expresses the circle of mimesis. "Mimesis[3] marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader; the intersection, therefore, of the world configured by the poem and the world wherein real action occurs and unfolds its specific temporality" (71).

The refigured present is brought forward and into the existential world of lived experience altering one's perception and hermeneutics and thus one's moral activity in the world. It is a three way dialectic in the present moment. "In this dialectic, time is entirely desubstantialized. The words 'future,' 'past,' and 'present' disappear, and time itself figures as the exploded unity of the three temporal ekstases. This dialectic is the

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temporal constitution of Care" (61). Care is regard for the future which is implicated in the present, which grows out of the past of the present. The *now* is bound to its past-present and its future-present such that the now is pulled in three ways at once.

I want to show how this might work by looking at my own recent engagement with the novel, *A Tale for the Time Being* by Ruth Ozeki (2013). This book is particularly apt insofar as the author explores themes of just this sort regarding the narrative and normative interplay between reader and characters. The two main characters are women who have life experience in the U.S. and Canada and are Japanese. Ruth, a middle-aged Japanese-descended woman from New York, lives in Desolation Sound on the west coast of British Columbia, and Naoko (pronounced NOW-ko) a 15-year old Japanese girl lives in Tokyo. Nao (her nickname) grew up in the upper-middle class privilege of Sunnyvale CA, but has been forced to move back to Tokyo after the dot-com bubble burst in 2000. Nao's father loses his job and the family finances are drastically altered when they return to the extremely expensive city of Tokyo. They live in a trashy apartment with prostitutes and other impoverished families. Nao is in the difficult position of being bi-cultural in a society where such a quality is not at all esteemed. The dramatic change in her social status, in addition to Nao being fairly far behind her peers in Japanese education and culture, leaves her vulnerable to severe bullying, even torture, and psychological duress. Her parents with their private pains neglect Nao and she is forced to cope with her social troubles relying on her own limited skills.

We meet Nao through her diary which has washed up on the shore of Desolation Sound in BC soon after the 2011 Japanese Tsunami occurred. It is sealed in a plastic bag

and Hello Kitty lunchbox along with a WWII Japanese Air Soldier watch, some letters written in Japanese and some in French. The finder of these items is Ruth, a novelist who is currently lost in her memoir that will not progress. She becomes obsessed with Nao's story and the other artifacts in the collection.

Ruth loses the thread of her own time as it seems to become intertwined in Nao's narrative. Ozeki reveals the shiftiness of the present moment for reader and character alike, as I, like Ruth, become absorbed in Nao's drama, and fear for Nao's life; we *care* very much about her fate. Nao also wrestles with the present moment throughout the novel ("Nao" is a homophone with the English word "now") as she tries to navigate serious challenges in her young life, trying to grasp the fleeting present to slow it down and make it more manageable. She experiences this *now* as a slippery fish. "*NOW* felt like a big fish swallowing a little fish, and I wanted to catch it and make it stop. I was just a kid, and I thought if I could truly grasp the meaning of the big fish *NOW*, I would be able to save the little fish *Naoko*, but the word always slipped away from me" (98).

The fish also represents the anxiety that Nao feels in the pit of her stomach regarding the bullying, her suicidal father, and her despondent checked-out mother (180). Ruth, fearful that Nao may commit suicide, searches frantically on the Internet for a way to connect with Nao's family to warn them and help her. This story becomes entwined with Ruth's own story and her perception of time slips into confusion. "[W]hen Ruth was gripped by the compulsive mania and hyperfocus of an Internet search, the hours seemed to aggregate and swell like a wave, swallowing huge chunks of her day" (91). She finds a former friend of Haruki's (Harry), Nao's father, at Stanford University. She emails him her query for contact information and states that her search is urgent. Ruth's

husband, Oliver, on hearing about this later, is surprised at her sense of urgency. He points out that the Tsunami just happened (2011), and that Nao would have been writing back in 2000-2001, so the diary is around a decade old (312-13). Either Nao survived that difficult time and is now an adult, or she didn't.

In either case, there really is not a cause for urgency. Ruth is confounded, speechless. She had believed that Nao was in imminent danger. "It wasn't that she'd forgotten, exactly. The problem was more a kind of slippage. When she was writing a novel, living deep inside the fictional world, the days got jumbled together, and entire weeks or months or even years would yield to the ebb and flow of the dream…Fiction had its own time and logic. That was its power" (313-14). The reality of the diary's time, ten years prior to her time had slipped into the present for Ruth. Her sense of time was muddled by the sense of immediacy in reading Nao's diary.

What happens to Ruth in the novel often happens to us readers as we fall through the rabbit hole of a story. Like Ruth, I want to know if Nao comes out okay and rush through the pages seeking a resolution to her suffering. Readers feel an urgency which may provoke us to pause from our own times, to more quickly devour the time of the narrative. We are worried when the problems heighten, and relax when they are safe. When we meet Nao's old Jiko, her great-grandmother, a nun in the Pure Land Buddhist tradition, we feel relief because Jiko takes Nao to her temple where she is safe from the confusion of her world. Old Jiko teaches Nao Zazen (siting meditation) to help Nao cope with her challenges. Grandma Jiko teaches her the practices and theory of inner strength that helped Jiko to overcome her hatred against those responsible for the death of her son, Haruki, Nao's father's uncle. Jiko calls these practices Nao's "*supa-powa*" and the

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reader hopes and worries whether it will be enough to protect her (182-3). The story compels the reader forward as we begin to see some of the subtlest ways in which our intersubjective lives interface with one another across time and space, and even including quantum possibilities when Ruth seems to have an impact on future pages of Nao's diary.

Nao, as a vulnerable girl, unprotected in a hostile context, claims our concern, and commands our sympathy, much like Oliver Twist in Dickens' famous story. How can it be that we feel compelled to help someone across time and space and even fictional worlds. What draws us in? Because the setting of Ozeki's novel is placed in North America and in Japan, I have some cultural resonances on entering the text as well as some challenges. Resonances may ease us along path, while challenges can impede our imagination and our sympathies or they can spur us to imaginative creativity—perhaps growing our cognitive empathy. As the reader, I am prefigured as a west coast American who lived in San Francisco at the time of the dot.com crash, and in South Korea in the late 90s, so some of Nao's story resonates with me through my experiences, though only as a Westerner. Some of my Korean-Canadian friends shared with me that they were badly treated by the Koreans, while we European-descended North Americans were regarded and treated well, even if not as equals. Even apart from any of my prefigured access points into Nao's story, most readers will share Ruth's reactions of concern, anger, and fear for Nao's wellbeing as poverty, unemployment, social ostracization, and bullying are fairly universal woes.

Like Ruth, when I return to my world, I still think about and worry about Nao. My time and care become intertwined as her narrative enters my world. I am *refigured* through the *configuration* of her story. I can recall the feelings from my own life

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experience as a teenaged young woman and its difficulties. My few instances of bullying

were nothing to the severity of hers, but I note that like her, my bullying happened when I

was emotionally and socially vulnerable. Unlike her, I had other options for my

education. Nao's story has also *refigured* my perception and interpretation of the many

young people I see. I know that many young people like Nao do not have the protections

of adults to correct bullying and abuse, or to remove them from unsafe or unsavory

situations. When Nao becomes a Ronin[32], wandering lost like a "wave person," I think of

the many homeless youth, the desperate, and the so-called *travelers*, in my community

and wonder how they fare. Nao has impacted my sensitivity to their vulnerability.

Already responsive to Nao's situation, the reader may find that his sympathies reach out

to the many teens suffering so in his own city.

This is the way in which what Ricoeur describes as the exploded present opens up

in narrative experience. I remember my past as a teen and feel the similarities and

differences with Nao's life. I consider the needs of teens in the present, and of my own

boys who are not yet teens and the jeopardy that they may witness, if they are not subject

to it themselves. Nao's story opens my empathic perception to wider considerations that

both draw on and expand my experience.

Ozeki makes explicit the impact of engagement with text in her novel as she

provides Nao with a text for her to engage—the diary and letters of her great uncle, Jiko's

son, who is tortured and later dies as a Kamikaze pilot in WWII. Reading of her uncle

Haruki's torture and forced suicide flight, Nao learns to put her own suffering in

perspective (251-58). Nao processes this as Ruth and I have been processing her

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[32] Ronin is an old Japanese word for a master-less samurai. The term now means a youth who has failed her
entrance exams and isn't going to school (2013 41-42).

suffering. And now, I, too, am thinking with horror of the severity of Uncle Haruki's

torture. What I know of WWII, I know from American history books and media. My

21ˢᵗ century perspective on this historical event now contains the images of Haruki, and

his mother Jiko, who became a nun to mitigate her own hatred of the Japanese militants.

"When Jiko found that her only son was going to die as a suicide bomber, she wanted to

commit suicide, too, but she couldn't because her youngest daughter, Ema, was only

fifteen years old and still needed her.   So instead...Jiko decided to wait until Ema was a

little older…[Jiko] would shave her head and become a nun and devote the rest of her life

to teaching people how to live in peace, and that's pretty much exactly what she did"

(180). I feel the repercussions of that history vibrating through Nao, and her father who

was named for this uncle, and this quiet, ancient little nun Jiko, and wonder how it is for

contemporary Japanese here in the U.S. and in Japan. As Ben Bergen's (2012) account

of embodied simulation describes, images evoked by this story make my experience of

their suffering and their growth viscerally real for me. And thus written upon me, they

become part of my story.

As I mimetically engage Nao and Ruth's stories, I am not merely mimicking what

I read about, like lived experience, narrative mimesis evokes creative interpretation and

interaction with the experience. Ricoeur (1984) invokes the expression *mimesis praxeos*

to explain how the narrative refiguring through mimesis[3] affords opening for ethics. This

is why it is not mere copying of an inert object. Mimesis is a dynamic practice, begun in

the imagination, and completed in the life. "But the praxis [of mimesis] belongs at the

same time to the real domain, covered by ethics, and the imaginary one, covered by

poetics, suggests that mimesis functions not just as a break, but as a connection, one

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which establishes precisely the status of the metaphorical transposition of the practical

field by the muthos" (46). Mimesis thus connected narrative experience up with living

practices in the material world. Engaging Nao and Ruth's stories changes my view of my

own story, my view of history, of Americans and Japanese in WWII and in the present.

As their stories have infiltrated my imagination, so do their plights, actions and sufferings

infuse mine. My practical action in the world, my ethics will be moved by the events of

this story. In this overlapping experience of the narrative's imaginative reality and my

lived reality, there is a transferal of meaning that changes my normative orientation and

thus my world.

In this way, my *prefigured* experience that I had brought to my present lived

moment and my present engagement with Ozeki's narrative is *refigured* by the

configuration of her story.

> Mimesis$_2$ has an intermediary position because it has a mediating function. This
> mediating function derives from the dynamic character of the configuring
> operation that has led us to prefer the term emplotment to that of plot…the
> dynamism lies in the fact that a plot already exercises, within its own textual field,
> an integrating and, in that sense, a mediating function which allows it to bring
> about, beyond this field, a mediation of a larger amplitude between the
> preunderstanding and, if I may dare to put it this way, the postunderstanding of
> the order of action and its temporal features (65).

Ricoeur's point is that through our imaginative interactions with a given narrative, the

realities of the character's world, as they play out in the narrative's slice of time, are

exported back to our experience of our own world. It does this to us in part through the

existential aspects of the narrative. The existential realities of the narrative awaken the

reader to her own existential realities. Realities like depression, suicidal thoughts,

warfare, and our own powerlessness before government bodies. She may ask how she

would endure the tortures that either Nao or her uncle faced. What would she do? Such

questions call forth from us a reshaping of our thoughts, attitudes and feelings that we

have had heretofore[33]. As such we emerge from the narrative experience *refigured*. And

through Mimesis[3], our world is also refigured, both in our perception of it and action in it,

and in its subsequent responses to our refigured action. "It is only at the end of our

traversal of mimesis that [we see that]… narrative has its full meaning when it is restored

to the time of action and of suffering in mimesis$_3$" (70). The time of action and suffering

is our lived time. This insight has implications for how shared narratives may impact our

shared world.

Ozeki has altered my thoughts, my feelings and perceptions of historical events

and particularly of the way our lives are shaped by the experiences and pains of our

families. The pain readers feel on behalf of Nao, her uncle Haruki #1, and her father

Haruki #2 teaches us greater sensitivity and solicitude for the unknown sufferings of

others' inner worlds, particularly for those whose despair is leading to suicidal thoughts.

This is the working of the threefold mimesis. It is a creative imitation that Ricoeur

(1984) describes as a "dialectic of coming to be, having been, and making the present"

(61). My past engages Nao and Ruth's pasts and presents, as I come to understand the

anxieties and anticipations they feel, and my present and future engage theirs, as I yearn

toward their respective goods at the end of the novel.

Moreover, when Jiko, both of the Harukis, and even Nao herself rise up to noble

heights of morality and care for others, I feel the yearning to likewise rise and grow in my

sensitivity and solicitude for the wellbeing of others. This could not be so without the

prefiguring work of Mimesis[1]: "To imitate or represent action is first to preunderstand

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[33] See discussion of preconscious attitude shifts below Green & Carpenter and Sara Hodges also.

what human acting is, in its symbolic system, its temporality. Upon this

preunderstanding, common to both poets and their readers, emplotment is constructed

and with it, textual and literary mimetics…literature would be incomprehensible if it did

not give a configuration to what was already figure in human action" (64). The threefold

Mimesis uncovers the narrative structure of reality in action and time. However,

narrative also figures into our very identity.

Narrative Intelligibility and Identity

       While my own actions can be unclear to me at times, and the import of events

surrounding me can elude me, time in the world of the story can render back to me a

clarity that makes my own self and world understandable and even more livable.

Livability in this world for humans is bound up with the very strange phenomenon of

selfhood. We may unconsciously perform many of the tasks of our day, rarely thinking

about this sense of ourselves, this "feelingness of the experience of the connected me," as

Antonio Damasio (2010/2012) describes it (4). And yet, this me-ness is precisely what is

at stake in all those mundane activities. Me and mine motivate much that I do in this life,

to whatever degree of success or failure. I am the protagonist of my own story, but what

does that mean, and what does it do for me?

       Narrative aids our self-understanding by providing an intelligible framework for a

felt sense of *me-ness*, not only a point-of-view which is mine, but also the concomitant

feelings, impressions, and memories that comprise my autobiography. According to

Damasio (2010/2012), in his book, *Self Comes to Mind,* the sense of self emerges in

relation to its worldly interactions. He suggests that as events occur between the

protoself (the self that is not yet narratively defined) and the world, there is a gathering of

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images in a nonverbal narrative that evokes a scene in which our point-of-view is, for us, the primary player: "The self comes to mind in the form of images, relentlessly telling a story of such engagements" (216). Narrative, as the structure of experience, unifies our experience and synthesizes disparate events into a meaningful whole. It is therefore an essential feature of how we understand the world and how we make sense of our role within it.

Mark Johnson (1993) points out that narrative is critical for intelligibility (175). To the objection that narrative is not necessary for knowledge, Johnson responds that "Our allegedly 'synchronic' understanding is but a slice of a more fundamental diachronic development of experience" (176). Through narrative, we can understand the social world by situating our point-of-view, qua protagonist, within the unfolding drama which embodies other actors (agential and non-agential), some of whom are the protagonists in their own stories, and in whose dramas, we are actors. This understanding informs our moral responses. Johnson makes the strong claim that "human action is irreducibly narrative in character and that, consequently, moral theory must give a central role to the narrative structure of our experience and to the narrative form of our moral deliberations and explanations…stories are lived before they are told, because our very experience is narratively structured" (177). This calls for a radical reappraisal of the role of narrative as a source of knowledge and meaning. To adequately understand our possible roles in this world, we need narratives to provide us with possibilities.

Human self-understanding is rooted in a narrative structure and as such, forms our identity. We are the heroes, heroines, and villains of our own stories. Our stories are not consistent, however, and that can trouble our sense of identity as a unity. The idea that

our identity is rooted in a narrative, might suggest more consistency than there actually is. Instead, Ricoeur (1984) provides explanation and a productive tension for the diversity of the narrative self, calling it a *discordant concordance.* This *discordant concordance* gathers disparate elements and makes meaning of the whole despite what has been left out of a complete chronology (31). In a later work, *Oneself as Another*, Ricoeur (1992) describes this *discordant concordance* as a "synthesis of the heterogeneous" in the individual (141). The narrative self pursues a cohesive sense of self, which emplotment affords, but that does not mean that the self is always in harmony with itself. Rather, we are striving to find and achieve accord not simply with our selves as we are, and our histories as we have been, but also with our values, and the growth that we seek in becoming who we could be. It thus that, like the *three-fold mimesis*, the past, present, and future, are at work in the self of the present moment. We are made up of a history of which our present moment is the fruit; but we are also reaching toward the future and toward a self that we want to be.

This *discordant concordance* then brings disparate parts of ourselves, our histories, and our possibilities together in a narrative unity, but it does not resolve all the tensions that such disparity brings (42). The disjunctions of our experience and our activity in the world remain, but narrative composition brings together the heteronomous objects, like plot, characters, actions, histories, helpers, hinderers, locations into a whole. Time is part of this narrative composition as well, because narrative, by definition is diachronic. Ricoeur states, "I propose to define discordant concordance, characteristic of all narrative composition, by the notion of the synthesis of the heterogeneous. By this I

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am attempting to account for the diverse mediations performed by the plot: between the manifold of events and the temporal unity of the story recounted" (141).

According to Ricoeur, narrative identity not only gathers the discordant elements, but, also responds to a long-standing philosophical problem of identity over time. Ricoeur's *discordant concordance* addresses the diachronic identity through narrative identity, claiming that narrative expresses a dialectic between one's numerical and qualitative identity, and one's sense of oneself as a person over time (141). Ricoeur refers to the numerical/qualitative identity and the sense of personhood in Latin as *idem* and *ipseity* respectively (116). The former is one's sense of sameness as a person, which is often identified with the body, and the latter is one's selfhood or inner world. We sometimes abstract them from each other analytically, but the two are deeply intertwined. For example, if I am a soccer player, my sense of who I am inside is concerned with, and attached to, my skill and performance as a soccer player. If I am saddened by the death of my best friend, I may lose some of my skillfulness on the field. One might think of the *idem* and *ipseity* in terms of one's what-ness and one's who-ness respectively (116-118). Catriona Mackenzie (2008) provides a helpful elaboration and explanation of these terms:

> The characteristic *ipseity*, or mineness, of the first-person perspective is also central to Paul Ricoeur's…phenomenological analysis of selfhood in *Oneself as Another.* Ricoeur argues that personal identity should be understood as a dialectic between sameness (*idem* identity) and selfhood (*ipse* identity). Sameness refers to both numerical and qualitative identity; to those dimensions of our identity that can be described in third-personal terms, such as our biographical histories, traits of character and temperament, social roles, bodily attributes and so on. Selfhood (*ipseity*) refers to the first-personal phenomenological perspective of an embodied subject both at a time and extended over time; to the sense of "mineness" or "belonging" that characterizes one's own experiences, memories, body and characteristics" (10).

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Mackenzie claims that "narrative identity" assists developing theories about the self by elevating what Christine Korsgaard (1996a: 101) calls "practical identity," above a metaphysical one. The *discordant concordance* of narrative facilitates a functional unity where one may struggle to articulate one logically, according to Ricoeur (1992, 141ff). The elements of one's life as an intersubjective cluster of interrelations and interdependencies often have the character of disparateness and discordance; narrative facilitates a synthesized meaning. As Mark Johnson (1993) puts it, Ricoeur "argues that it is the temporal character of human experience that calls for narrative ordering…our actions are…intertwined into an experiential web that develops over time" (174). The narrative ordering makes a meaningful whole, while still preserving the tensions and conflicts in one's identity and experience.

The meaning of this unity can facilitate intelligibility for our lives. As the narrative of *self* moves forward along his plot, the elements of the plot come together in a synthesis of meaning that makes all the events seem almost necessary, according to Ricoeur (1992). "This necessity is a narrative necessity whose meaning effect comes from the configurating act as such; this narrative necessity transforms physical contingency, the other side of physical necessity, into narrative contingency, implied in narrative necessity" (142). Configuring the elements of our narrative, we may find that events or actions of our history, which at the time seemed disruptive and incongruous, seem in hindsight to have been necessary to what we have since become. In this way, the *discordant concordance* provides a way of synthesizing and assimilating the meaning of our lives.

Stories help us in this process as we see their characters wrestle with the events of their lives, and as the plots exhibit and enact the meaningful whole of the characters' *discordant concordances*. We may find the plethora of shifts, changes, and losses in our life experience as mystifying sometimes. Stories can help by making explicit, what for us, immersed in our own narrative lives, is implicit and inexplicable. We may then see the ways in which our own discordances have advanced our own plots. Sometimes, the insights are not so explicit. Nevertheless, leaving one's own life for a time, getting lost in someone else's story, can make returning to one's own life easier. Stories can provide insight and meaning by instructing us about the myriad ways of being human, inviting us into one another's worlds, binding us to one another, and giving us the pleasure of meaning. That is their seduction, or witchery as Gottschall describes it. They draw us, just like Alice was drawn, and like Alice, we fall.

Narrative Seduction: Empathically Entering the Worlds of Others

Narratives entice us into empathic responsivity with characters and their lives, sensitizing us to broader and deeper perceptions and judgments of others. Narratives have the power to expand our empathic regard to include more people and particularly, those from different groups than those we inhabit. Empathy is the cognitive process that facilitates both the emotional engagement with the story and the ability to feel with the experience of the living other. Recall that empathy is related to mimesis as we saw in Chapter II. Imitation itself engenders empathic feelings. Empathy seems to be an important part of what links both the practices of entering the story and of taking the point of view of the other in living ethical situations. Sometimes these practices bring us

the joy of shared pleasures, other times, they instigate meaningful connections with fellow sufferers. Stories and human interactions promise both joy and suffering.

Narrative seduction takes place in a variety of ways. The first line of seductive attack is often in the beginning of the book. For example, "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (51). This famous first line from Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* intrigues us by its ironic wit so that we cannot help but be drawn in to the next line. "However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighborhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters" (Ibid.). Austen entices us with a wry humor that laughs at such social expectations, even as it sets the stage for how such expectations might unfold.

Once inside the story, narrative is not only a powerful means of stimulating empathic responsivity, it also persuades readers perhaps more effectively than propositional rhetoric. As we saw earlier, regarding embodied simulation, imaginative experiences stimulate motor and sensory areas of the brain, thus evoking in us the sense of lived experience. Psychologists Melanie Green and Timothy Brock (2000) investigated the influence of narrative on beliefs and attitudes to show how persuasive they are, both in impacting beliefs and in attracting the reader to protagonists. The more imaginatively vivid, well-written, and engaging the narrative, the more persuasive it is and the more likable characters become (717-719). This is due in large part to the experience of transportation which readers have when immersed in reading.

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Transportation is "a convergent mental process, a focusing of attention, that may occur in response to either fiction or nonfiction. The components of transportation include emotional reactions, mental imagery, and a loss of access to real-world information" (703). The level of immersion is a key aspect of the transformative power of the text, since distractions weaken the grip of imagination. Some participants were deeply engrossed (highly transported) and others more weakly so (low transport). Their relative absorption pertained to their relative accordance with the story and its themes. Green and Brock refer to this reading style as immersion. "Immersion (involving imagery, emotionality, and attentional focus) [engrosses the reader] in another setting with temporary distancing from a reader's original situation," (718). The effects of transportation from immersed reading were that "highly transported participants reported beliefs more consistent with those implied in the story…[as well as] just-world beliefs that were more story-consistent than low-transported participants" (706). Green and Brock found that the quality of the writing and its status (literary canon or best-seller list) influenced the level of transport, indicating the social influence of our response to the stories we read.

Absorption in the narrative was also impacted by the frame of the task. Some readers were asked to perform critical tasks, like evaluate the difficulty of the words for a fourth-grade reader, while others in the "theater" group were asked to "become" the character. Findings indicated that the latter group experienced greater transport, but interestingly, the group analyzing for words sometimes forgot the task, getting immersed in the story instead (710). The seduction of the story may have been too compelling to stay outside as critic. Immersion in the story attracted readers' beliefs and attitudes

toward those of the story, like crime doesn't pay. Unfortunately, this is true regardless of the legitimacy of the source, and can result in ambivalent outcomes in that "narratives might be used to advantage by low-credible sources or by speakers who lack cogent arguments" (719). The key insight from their findings is that the greater the transport, the more the reader's beliefs leaned toward those of the story.

Transport seems to be the result of a highly resonant experience of mimesis between the reader, the text, and life. When we are transported, the story comes to life, vividly carrying us to its world with its people. According to Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley (2008), this is why narratives are so useful for social cognition. They claim that literature is a simulation of social life and as such is instructive in self and other understanding. "Narrative fiction models life, comments on life, and helps us to understand life in terms of how human interactions bear upon it" (173). Mar and Oatley, like Ben Bergen (2012), claim that the simulation is possible because cognition is embodied. They point out that the discovery of mirror neurons has facilitated greater understanding of how these simulations are occurring below the level of consciousness (179). They reference data that shows how hearing certain words evoke resonant emotional responses (180). "The simulation of social experience that literary narratives afford provides an opportunity for empathic growth" (181). *There appears to be a link between empathy in real life and empathy in stories.* We are, in fact, often developing neuronal circuitry that assists in empathy's growth when we read stories.

Given that we humans tend to understand ourselves as pleasure seekers, it makes sense that we pursue and enjoy narratives that give us pleasure, but why are we willing to read stories that cause us pain? How can we be seduced into undergoing discomfort,

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pain, or even suffering? Antonio Damasio (2010/2012) conducted studies to explore the different emotional responses of admiration and compassion in reading experiences. He found a number of very interesting results, but most importantly, he found that physical and mental experiences in the readings were experienced differently in the brain. It was not the sentiments of admiration and compassion that divided the brain responses, but whether the events were physical or mental. "The shared feature of one pair of conditions—skill and physical pain—was the involvement of the body in its external, action-oriented aspects. The shared feature of the other pair of conditions—the psychological pain of suffering and virtuous act—was a mental state" (137). He found that the older brain responses, those of the body, like physical pain, occurred faster than those of compassion for mental pain. The mental pain took longer to dissipate, however (138).

Maybe this explains why the pain of being immersed in a story with physical violence is intense initially, but what remains with the reader are the affective experiences of admiration and compassion. As an American white woman, engaging narratives which describe the suffering of non-whites at the hands of whites is painful. I am well cultivated in the historical realities of white enslavement and the oppression of African descended people, as well as the concomitant guilt for the privilege of my ancestry. And while I can extrapolate reasonably well from the accumulation of my understanding of suffering what it might have been like to be African American in the south in the 30s and 40s, reading *The Color Purple*, made it palpably real to me.

I was inside Celie, experiencing the world from the perspective of a young, small, vulnerable black girl with no protection. Her passionate love guards her sister from

similar suffering, and endeared me to Celie, making me want to protect her. There is no white perspective in the story; whites are either perpetrators of violence, or ignorantly complicit with it. The pain of shame as a white reader was endurable though, because Celie herself is such a compelling character. My humanity was attracted to hers, rooting for her overcoming her obstacles.

Empathy urges me to help, but how does one help a fictional character? By engaging such a narrative, might we be witness to the suffering? Following Celie as she grows and is loved by Shug, and watching Celie develop her voice, her autonomy, and ultimately herself as an artist and entrepreneur, I have the pleasure of sharing in her growth. The history of her wounds form the soil from which she grows into a heroine capable of humaneness beyond what most of us achieve. This calls forth my admiration. Her story satisfies what Ricoeur identifies as narrative fulfillment. Perhaps the satisfaction of accompanying Celie in her overcoming of oppressive circumstances is what makes it feel worthwhile as an emotional and imaginative engagement. Narrative seduction, in relation to narratives of suffering, is not a *schadenfreude,* or pleasure in another's pain, nor a maudlin wish to wallow in hard things. The attraction is that of life itself—the chance to experience, to learn to face challenges, and grow. Celie's world is a hard world, but it is a world so different from my own that I find I am partly drawn by that very difference. What keeps me engaged is not merely fascination, however, but care. I came to care for Celie, desiring her safety and self-fulfillment. By following Celie through the hardships of life's pains, I learn some of the texture and taste of that pain. Such experience is a little like the education of hard knocks.

Painful stories like *The Color Purple* deepen our understanding of and regard for the weals and woes of the human condition. And yet, while painful stories invade our private world and alter our feelings, they are still a kind of safe space for such an experience, according to Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley (2008). Because the experience, viscerally real as it is, is not physically dangerous, we can step back from it and consider it in a way that we cannot do in lived experience. "The structure and expectations of literature that encourages empathy in order for comprehension to occur also permits the reader to pull back cognitively and emotionally when desired and thus may be ideal for fostering understanding between different groups [of people]" (181-2). Reading stories affords us a distance that makes it easier to engage even the elements of suffering. Perhaps we are being stretched in this process of imaginative engagement in such a way as to enable ourselves to be willing to engage such suffering in our lived experience as a result. Perhaps I will be a little less naïve or insensitive with my black friends and neighbors as a result.

Additionally for the sake of expanding empathy, engaging narratives of groups different from oneself can facilitate the possibility of improving sympathy when one actually encounters members from those groups, according to Mar and Oatley (183). Greater exposure to literature might then improve one's empathic abilities and hone one's social inferencing skills. "By engaging in these emotional experiences, we may not only gain a greater understanding of emotions and of their breadth and quality, we may also pick up emotional cues implicitly communicated by the author" (187). These influences are, of course, not limited to the printed word insofar as "a good film or television show

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may demand as much complicated mental-inferencing processes as would a good novel" (186).

The format of the story will bear upon the engagement, so that too is important. One must know oneself, one's audience, class or group, as well. Stories provide us a private place to experience the inner life of the other, a particular point of view for a particular time in history or place in the world. Transported in time, place, and perspective, we can immerse ourselves in utterly new, strange, or even fearful experiences. Reading books allows us a critical distance on the experience that allows a measure of control over our environment and the pace of our immersion. We can pause, look up, ponder, or take a break. This allows us a freedom with the text that may not be as easy in audio-visual presentations of story. When I finished reading *The Color Purple* for the first time, I sobbed. I was alone at home when I closed the book. I felt the weight of history, a profound breach in the human family, and worry for how such a breach will ever be healed. I felt anguish for the people of Celie's story, for the women who had to struggle so hard just for a modicum of reasonable treatment. I marveled at Celie's ability to overcome these fearful and overwhelming obstacles, feeling exhilarated as she began to take her stand in the world. Her triumph in calling her husband Albert a small man made me exhale in relief.

One might also feel so moved by the film *The Color Purple*. Because I had seen the film prior to reading it, I saw Whoopie Goldberg and Oprah and Danny Glover as I was reading. And yet, my reading of this story was more poignant, more powerful, and more emotionally evocative than watching the film had been. In my case, this might have been partially due to *personal distress*. Recall that personal distress is generally

viewed as an impediment to empathy, in that it overwhelms the individual with uncomfortable feelings, potentially causing disengagement and avoidance rather than helping behavior. Reading a painful story, as opposed to watching it, allows the reader the ability to disengage without necessarily disrupting the mood. One can slow down the pace, allowing for a reflective tempering of emotional intensity. Oatley (2010) makes the point that we need intimacy, but also distance from characters and stories to fully receive the narrative.[34] Reading this story afforded me a kind of privacy that the film had not done. Books also have the advantage of giving us more inner monologue and reflection of the characters than films can. As such, books lend themselves to reflection, while films are rather like action in living experience in that it is less amenable to stopping and contemplating. Reading about the violence that she and her friends and family endured was offset by Celie's reflective inner world of writing and contemplations. Her meaningful inner world made the hard outer world easier to bear somehow. The accessibility of films, TV shows, etc., improves their reach, however, as reading takes more time and energy. Films also provide a vividness of sight and sound that for some consumers is a readier captivation, and necessary to facilitate consumers' engagement with the poignancy of the meaning.

Keith Oatley (2009) claims that reading stories is an essential part of educating emotional understanding and empathy. "In fiction, we can practice empathetic feeling by exploring our emotions in circumstances encountered by the characters, and thereby also understanding these characters" (211). This is true of narrative generally, including films. These imaginative engagements are experiences, and like the experience of our

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[34] Note that this article of 2010 bears the same title as Oatley's previous article from 1999, but has different content.

lived existence, they teach us about life, others, and ourselves. Ricoeur (1984) claims

that, "We tell stories because in the last analysis human lives need and merit being

narrated. This remark takes on its full force when we refer to the necessity to save the

history of the defeated and the lost. The whole history of suffering cries out for

vengeance and calls for narrative" (75). Such suffering, even in stories, makes a claim on

us.

Empathic Solicitude and the Claim of the Other

Care motivates us and informs our interpretations of the world and its events,

according to Ricoeur (1984, 1992). It also draws us out of ourselves, and through our

empathic perception and imaginative powers, into the world of the other, whether living

and close by, or inside the world of a story. Such stories, like the people who have

suffered their dramas, seem to make a claim on us. While we cannot physically help the

Nao's and Celie's of the stories, we can be witnesses to their unfolding. We can feel

their inner struggles. These stories need to be told and heard because they help articulate

the range of possible meanings in the human condition. Such insights can teach us much

about ourselves, about the histories that may precede our own and one another, helping us

to make meaning in our own lives and contribute to the meaning in others' lives.

The virtue of benevolence (*ren*) that the Confucians extol may be strengthened by

being immersed in such powerful stories because of the way they teach us a deeper

appreciation of what other people's lives look like, and help us consider how we would

feel in their shoes.   Such practices are actually sources of fulfillment, I argue, because

they facilitate both personal growth and meaningful ways of connecting with other

humans. This is precisely what Ricoeur (1992) claims the human project seeks when he

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says that selfhood depends on the other for fulfillment of the two-fold requirement of the good life: pursuit of excellence and friendship. The possibility of personal growth depends on meaningful relations with others, a dialogical rather than a monological one. He develops his theory of this dialogic relation in his discussion of solicitude.

The powerful sentiments that I experienced while reading *The Color Purple* were made possible by what Ricoeur references as "the beautiful name of *solicitude"* (180). Solicitude is our need of others for fulfillment in life. In agreement with Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (1.7.1098a), Ricoeur also emphasizes that the ethical aim or intention in life is the pursuit of excellence and of friendship (172). We are driven by dual purposes as humans, personally to seek to realize our potential, which engenders self-esteem, but from this striving, we discern that we cannot do this without meaningful and moral relations with others. Our ability for achievement in life is mediated by the "role of others between [our] capacities and [their] realization" (181). Comprehension of our need of others is solicitude, which is the key to motivating ethics and is thus vital to any moral cultivation project (182).

This need is felt both as a need for belonging with others and the need to be recognized as valuable by others. It is essential to self-realization, which means that it is not only up to us to succeed in our endeavors. Such striving is subject to the winds of fortune and the wills of others as well. Practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, according to Ricoeur, is directed at the optimal behavior and actions that will facilitate both self-realization and connection with others, as actors and responsive participants (172-178). As I discussed above, narrative identity of the self is a gathering of ourselves both as

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actors and *sufferers* in this life. Narrative elevates (by unifying) disparate actions into a somewhat unified character, a narrative of activity and endurance, or suffering.

> The idea of the narrative unity of a life therefore serves to assure us that the subject of ethics is none other than the one to whom the narrative assigns a narrative identity. Moreover, while the notion of life plan places an accent on the voluntary, even willful, side of what Sartre termed the existential project, the notion of narrative unity we find in all stories places its accent on the organization of intention, causes, and chance that we find in all stories. The person appears here from the outset as suffering as well as acting, subject to those whims of life which have prompted the fine Hellenist and philosopher Martha Nussbaum to speak of the "fragility of goodness," the fragility of the goodness of human action that is (178).

Narrative is our primary structure for understanding our experience, precisely because it creates such a unity of acting and suffering. As reciprocal beings, incapable of making sense of our lives without others, we reach out to narratives like we reach out to other people, to attempt to make our weals and woes intelligible. Understanding this reality facilitates the *mutuality* of our regard and actions. "Reciprocity is part of its most basic definition and so encompasses the question of the primacy of *philautia*" (183). Philautia is self-love in the Aristotelian sense of being one's own friend by pursuing excellence. Ricoeur makes the age-old question of the primacy of *self versus other* a moot question because neither can exist *as a self* without the other. Solicitude expresses itself as openness and receptivity to the other (180). It is not an addition to our self-cultivation projects, but a requirement for its fulfillment: "Just as solicitude is not an external addition to self-esteem, so the respect owed to persons does not constitute a heterogeneous moral principle in relation to the autonomy of the self but develops its implicit dialogic structure on the plane of obligation, of rules" (218). Because the drive to grow and increase in competence and skillfulness depends on meaningful relations

with others, selfhood manifests only in and through relation to the other. By virtue of our own solicitude, our need of others, we are solicited both by living and imagined others.

Empirical research on ultrasociality and empathy, as discussed in Chapters I through III, supports this view that we cannot thrive without one another. And since we are dependent upon one another even for our selfhood, we reach out to one another in solicitude. Empathy facilitates our perception of the meaning of other's cues and our insight into the proper response, thus fulfilling solicitude's need. This accounts for the pleasure that we have in connection with others. As I have shown, empathy helps us to intuit the nature of situations and the sentiments and moods of others and how to accommodate them given our own aptitudes and skill levels. This is true also of imaginative engagements like stories. As a form of imitation, we can both write and read imaginative creations and feel their liveliness in our own hearts and minds. Novels like Ozeki's and Walker's indicate the kinds of engagements possible, if we accept the invitation. Empathy facilitates both our immersion in and response to such stories. It is because we care that we are drawn into stories. Narrative woos empathy into relations with those whom we might never meet, but who depend on us and on whom we depend for intelligibility, for meaningful connection, and for the realization of improving our social and natural world through greater cooperation and collaboration.

By immersing ourselves in novels, we allow ourselves to be transformed. Ricoeur uses the term *refigured* for the final movement of the three-fold Mimesis. We have brought what we carry into the text which has seduced us into relinquishing our bags and losing ourselves, losing time, in the encounter with the story's world and its characters. Richard Kearney (2001) calls this transfiguration, insofar as we are found or made in the

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crossing over itself.[35] Through the very heart of our care (about our own projects and our relations with others), we are remade into a different form of our *self*. However we conceive of or characterize this movement of experience, we are forever marked.

It may be that we emerge from the narrative seduction a slightly (or perhaps dramatically) different self. Like those who eat the fruit in Hades, now we are owned by the story, by the lives who have touched us. Perhaps being owned in this way is how we become more humane. In the next chapter, I will deepen the point about our interdependence and vulnerability to one another and suggest how this study might have implications for our personal and collective moral cultivation projects.

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[35] In the fleeting moments of being between our own world and the storied world we are neither ourselves, nor an other, but somehow both, according to Kearney.

CHAPTER VI

NARRATIVE ENGAGEMENT AND MORAL GROWTH

Obtuseness and refusal of vision are our besetting vices. Responsible lucidity can be wrested from that darkness only by painful, vigilant effort, the intense scrutiny of particulars. Our highest and hardest task is to make ourselves people "on whom nothing is lost."
~ Martha Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge (Henry James) 148

Fan Chi asked about ren (humaneness). The Master said, "Cherish people."
When he asked about knowledge, the Master said, "Know people,"
and Fan Chi did not understand.
~Confucian Analects XII.22[36]

Narrative, we should see by now, is a powerful medium through which we create

meaning in our own lives, understand those lives within a larger web of narratives, and

come to understand the inner worlds of others. What narrative does for us ethically then

is to touch the chords of empathy to draw us into the story, into concern for the

characters. Narrative has the power to seduce us into caring, if we will be seduced.

When we emerge from the story, the alterations in our perceptions, interpretations and

feelings come into play with our world and alter the way we see it and interact with it.

This is the *refiguring* that is done to our *prefigured* selves by the *configuration* of the

narrative. Over time, this may mean changes in our understanding and shifts in our

character. A key concern in this chapter is how to assess whether the work being done by

the narratives we engage is promoting habits toward the growth of empathy or its

contraction.

I began my discussion in this work by looking at the need for a more empirically

grounded view of human nature that recognizes that others are essential to our ultrasocial

natures and that the emotions play a key role in moral cognition. I focused on empathy as

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[36] Translation: *http://www.indiana.edu/~p374/Analects_of_Confucius_%28Eno-2015%29.pdf*

being a vital cognitive process to understand and develop for improved social relations

and individual wellbeing. I have now brought narrative in as an essential part of any

cultivation project for the growth, refinement, and expansion of empathy. I refer to this

process as the cultivation of the empathic moral perception because moral perception is

engaged in interpretation and judgment. Like Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis*, or

practical judgment, the empathic moral perception has a lot of work to do in discerning

what is the right thing to do and how best to do it. So, the maturation of empathic moral

judgment is essential to moral growth. Moreover, this growth through moral cultivation

requires an empathic regard for others, as a basis for prosocial action. This, in turn,

requires a deeper appreciation of interdependence and the obligation that grows out of

that interdependence. That obligation may be understood as reciprocity.

It may be asked, however, why such an ethical project is necessary. For Ricouer

(1992), we need such means to fulfill our solicitude. Solicitude, as we saw in the

previous chapter, is rooted in a proper understanding of the individual's pursuit of the

good life. According to Ricoeur, the good life is only possible in interdependence with

others. Solicitude, or the recognition of one's need of the other, assists us in fully

developing reciprocity. Through the work of engaging narrative and cultivating empathy,

we can enrich our understanding of ourselves and others as subjects who deserve the

respect and care that reciprocity requires. Through engagement with narratives, empathy

can be developed to be more astute in its powers of observation, which I call *narrative*

empathy[37]. Empathic perception can then lead to a proper appreciation of our need of

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[37] Suzanne Keen defines narrative empathy as, "Narrative empathy is the sharing of feeling and
perspective-taking induced by reading, viewing, hearing, or imagining narratives of another's situation and
condition. Narrative empathy plays a role in the aesthetics of production when authors experience it (Taylor
et al. 2002–2003: 361, 376–77), in mental simulation during reading, in the aesthetics of reception when

others, or solicitude, in this case as our teachers. It can further assist us in envisioning

good and bad ways of living out our reciprocity.

Narrative Empathy: Ricoeur on Reciprocity

Paul Ricoeur's (1992) claim is that all action is narratively prefigured, and that

narrative is inherently moral, that is, morally laden. So it is that our social interactions

are always morally charged. We are always responsible to our normative expectations

which are expressed in our stories. Ricoeur explains this reciprocal relation that is at the

center of narrative's normativity. At the heart of our engagement with others and our

engagement with narratives is our deep need of others, or solicitude. In order to realize

our possibilities for growth and meaning as humans, we must realize and live out the

recognition that such realization is only possible in reciprocity with others.

Ricoeur explains this dependence in detail by laying out the nature of the

reciprocity of self and other. Reciprocity involves three aspects of the self-other relation:

1) reversibility, 2) nonsubstitutability, and 3) similitude (193). *Reversibility* means that

depending on who addresses whom, the "I" becomes "you" and the "you" becomes "I" as

in "I am talking to you" and "Well, *I* am not listening to *you*." *Nonsubstitutability* is the

value of each individual as that particular individual (217). My sons are not

interchangeable and losing either would not be compensated by the presence of the other

or some other child, because each one is absolutely unique and irreplaceable. *Similitude*

is the recognition that the other and I are of equal value and have equal claims to the

human goods of life. This equality is expressed in the Golden Rule by Hillel and Jesus.

"Do not do unto your neighbor what you would hate him to do to you," and "Do unto

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readers experience it, and in the narrative poetics of texts when formal strategies invite it"
(http://wikis.sub.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/index.php/Narrative_Empathy).

others as you would have them do unto you" (219).[38] *Similitude* recognizes two things,

first, that the other is of as much moral value as oneself, and second, that the other has

feelings, aptitudes and aspirations that have equal right to consideration as one's own. In

other words, it is the humble recognition that I have no more moral worth than another, as

well as the recognition that I have just as much as another. Both are true and facilitate

what Ricoeur calls my *self-esteem* and my *solicitude* for the other.

The pursuit of individual wellbeing depends profoundly on one's attentiveness to

moral reciprocity, according to Ricoeur. Solicitude awakens us to our need of and

dependence upon the other to thrive, but reciprocity recognizes the other as having as

much of a claim to justice as oneself. The obligatory quality of this reciprocity compels

the ethical agent in a broad and important way.   Ricoeur calls this the 'norm of

reciprocity' (219). Reciprocity helps us resolve the tension between our need for others

and Kant's 2nd formulation of the Categorical Imperative that requires us to treat other

people as ends in themselves, and therefore never to use them as mere means to our own

ends.

> Just as the appraisal of good will as unconditionally good seemed to us to assure
> the transition between the aim of the good life and its moral transposition in the
> principle of obligation, it is the *Golden Rule* that seems to us to constitute the
> appropriate transitional formula between solicitude and the second Kantian
> imperative. As was the case for the esteem in which we hold good will, the
> Golden Rule appears to be part of the endoxa acclaimed by Aristotle's ethics, one
> of those received notions that the philosopher does not have to invent, but to
> clarify and justify (219).

The norm of reciprocity has the more universal quality of a claim than the *endoxa*,

or commonly held beliefs or ideas of a particular culture. Unfortunately, while it may be

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[38] Confucius also has a negative formulation in Analect V.12, "What I do not wish others to do unto me, I
also wish not to do unto others" (2001).

the case that we are deeply dependent on one another, and that the norm of reciprocity is as universal as anything can be, cultural practices often do not reflect such realities. We in the West are mired in myths of rugged individualism that deny the norm of reciprocity. Thus, we may need to shape our projects of moral cultivation to be more accurate representations of our real need of one another. Accepting and taking up the responsibility of our interdependence ought then to infuse our moral cultivation projects, both public and private. What we need are habits of mind and practice that keep us mindful of our interdependence and the obligation of reciprocity. With practice, what Ricoeur identifies for flourishing, self-esteem through growth and solicitude in improved moral skillfulness, may be developed into a reliable ethos.

Habits are what strengthen the elephant that I spoke of in Chapter I (automatic cognitive-affective processes) in tending in a particular direction whether that is toward mere self-indulgence or fulfillment. As John Dewey (1922) famously said, "Character is the interpenetration of habits" (38). How we behave toward others, facilitating affiliation or disassociation, is the product of how we have conducted ourselves on a day to day basis. Such is our character: to be friendly, courteous, respectful, considerate and helpful, or less so. "Of course interpenetration is never total," according to Dewey. "It is most marked in what we call strong characters. Integration is an achievement rather than a datum. A weak, unstable, vacillating character is one in which different habits alternate with one another rather than embody one another" (38). A character that is consistent with itself will, in its variety of expressions, still reflect overarching values with reasonable harmony. One who esteems respect for others will not regularly be inconsiderate of her student's feelings or struggles. One who values simplicity will not

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habitually flash expensive accessories before his friends. And aspects of character which are outliers in our values will have to be redirected if we wish our character to be in harmony with itself.

The habits of awareness of what is due the other could be considered a matter of decency. The practice of treating others with a modicum of respect and courtesy facilitates an abiding awareness of our shared humanity and our equal claims for social goods. If our practice of cultivating such habits is regular and consistent, we can improve the likelihood of our behaving with the decency that we esteem. We can lose good habits, if we do not mind their keeping. And if we have bad ones, we can reflectively consider what changes to make and how to implement them. Interestingly, in support of the moral intuitionist perspective (versus the rationalist one) Dewey observes that thinking obtrudes in the active effort to alter a habit. If, for example, one wants to change from slouching one's shoulders to holding ourselves up straight, "We must stop even thinking of standing up straight. To think of it is fatal, for it commits us to the operation of an established habit of standing wrong…We must start to do *another thing* which on one side inhibits our falling into the customary bad position and on the other side is the beginning of a series of acts which may lead into correct posture" (35 emphasis mine). The best means of altering an undesirable habit is by "instituting another course of action" that takes one the direction one prefers (35). This is common advice for quitting smoking: avoid sitting in favorite spots, take a walk after dinner (to avoid the lighting up stimulus), begin a new hobby, etc. So, the rider (controlled consciousness) can project ways to create new habits and work to entice the elephant (automatic processes) into them.

Moral growth requires something of us in our unconscious attitudes and behaviors, however, which may pose an obstacle that merely altering our outward behaviors may not be sufficient to move. Again, narrative engagements with good stories may supply the remedy because as they carry us forward, transported with concern for the protagonist, they are wooing our moral attitudes. Habitually reading good books can slowly influence our moral attitudes in the direction we want to go. According to Dewey "…every experience both takes up something from those [experiences] which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (1938, 35). Engaging narratives provides just such opportunities for experience that can augment our lived experiences. Narratives offer experiences that can stretch us beyond what might be problematically complacent habits so as to consider points of view that trouble such complacency. Narrative engagement thus can be a means of identifying misguided attitudes or discordant habits, so that we can then reflectively identify the necessary correctives.

Experience is necessary for growth, but we can only have so many experiences in one life. Narratives provide us with particular and complex experiences almost as vivid and visceral as lived experience. We can never live as many experiences as we can read about, never live in as many places, in other time periods, or in another person's skin. In stories, this is just what happens. Stories thus open up possibilities to consider new ways of being in the world. As Dewey (1922) puts it, "Activity does not cease in order to give way to reflection; activity is turned from execution into intra-organic channels, resulting in dramatic rehearsal" (191). In these "dramatic rehearsals" we can refine our empathic perceptions and hone our responsive skills. Experience changes us, alters our

perceptions, judgments and feelings about ourselves, others and our world, and narrative

can help make sense of those shifts. Ricoeur (1984) claims that narrative makes explicit

what we implicitly and unconsciously experience every moment of every day. The

process of putting it together into a narrative form, or emplotment, is the process of

making experience intelligible to ourselves (54). Not only can narratives assist us in

making more sense of ourselves and our place in the world, but by taking us into the

world of the other, they can make the other's subjectivity more vivid to us.

Good narratives, therefore, provide powerful opportunities for growth. The

quality of the engagement, however, will determine its value and usefulness to such

practices, so moral judgment is required in consideration of what contributes to and what

detracts from developing insight into the demands of solicitude. In these sub-sections, I

will look at some suggested criteria for what makes good stories good. These criteria

show the responsibility of the relation of self and other again in the light of writer-reader,

reader-writer (or film-maker—viewer), highlighting the normativity of writing and

reading themselves.

Authentic Craftsmanship: Moral Fiction and Moral Readers

Walt Disney Studios has long been criticized for the ways in which stories like

Cinderella and Snow White have limited women's self-perception to being good, kind,

and helpless, in need of a man's protection. Disney Studios has sought to correct such

images with characters like the Scottish Princess, Merida, in *Brave* (2012), who refuses to

marry a prince and is instrumental in saving her mother. When a girl dresses up as

Merida or Elsa from *Frozen* (2013), her princess images include those of power and

strength, and love of family versus romance. Narratives can further entrench or

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problematize our current cultural mores, which is why marginalized groups protest when their ethnicities or religions are dramatized in too limited a scope or portrayed in offensive stereotypes.   Thus it is crucial that we attend to the shaping influences of our stories. Many readers and viewers are already intuitively aware of the power of narratives to influence our self-regard as well as our attitudes towards others. What is needed is practical reflection on which stories are strengthening our empathic moral perception, increasing our harmonious behaviors, and which are not. What are our stories, whether 30-second sitcom-like commercials, or three-hour movies on slavery, telling us, or should I say, *making* us?

To apply the adjective "moral" to fiction will give pause to many readers, who are opposed to censorship, but the same readers will likely require that a fiction have the ring of truth. According to John Gardner (1978) in his book *Moral Fiction,* the difference between moralistic fiction and moral fiction is how the author approaches the writing engagement. Moralistic fiction sets its agenda for the moral import of the story and then manipulates the words and events to suit that end, e.g., *Pilgrim's Progress*. Moral fiction, on the other hand, is an inquiry into a problem, usually related to some aspect of the human condition, and it is approached as an exploration. The author undergoes the work of composition discerning the authentic words, images, and paths for his characters. In this painstaking work, the artist's "imagination is working close to the conscious surface," according to Gardner (117). In this aesthetic inquiry, the author explores and discovers, allowing his imagination to guide the process. As Garner says, "A strong imagination makes characters do what they would do in real life" (118), rather than suiting the writer's agenda.

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Integrity, in the process of imaginative inquiry, insists on an honest drawing of the characters, events, and themes, which must speak to the realities and contingencies of the human condition, for "true art is moral" (105). He does think that writers should "hold up models of decent behavior" and that they should as Tolstoy said, "make people be good by choice" (106). More importantly, however, the authenticity of the writing is evinced in the writer's own engagement with the text in which "the writer discovers" such truths as she then "communicates to the reader" (107). He claims that this is done through what Aristotle has identified as mimesis: "a writer learns simply by imitation" (109). Avoiding the ease of stereotypes, "he understands by sympathetic imitation what each character has done throughout and why…" (109). The writer asks herself questions, probing the characters and listening to their habits thus far for answers. "To learn about reality by mimicking it, needless to say, the writer must never cheat" (110).

The writer of moral fiction is thus called upon to attend to the "right" words and movements of her imagination. She may not, no matter how cleverly she writes, make characters do unnatural things if she wants the work to be taken seriously. Even humor is serious. It is work to create a well-executed and right-fitting humorous moment or phrase. George Eliot and Charles Dickens, for example, often have humorous characters, either simple folk with superstitious ideas, or higher class folk with vanity or excessive decorum, but both authors allow many such characters to have complications that allow us to regard them compassionately, or to have genuine insights that the reader must acknowledge. And bad characters, foolish ones, vicious ones must not be disingenuously drawn either, to support either a moralistic end, or what is merely cruel and ugly for its own sake (126). Honesty in the writing requires honest renderings of character, then, but

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also attentiveness to the implications of the words themselves. The craft of good writing

requires attentiveness to every aspect of the work—the words, metaphors and ideas.

> Words conjure emotionally charged images in the reader's mind, and when the
> words are put together in the proper way, with proper rhythms—long and short
> sounds, smooth or ragged, tranquil or rambunctious—we have the queer
> experience of falling through the print on the page into something like a dream, an
> imaginary world so real and convincing that when we happen to be jerked out of
> it by a call from the kitchen or a knock at the door, we stare for an instant in
> befuddlement a the familiar room where we sat down, half an hour ago, with our
> book (113).

Gardner here opens a window into the phenomenon of transportation. This is

what it feels like to be transported, and what often happens to us as we read. He further

shows why it matters for moral life. Such transports allow reflection on lived experience:

"In fiction, we stand back, weigh things as we do not have time to do in life; and the

effect of great fiction is to temper real experience, modify prejudice, humanize" (114).

The structure of a fiction is often itself a means for such reflection and discovery. In his

view, the device of suspense is what aids the reader in achieving new insights by making

"the decision [of the character] philosophically significant" (115). In Jane Austen's

Persuasion, for example, Captain Wentworth delays renewing his solicitations of Anne

Eliot when they are again in company and he has made his fortune at sea (she had been

persuaded by her godmother Lady Russell to break off her engagement when she was 19

and he going to sea). She perceives his manner of reserve as the product of a cooling of

regard, but he later reveals that it was anger, resentment, and pride. He shares with her his

regret that he nearly undermined his own happiness by giving in to such dejection. This

realization is much more satisfying and insightful later in the novel because, by his delay,

we have been allowed to watch Anne's unfolding self-understanding. As she reflects on

her past action in breaking their engagement, she finds that she does not regret following

the advice of Lady Russell, even as she would not advise anyone else likewise. And Wentworth, we find, had to discover his own deep regard for her by almost missing his opportunity. We more fully apprehend all that might have been missed because we have followed their winding paths back to mutual regard and declarations. According to Gardner, the suspense written into the plot allows readers to participate in the discovery that the characters achieve (115).

For the writer and the reader then, we are learning and thinking in the imaginative process of engagement. "The writing of fiction is a mode of thought because by imitating we come to understand the thing we imitate. Fiction is thus convincing and honest but unverifiable science (in the old sense of knowledge): unverifiable because it depends on the reader's sensitivity and clear sense of how things are, a sense for which we have no tests" (116). This honesty should not be confused with what Gardner regards as an excessive and misleading emphasis on whatever is the "cruelest and ugliest [as] the truest," which seems to have gotten even more pronounced since Gardner's day (126). Honest imitation does not celebrate brutality.

His view of artistry accords with Martha Nussbaum's in claiming that "working at art is a moral act" (126). Nussbaum (1990) claims, "The author's conduct is like moral conduct at its best…the artist's task is a moral task" (163). The seriousness of the writer, which is not moralistic, demands of the reader a reciprocal engagement. In order to be capable of learning the insights that the writer has painstakingly undergone, the reader must also put himself at stake in the work. When he falls into it, he must give way and follow it out.

So, when we consider what kinds of stories to consume, we ought to consider questions of authenticity regarding the worlds in which we roam. We must learn to detect a false from a true artist. "A false artist is after power and the yawping flattery of his carnivore pack," while the "soul of art is celebration and discovery through imitation," according to Gardner (120). "Edifying" is a term that has been applied to certain good books and films, but this may easily be confused with what Gardner calls mere sermonizing, and while sermons may be good in their way, they are not generally a means of imaginative simulation, transport, and refiguration, unless perhaps they engage in good storytelling. Yet, if we reconsider what is edifying apart from sermonizing, certain qualities in the work will emerge, while others will leap out as the very opposite of edifying.

Marshall Gregory shares Gardner's concern for the moral import of fiction. Gregory's book *Shaped by Stories* (2009) describes the many ways in which fiction plays a shaping role, not just for individuals, but for culture, as well. "Dictators conquer, but stories infiltrate" (22). This happens bit by bit. Reader by reader, we are culturally influenced by the stories we share. Stories like *Pride and Prejudice* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* affect the way we think and judge according to a certain regard for gentility and decorum. Gregory claims that Elizabeth Bennet[39] and Atticus Finch[40] are two companions in his inner world, accompanying him and checking him when he is disinclined to be virtuous (82-83). Gregory identifies the moral quality of fiction with regard to the values of promoting or obstructing appropriate respect for and treatment of others.

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[39] The heroine from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

[40] The hero from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

The power of stories is as ambivalent as lived experience. They have a pernicious as well as a benevolent power. The goal of ascertaining the moral worth of a story is not to suggest that we ought not to read those with lesser or no value, but that we need to be mindful of the work they are doing, because they are shaping us whether we notice it or not. By paying attention, we can limit our indulgences just like we might limit our indulgences in potato chips or candy. Binging on the HBO series *Game of Thrones* over a weekend might be entertaining watching, but might not be conducive to one's consideration of coworkers Monday morning. Gregory analyzes the moral merit of James Thurber's *The Catbird Seat*, claiming that while it is wonderfully clever in its rhetoric and execution, it is ultimately morally bankrupted by its misogyny. Gregory states that his ethical evaluation seeks to look at the "vexed question of how to apply ethical criteria to aesthetic choices. I am particularly interested in how to assess formal brilliance in relation to ethical obtuseness" (138). In the story, the sympathetic character is Mr. Erwin Martin, the fastidious and unobtrusive head of the filing department of FandS, and who is planning the destruction of Mrs. Barrows. Mrs. Barrows is the newly appointed "special advisor to the president of the firm," who apparently views Mr. Martin's department as an unnecessary expense to the company (124).

Martin constructs an elaborate ruse to lure Barrows to his apartment where Martin behaves in wild contradiction to his well-known, staid, milk-drinking character. The reader believes he will kill her, but he actually wants to provoke her into exposing him at work where her credibility will be shattered because of the fastidiousness of his reputation: "Man is fallible, but Martin isn't" (123). Martin succeeds and Barrows is fired; the underdog wins, according to Thurber. Gregory reveals the blatant misogyny in

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Thurber's tale however, pointing out how it merely re-entrenches cultural anxieties about working women, and promulgates ugly stereotypes—exactly what Gardner identifies as inauthentic and immoral authorship. Thurber's characterization of an "uppity" woman boss whom he names Mrs. Barrows (barrow is the name for a castrated pig) has gotten her comeuppance for being too confident in a man's world. This assassination of her character reveals a hidden machismo that seeks to keep women demure and subordinate, according to Gregory. "[I]f Thurber makes me believe, or reinforces an uncritical prejudice I already hold, namely, that "unfeminine" women are contemptible both as women and as human beings, then he has foisted on me and reinforced for the rest of the world a belief that makes our world a worse place than it has to be, and that makes me a worse person than I should be" (139).

Gregory's point is not that fictional characters should all behave well, but that the author is responsible for his or her role in the ultimate message of the story. Thurber's 1942 story does not responsibly deal with the 1940s problem of women in positions of power or authentically engage the challenges and anxieties that that poses for men. Instead he appeals to our *schadenfreude* by characterizing Barrows with animalistic and moralistically charged words that provoke antipathy: braying, quacking, obscene. Such manipulations of our feelings are not supported by any actual errors in her character, only in her inadequacy to the male gaze of the 1940s. Growth is not what is sought for the reader of this story. Such manipulations violate the integrity of the art of writing and serve to pander to the lower appetites, affirming fear of change and antisocial attitudes and behaviors, whether racist, sexist, homophobic, or abuse of children.

Lack of moral integrity in narrative and narrative theory is a serious problem according to Martha Nussbaum (1990). She claims that we have vitiated the power of narrative by attempting to divorce the aesthetic from the moral. In her book, Love's Knowledge, she mentions New Criticism and Deconstruction as guilty of promoting and provoking thinkers and critics who have "continued to be largely hostile to the idea of bringing a broad range of human concerns into connection with literary analysis" (21). She grants that the moralisms of the past have constrained the authentic voices of authors and their characters, and that, as such, they needed correction (22). But, we have gone too far the other direction. We have, in effect, robbed stories of their life's blood. "For [such an attitude] appears to take no account of the urgency of our engagements with works of literature, the intimacy of the relationships we form, the way in which we do, like David Copperfield, read "as if for life," bringing to the text our hopes, fears, and confusions, and allowing the text to impart a certain structure to our hearts" (22). When we narrow the role of art to exclusively aesthetic discussion, in an attempt to elevate the aesthetic in its own right, we show our ignorance of the way humans actually read and what reading (and any serious art) does to us.

Aristotle, in his discussion of pursuit of the good life, characterizes such genuine pursuit as *spoudaios*. *Spoudaios* is translated as seriousness; it is something worth taking seriously (Joe Sachs Traslation, 2002, 210). It might also be translated as earnestness, honesty, resolve. It means that one takes oneself and one's character as desperately important to the quality of one's life. *What* we read matters and so does *how* we read. The theorists in this chapter are bringing to our attention the way in which reading,

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watching films, engaging narratives is a matter of great importance for the accumulation of whom we shall become, both as individuals and as a community.

It is that life's blood that provides the transformative power which Lynn Hunt (2007) claims facilitated a number of developments in human rights, particularly for women. The moral power of epistolary novels, like *Pamela* (1740), helped readers to appreciate the real plights that women (without social or political power) with no protectors could suffer.[41] In like spirit, Gregory argues that stories have helped influence social attitudes and behavior in political history by civilizing us. He refers to the 80s-90s sitcom *Roseanne* to illustrate. Dan says of the years of his marriage to Roseanne, "'You civilized me when I wasn't lookin,'"" which Gregory claims is just what happens to us readers incrementally over time (29). He claims that stories "swallow the world whole, and in fact the domain of stories may be *the only form of human learning other than religion* that makes the attempt to encompass the entirety of human life and experience" (31Italics mine). Because of this scope and range of thinking, writing, and performing, narrative offers us a rich opportunity for ethical education, "education that helps shape our ethos whether that shaping power leads the learner to behave 'properly' or not" (31-32). I would add to his description of shaping our ethos, also understood as character, that this education is shaping our empathic moral perception.

In so doing, we must ask *how* it is shaping us. Is the story itself leaning toward expansion or contraction of empathic understanding and regard?   When we enter a narrative, we ought to be transported to real human lives that can teach us about

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[41] See her book, *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, for her discussion of how the epistolary novel helped improve male understandings of women's situations. Novels like *Pamela,* depicting women's private struggles in the face of the restrictions placed on them by a society that demanded virtuous behavior, while denying women any political autonomy, were instrumental in changing public thinking.

important aspects of the human condition, such as our vulnerability, interdependence, and our respective ways of striving. Gregory's other moral injunction is thus that we ought to read broadly to expand our perspective. "In swallowing life whole, stories show us such features of existence as the operation of cause and effect, the surprises of coincidence, the motivations of passion and guilt and ambition and pride…the tranquility and turbulence of our inner emotional lives…" (33). The love of stories is as fruitful for the moral imagination as it is delicious.

Engaged Reading: The Process of Refiguring

The seriousness with which some narratives take the questions at issue for moral living invites readers to join the inquiry. This invitation is an offer of experience outside of our own sphere, but which can elucidate features of our own experience, and may suggest new ways of seeing that we had missed, mired in our own worlds. The moral value of narrative, according to Martha Nussbaum (1990), is to instruct us in the subtle art of moral perception and improvisation. Aristotle's idea of *phronesis*, generally translated as practical judgment, or practical wisdom/knowledge, is an aptitude for discerning the complexity of moral situations and improvising an apt response. *Phronesis* is, according to Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, the ability to realize moral excellence (arête/virtue) with insight and keenness, such that one may respond "at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right aim, and in the right way; [it] is what is appropriate and best, and this is the characteristic of excellence" (1106b. 21-23). Moral perception or empathic moral perception, as I refer to it, is the key to developing from empathy to reciprocity.

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Moral perception entails interpretation and judgment. It is very difficult sometimes to ascertain what is needed in a situation and how we respond to that need. Skill in this area is acquired by honing and refining improving one's ability to see, identifying and attending properly to salient features of the situation, and one's ability to judge aptly, having a proper sense of balance and wisdom. The saxophone player must know her piece well before she can improvise with her band. When we are well-practiced in a skill set, we are free then to improvise ways of performing that skill that are responsive both to the conventions that define it and to the dynamic shifting of the particular situation. If, for example, one is a proficient cook, when one prepares a dish— even if it is not a familiar recipe—one may have a sense of what one may substitute for particular ingredients and still retain the integrity of the dish. Skillfulness allows you room to play in, as it were, because you know how to preserve what is essential to the situation. Moral perception is the ability to read the recipe, as it were, and understand the implications of the various ingredients. As moral perception develops greater felicity, it can improvise without sacrificing the moral integrity of the situation. So it is that moral perception attends to the practices of moral action and the "recipes" one accumulates are knowledge, experience, insight, and wisdom.

Narrative provides the arena in which we may practice moral perception, learning to see as the narrators and characters see, attending to what they point out. By performing the dramatic rehearsal of the imagination, we develop and refine our perception. In the work of engaging the story, we follow its characters, mimicking their successes and failures, being attracted and repulsed in turn. In the end, we can see the result of the characters' efforts whether for their good or not, and we may acquire new

insights by our experiment. Whatever clumsiness we may have in the beginning of a moral practice will, through repetition, acquire finesse, which Nussbaum and John Dewey agree is an artistry. Dewey (1922) says, "The artist is a masterful technician. The technique or mechanism is fused with thought and feeling" (71). Such artistry is possible only as a result of intelligent habits (72). Good habits are undertaken in thoughtfulness for their ultimate outcomes and maintained with attentiveness and correction toward the relative fulfillment sought. There is a resonance amongst these thinkers—Nussbaum, Dewey and Aristotle—regarding the dynamic responsivity in moral perception. Imaginative moral practices, like engaging narratives, and engaging reflective discourse on those narratives are the means of crafting an astute moral perceptiveness.

There are those who are skeptical that narrative empathy will necessarily result in greater empathic regard for those whom we encounter in lived experience. Literary theorist Suzanne Keen (2007) is not convinced that readers will take up the responsibility of empathy, and she wonders whether reading should even be weighted with that task. In her book, *Empathy and the Novel,* Keen is suspicious of the idea that novels make us better people. "I…doubt that novels alone can cure what ails us: can novel reading really restore to vitality nearly extinguished civic virtues in a culture like my own, in which torture and routine violations of international law and human rights are carried out daily on our behalf?" (167). She questions whether we *grow* in empathic regard through reading, asserting rather that we likely had already achieved such development when we began reading a given novel, and worries that we overburden fiction with the work that ought to be going on in individual character work. "Readers, which is to say living people, bring empathy to the novel, and they alone have the capacity to convert their

emotional fusion with the denizens of make-believe worlds into actions on behalf of real others. That they rarely decide to do so should not be taken as a sign of fiction's failings" (168). Instead, she claims that fiction may have the role of mitigating our *lack* of concern. "More modest expressions of hope invest fiction with the power to reverse the course of apathy and indifference to others" (167).

Marshall Gregory's view is that this modest hope is not an insignificant beginning. He finds that while we may show disempathy or wrongly placed empathy in our early readings, perhaps based on the pathologies of our painful histories, reading also helps us to overcome these inclinations. "The value of…narrative experience for me, and presumably, for others, lies not in its cementing of petty emotions, but in its ethical invitation to deepen my understanding of both my past and my present, and thus to acquire a different ethos from the person I would have been as merely the victim of the past" (146). I am arguing that we *can* make incremental changes through successive engagements with narrative, a not unrealistic goal given my earlier discussions regarding our anthropology and our empathy. And further, an important way for such growth is through narrative engagement. Keen is correct in asserting that there are no guarantees that readers will grow empathically. However, this is in part because there are no guarantees in living moral situations that we will let our empathy be moved to action either. Further, Keen's skepticism may be based on too limited a sample. The incremental changes stimulated by reading and reflecting on good books (watching good films) will take years to accumulate into something like a fuller, more inclusive form of empathic regard. That is why I am claiming that the value of this research on empathy,

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narrative, and prosocial behavior is for a *program* of self-cultivation. Rome was not built in a day.

What Keen's concerns suggest to me is that responsible reading, like responsible living, is a demanding task. Frankly, we often fail to fulfill both. I do not think, however, that our failure to fulfill the task warrants a slackening of resolve. It is not necessarily fiction's failing that we do not grow in empathy, but it may be the failure of *some* fictions. And perhaps we readers/viewers are not earnest enough in our pursuit of narrative engagement or moral living to facilitate the growth of empathy.   It may also be that we are lacking in sufficient guidance. If it is true, as Nussbaum, Gardener, and Gregory point out, that the ethical dimension of fiction has not been taken seriously for some decades, then we may need more theorists like them to help us readers on our way. Ignorance is an impediment to empathic prosocial action, as Preston and Hoeflich point out. Ethics classes, texts, and reflections can aid us in considering ethical problems, but such reflections are often abstract and general. Rarely do they give us the information that we need for our performance in a particular situation. Stories do.

As we have discussed empathy in previous chapters, we have seen that when we empathize with living others in their respective dilemmas, our mirror neurons are firing as if we ourselves were in the dilemma. So it is when we empathize with characters in stories. Bergen, Damasio, Mar and Oatley, as I previously discussed, show the ways in which our neurophysiology is moved and shaped by imaginative engagements. The powerful activation induced by reading may actually be developing new neural pathways[42]. Antonio Damasio speaks of "embodied semantics" and Ben Bergen of

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[42] See "Making Connections" Berns et al. According to Gregory Berns, et al.(2013), in their research on short and long-term effects of novel reading, found alterations in neurology as a result of reading were

"embodied simulation," both of which affirm the possible neurophysiological underpinnings of such changes in feeling and character of the sort Gregory describes. It seems reasonable to think that our reading, an embodied simulation of another world from the perspective of another point of view, is writing new ideas, feelings, and possibilities into our psyche.

Keen is right to caution us that an untaught or insensitive empathy will not necessarily become more humane merely by reading some good books or watching some good films. As a responsive and dynamic aspect of moral cognition, empathic moral perception can only be as sharp and effective as it is trained to be. This training entails reading and reflection, which is why philosophy and moral theory, in particular, need to engage stories. Nussbaum offers an analysis that can aid us in envisioning the process of a trained moral perception and improvisation.

Sensitizing Empathic Moral Perception for Virtuosity

Moral perception, as I have said, is the interpretive skill and judgment which discerns what is morally necessary. Before going forward in discussing how we refine *phronesis* or practical wisdom/judgment, I want to explain it a bit further. In her book *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum (1990) elaborates on Aristotle's use of *phronesis* as the moral skill which *knows* how to act in accord with virtue in a given situation. She elucidates the nature of this responsive judgment by highlighting its attentiveness to particulars and subsequent apt responses. Work on one's moral character (i.e., the development of virtue) is necessary for *phronesis*, but the practice of *phronesis* will

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"detectable and significant". Further, these alterations endured through repeat testing, though their current work has not yet been over very long periods (598-599). As the title suggests, reading novels makes connections in cognition.

improve one's ability to perform one's role in the scene with acumen (149-150). If I

work on growing moral courage by learning how to withstand difficulties that used to

make me cower, I must also learn how to express that courage aptly. As I learn to stand

and face the other in admitting my error and accepting responsibility for my failure, I

must also learn the proper manner of such acceptance. A petulant tone will not do, but

neither will an excessive contrition that forces the other to console me, when I ought to

be consoling her for my error, assuring her that I will strive to do better. Moral

perception is the skill to discern such aptness in tone and measure.

Moral perception thus is actively assessing the meaning and morality of action

and deeming it this way or that. Beyond praise or blame for our expression of virtues or

values is the active response to be given: help, hindrance, or indifference.

"[D]iscernment of the correct choice [in a specific situation] rests with something that

[Aristotle] calls 'perception.' From the context it is evident that this is some sort of

complex responsiveness to the salient features of one's concrete situation," according to

Nussbaum (1990, 55). Full morality, according to Nussbaum, requires reliance both on

principles, informed by episteme, or knowledge about the world, and on *phronesis* which

enables proper discernment and facilitates our dynamic responsivity or moral

improvisational skills. Refinement of those skills benefits from the particularity of

narratives that paint the picture of moral life in all its rich complexity, to aid the

imagination in discerning the right action for particular situations (54-55).

Rules are not insignificant in this dynamic understanding of ethical action,

however. Moral perception is not in contrast to rules, according to Nussbaum. Rather,

moral perception is necessary to keep the rules from failing the particular complexity of a

given moral situation by blind obedience to general principles (157). Rules are needed, however, to guide and ground moral perception, even as they may be adapted according to perception (157). So much can go wrong in moral practice, no matter how thoughtfully designed our systems are. Narratives can help us to refine the implementations of our values by teaching us to see what is morally salient in the choreographed steps of sociality found in the story, elucidating what we often miss when we are immersed in living.

Nussbaum's discussion of narrative's influence on ethics shows that moral skill is achieved through perception, which is the "ethical ability…to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation" (37). The complexity of moral living requires a subtle skillfulness in noticing all the salient elements of a moral situation. "The Aristotelian conception argues that this ability is at the core of what practical wisdom is, and that it is not only a tool toward achieving the correct action or statement, but an ethically valuable activity in its own right"…facilitating our becoming what Henry James calls "'finely aware and richly responsible'" (37). Nussbaum's perspective agrees with Ricoeur's account of narrative and normativity. "Once again, this commitment seems to be built into the very form of the novel as genre" (37). And we as readers are refigured, returning to our particular lives carrying (or rather becoming) the refigurations which have occurred in us.

Nussbaum (1990) turns to Henry James' thought to further develop her analysis of moral perception because she views his work as relevant moral philosophy (148). She examines the moral artistry of his characters Maggie and Adam in the novel *The Golden Bowl*. Nussbaum's discussion helps to clarify how moral urges in the form of empathy

can find their way to reciprocity, toward genuine regard for the other. In order for our regard for the other to find moral expression, we must cultivate our moral sensibilities to a keen attentiveness to that which is of moral import, so that we are not guilty of being morally obtuse. "Obtuseness and refusal of vision are our besetting vices. Responsible lucidity can be wrested from that darkness only by painful, vigilant effort, the intense scrutiny of particulars. Our highest and hardest task is to be people 'on whom nothing is lost'"(148).

Rules and precepts will always be necessary in moral life, but the facility to relate them to particular moral situations requires a dynamically responsive judgment in interpreting events accurately and acting one's part aptly and justly. *Phronesis* enables us to ascertain the right thing to do, in the right time and in the right measure. It is comparable to discernment which is concerned with the particular application of a value. Aristotle says that what deserves praise and blame are not easy to determine, because "such things are in particulars, and the judgment is in the perceiving" (II.22-29, 1109b). Nussbaum claims that moral feeling and perception have degrees of acuity and refinement, the higher development of which can be used to more effectively and astutely respond to difficult moral situations and dilemmas. Empathic moral perception can be refined through practice. "Obtuseness is a moral failing; its opposite can be cultivated" (156).

Unlike ethical discourses, stories are constrained to deal with particular individuals in particular situations, and as such are more suited to imaginative moral experience. Yet, according to Nussbaum, the characters are not free to break the rules of their world without repercussions (155). The verisimilitude of the story depends on

characters behaving within the rules of the novel's world, according to John Gardner (1985, 111). In this way, the character's constraints mirror our constraints in our own lives, and as such, they provide an insightful theatre in which to observe their performance.

Moral perception is constrained by the mores which the situation demands. It is not free to roam wherever it will. Nussbaum utilizes Henry James' novel *The Golden Bowl* to show an example of exemplary moral improvisation. The 19th century heroine, Maggie, and her father, Adam, are in a dilemma, torn between love of each other and Maggie's need to assume her adult role as wife. Maggie has married Amerigo, who was previously in amorous relations with Charlotte.   Maggie (ignorant of the previous affair) has instigated Charlotte's marrying Adam to console him for his loss of Maggie. Maggie has just learned that her father's dignity is being compromised by illicit meetings between Amerigo and Charlotte.

Three things need to happen to rescue this situation from a family disaster, but they will not occur without pain. First, Maggie needs to separate Amerigo and Charlotte without her father knowing why; she decides that Adam and Charlotte must move to America, while she and Amerigo remain in England. Second, Adam needs to give up his fatherly claim on Maggie so as to be willing to move to the U.S.; she cannot fully enter her adult sexuality so long as she feels his need of her. Third, she must make Amerigo see that she knows of his previous and resumed affair without overtly confronting him, as well as signal to him her sexual readiness to enter her life more fully as his wife (they've been married, but she has continued to prioritize her father). All of this is achieved through Maggie and Adam's moral perceptiveness and responsivity to each other's

subjectivity and contingency. Adam gives up his claim on his daughter, painfully, but willingly, in acknowledgement of and respect for her emerging womanhood. Maggie relinquishes her hold on Adam, accepting that it is a kind of death for him, for both of them. A necessary death. The final act is achieved through Maggie dropping the crystal golden bowl which Charlotte had bought for Maggie as a wedding gift and which had had a crack in it. When she holds the bowl before him and drops it, and it shatters, Amerigo understands symbolically the wrong he has committed (it is subtle, but he gets it), and which she naively facilitated. He respects her method of subtly but surely standing before him with the truth. It may be that he sees her for the first time. He is drawn to her invitation for a real marriage and together they facilitate the move of Adam and Charlotte.

Maggie instigates it all, but she elicits the cooperation of the other players by her subtle sensitivity to the feelings of everyone concerned. She acts not out of jealousy for her own wounded fidelity, but out of a desire to preserve her father's dignity and her own marriage. She saves face for the other actors in the drama so that her father never learns of his betrayal. Nussbaum is interested in the aesthetic and moral beauty of this moral improvisation as exemplified by Maggie. As a moral actor, responsiveness to the role, to the drama, to the other actors, is essential to the skillfulness of the execution. Nussbaum notes that such sensitivity to all of the nuances and implications of a moral situation requires a finely tuned perception, one that is capable of overcoming self-concern to attend fully to what needs to be done.

> If we think of [moral] perception as a created work of art, we must at the same time remember that artists, as James sees it, are not free simply to create anything they like. Their obligation is to render reality precisely and faithfully; in this task they are very much assisted by general principles and by the habits and

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attachments that are their internalization. …If their sense of the occasion is, as often is in James, one of improvisation, if Maggie sees herself as an actress improvising her role, we must remember, too, that the actress who improvises well is *not* free to do anything at all. She must at every moment—far more than one who goes by an external script—be responsively alive and committed to the other actors, to the evolving narrative, to the laws and constraints of the genre and its history (1990, 155).

Moral improvisation is thus not less rigorous, but even more rigorous than following the rules of an ethical system. Nussbaum (1990) uses the jazz musician as an analogy for moral improvisation, but claims that *moral* improvisation is more demanding because one cannot creatively abandon the rules like a musical artist might in evolving a new art form all together (156). This is because, the

> perceiver who improvises is doubly responsible: responsible to the history of commitment and to the ongoing structures that go to constitute her context [i.e., the moral culture of one's time]; and especially responsible to these in that her commitments are internalized, assimilated, perceived, rather than read off from an external script or score…Moral improvisation shows an even deeper role for obligation and rule than do these artistic cases" because those to whom the actor is obligated demand a moral accounting (155-156).

Phronesis is internalized obligation; it is a part of us, rather than exterior, like a script. This explains why *phronesis* is a skill constantly being developed. If our empathic moral perception must adapt agilely to all the nuances of social complexity, then we must exercise it well and often.

Moral improvisation depends on the sort of artistry that Nussbaum thinks practical wisdom entails. Utilizing our empathic moral perception to read a scene, intuit our possible roles, and dramatically rehearse their possible outcomes facilitates the possibility of the harmonization of our performance with the other actors. This is the wu-wei of moral skillfulness that I discussed earlier. Wu-wei, the Chinese virtue of effortless action, is the result of hundreds or thousands of hours of practice in one's action. By

repeatedly entering the world of the other, learning to see as they see, feel how they feel, trying to help in this way and that with varying degrees of success, reflecting on those ways and adapting over and over, sometimes we will get it right[43]. Perceiving the right action, in the right time and in the right measure, we can act skillfully. Empathy and sympathy are clearly at work in moral skillfulness. This is why it seems right to me to call it empathic moral perception. Maggie's love for her father and her compassion for his self-regard activate and inspire her skill with an intense energy to create a solution. I will explore this moral sentiment more in the last chapter as it embodies the nature of Ricoeur's *solicitude*, driving our personal and moral engagement with the world. It is a matter of self-respect that we consider our growth and consider the ways of ensuring growth. Further, we have a responsibility to consider the future and how best to pass this practice on to the generations that follow us.

Passing on the Practice of Narrative Empathy

As we saw earlier, Suzanne Keen (2007) has raised serious concerns questioning the power of stories to influence the direction and activation of empathy for prosocial action. Her sampling of the lack of empathic outcomes is too limited, however, in my view. And as I, in accord with Marshall Gregory and others, seek to inspire *incremental* changes in character through a practice of reading and reflecting, it will likely be many years before real changes in character are noteworthy. Given the neuroscience that shows neurophysiological responses to immersed reading that mirror that of lived experience, it seems reasonable to suggest that such reading is doing real work on our characters. Still, I think that Keen's doubt is important to this project because it highlights the

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[43] I suspect that this matter of "getting it right" is also a matter of perception as it is difficult to say when one really has done so.

responsibility of the reader/watcher to be responsive—to take up the task of reading with the same seriousness that one takes up her moral cultivation. Keen's doubt also stimulates me to think about *how* we pass on the skills of reading and reflection for narrative empathy, and the refinement of empathic moral perception. Young and inexperienced readers need guidance in achieving meaningful engagements with stories. In childhood and youth, parents and teachers guide us.   As we come into our own as adults, we have a moral responsibility to the next generation to share the insights of our experience, and the wisdom that we have distilled from that experience. We can guide them in what we have learned about living well, and in harmony with others, and to help us in that endeavor, we must facilitate their relationship with narratives.

In Chapter IV, I discussed Martin Hoffman's description of the way in which induction by parents is done to develop children's empathy in social situations. Analogously we teach our children and students to take reading stories seriously by discussing the stories with them. And because the moral potential of a story hinges on the moral receptivity of the reader, it helps to teach them openness and courage when the story is hard or painful. We must also be good listeners, however. Nussbaum (1990) claims that the legitimacy of moral insights depends on being subjected to the judgment of relevant others (270-274).   Children often see what is salient in moral life that we adults have become inured to. Their fresh eyes may shed a different light on our empathic road.

Stories promise much pleasure for children, which we mentors can enhance by our own emotionally engaged story-telling style, reading style, and practice. The power of story begins with us, the first readers that young minds hear. If we help the stories to

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achieve their affective power, we will find ample opportunity for what we call "teachable moments" to help bind empathic feelings and moral values. Stories can help facilitate "hot" cognitions, a felt emotional urgency and motivation for moral action. Martin Hoffman (2000) claims that moral cognition is hot when the invocation of the moral principle activates empathic affect (14-15). Such a "hot" moral principle might be that it's unfair to mistreat another out of mere prejudice. Cooler cognitions like "all people deserve fair treatment regardless of gender, skin color, religious affiliation, sexual preferences, or mental or physical disability" might then follow. When we mentors read about violation against such a value, we can draw attention to it. Such lessons need not be obtrusive and often arise organically in morally charged moments in the text. Parents who read to their children often already address the values of the books while reading. Children spontaneously reflect on the situations and parents only need to pick up on those reflections and join them to deepen the child's understanding.

My oldest son and I read a book called *Out of My Mind* by Sharon Draper, in which the protagonist, Melody, is an 11-year-old girl with severe Cerebral Palsy. She is an extremely bright girl as the reader knows because we are inside her thoughts. However, Melody cannot speak or use her fingers well, so to the rest of the world, apart from her parents and an insightful caregiver, she is a mute, but noisy, disruptive, and severely physically disabled girl. She is ravenous for learning and has an adolescent's desires for acceptance and friends. As we read about her frustrations at being in a kindergarten-style special education class, enraged by the incessant playing of an ABC album when she is capable of reading beyond her own level, we sympathized with her angry flailing and screaming. My son and I talked about how hard it would be to have no

one be able to hear your inner thoughts, not know your mind, who you were or what you cared about. When she receives a Medi-talker, a computerized voice with a keyboard, she can finger peck her words and is able to "speak" for the first time. Those around her quickly learn how knowledgeable, bright, and funny she is. She is integrated into a 5th grade classroom. This does not, however, help her make real friends because those without disabilities respond to her with anxiety and prejudice. Her real life challenges of complete dependence on others, and the prejudices of her classmates in the 5th grade and even the teacher, gave both my son and me some ideas to chew on. Months later, when my then 10-year-old son and I saw someone in a wheelchair with what looked like the disability of Cerebral Palsy, my son reflected, "I wonder if he's frustrated." While I do not think that either my son or I have acquired a deep understanding or sufficient respect for the challenges of such disabilities from such limited experience, we both gained an insight into one corner of the human condition that we had not had before.

Childish empathic inclinations depend on the help of adults to develop. Without such guidance and inductions as Hoffman describes, young people can develop anti-social attitudes and behaviors. Educational interventions can help these children to strengthen their empathic understanding, however. Through interventions that include narratives and empathic reflections, educators aid socially disadvantaged children in taking another's point of view, and developing the ability to feel from that position. Researchers are seeing the value of these interventions on at-risk youth in cultivating empathy, hoping to mitigate the neglect or abuse that may have put them at risk for

antisocial behavior.[44]   Narrative empathy develops according to the stimulation that is provided and the guidance that highlights salient moral points.

Suzanne Keen's concerns about the power of narrative to shape empathy raise a further question regarding guidance in adult reading. Martha Nussbaum (1990) has a point that I think responds to this, giving us insight into possibilities for adult reading practices. Nussbaum claims that the merits of our moral insights must be tested against the views of other relevant moral thinkers (270). Moral validity cannot be achieved in a vacuum. When we read books and reflect on them in the privacy of our living rooms, bedrooms, and parks, we need to remember that we have only done part of the work of cultivation. In the community of other readers and moral practitioners, to whom we subject our moral insights, we can further hone and refine them. With the perspectives of other readers, we may learn how durable these insights are. The recent history of book groups might be such a forum for sharing the moral wisdom that fictions purvey.

In this way, the community becomes co-judge of my relative success or failure in moral cultivation. This may be unnerving to those of us reared in a rigorously individualistic culture, but I believe it is a necessary consideration for the growth of empathy and the flourishing of subjects and their communities. Subjection of the self to the other and its concomitant risks continue to be at the back of my project. Empathy is a risking of self on behalf of the other; writing is a risk in anticipation of the responses of the reader; reading is a risk at the hands of the writer. Such risks suggest the need for courage to continue reading, to continue the journey that puts my convenient thinking in jeopardy. In the final chapter, I want to look at what facilitates our courage to be

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[44] See PATHs curriculum and study:
http://ajp.psychiatryonline.org/doi/abs/10.1176/appi.ajp.2014.13060786?url_ver=Z39.88-2003&rfr_id=ori%3Arid%3Acrossref.org&rfr_dat=cr_pub%3Dpubmed.

empathic in the face of suffering. If we fear pain, we may avoid empathic encounters.

How might our solicitude help our courage?

CHAPTER VII

LOVE AND LETTING GO:

A MOVEMENT OF FAITH

When I suffer for the vulnerable, is it not for my own vulnerability that I really suffer?
~Etty Hillesum 230

Not inexperienced in suffering, I learn how to bring aid to the wretched.
~Dido, The Aeneid

From Empathy to Compassion in Narrative Engagement

Whether *solicitude,* as the recognition of our deep dependence on one another,

can be realized in prosocial action or not depends on a number contingencies, one of

which is overcoming preoccupation with self-concern. The self's relation to the other has

paradoxical qualities in its inclination for self-ascendency and its inability to realize self

without the other. Ricoeur has explained how even our realization of ourselves as selves

depends on others. Selfhood requires others with whom one can find belonging,

meaning, and recognition of my value as a relationship partner, as a professional, as a

member of the community. So we are vulnerable to the community to enable our

becoming, even as we have urges to ignore others in favor of self.

Add to this that wisdom dictates that we comprehend and appreciate the reality

that other people are selves also with equal claims to self-realization and belonging. The

other's need for belonging may depend on me and I may be bound to respond for my own

integrity. Paul Ricoeur (1992) states, "Self-constancy is for each person that manner of

conducting himself or herself so that others can count on that person. Because someone

is counting on me, I am accountable for my actions before another" (165). Narrative

identity is based on a dialogical relation between self and other in which alternations

occur in which the other becomes the self for whom I become the other. My identity cannot be monological, because the self relies on the other for selfhood, which is why human life is shot through with response-ability.

Our awareness of our vulnerability and our awareness of the similarity of our respective claims describes, are two very different realizations. And while they are related, our recognition of the latter may be a long time coming. The recognition that your projects, aims, and longings have as much right to be considered as mine do seems most often to be the understanding of a more mature development. Recognition of how we are similar can support the growth of benevolence, a matured, general regard for human wellbeing.

Childhood lessons like the inductions described by Hoffman can begin the work of such a recognition and instigate such feelings. Such early moral practices of social engagement are what develop into our childish, youthful, and adult empathic responses to one another. This development must be nourished by care, not the sentiments of regard only, but care as manifested in active help and support. It is the love of the parents which drives such cultivation; as Aristotle (2002) has noted, parental care for one's moral growth is necessary for adult moral aptitude. "Hence it is necessary to be brought up in some way straight from childhood, as Plato says, so as to take delight and feel pain in those things in which one ought for this is the right education" (II.11-14, 1104b). Moral luck in parental presence, maturity, love and a modicum of resources is a major contingency in the development of empathy and the recognition of solicitude. If we have had the good fortune to have been cared for and nurtured enough to have a reasonably developed empathy and a fair regard for the rights of others, how do we then get

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ourselves to continue to grow that understanding and develop its skill. What is the insight, the impetus that gets us there? Nussbaum's description of the moral emotions of love and pity can help us to discern some part of the catalyst in what she describes as *love's knowledge*.

Love is a difficult word to utilize philosophically because of its many meanings and extensive historical and cultural baggage. Nevertheless, the many forms of love can shed light on particular expressions of empathy helping us to uncover what motivates it to overcome excessive self-regard. Max Scheler (1913/2008) characterizes the movement of love using the Greek term, *Eros*. This should not be understood in our contemporary understanding as erotic love, but in the Platonic sense of the ecstatic movement out of the self toward the other (83). This movement reaches out toward what it values, "The movement of love is always and everywhere towards the creation of values" (113).

Aristotle shares Scheler's deep regard for such relations, in the form of friendship, as essential to continued growth, claiming that parents and children have friendship, that the good life needs friends, that cities are held together by friendship, and that we praise those who are the "friends of humanity." Friendship is an essential good and yet it is much more. "And friendship is not only necessary but also beautiful, for we praise those who love their friends, and an abundance of friends seems to be one of the beautiful things. Moreover people believe that it is the same people who are good men and friends" (VIII,1155a). The pleasure and joy in good friendship may explain how it is that we find it worthwhile to release self-concern in valuing the other.

In love we reach beyond mere self-concern both in our regard, our esteem, and our active care. Love values the other so much as to be drawn away from the self toward

the other. Scheler (1913/2008) refers to this as a "spontaneous benevolence" toward others because of our shared humanity (98). As empathy matures in the growth of love for others, self-concern is not as difficult to displace for other-concern. "It is precisely in the act of fellow-feeling that self-love, self-centered choice, solipsism and egoism are first wholly overcome" (98). So, loving relationships are an important experience for the development and growth of empathy. What prompts us to act in spite of risks, though? Love is risky not just for lovers, but for parents, for friends, for anyone who stands to lose a beloved one. Children can die and leave parents with wounds that never heal. Friends can change or abandon us. Loving makes us vulnerable. Navigating the fear of that vulnerability is an important part of the maturation of the empathic moral perception and the motivation to act for the other.

Returning to *Love's Knowledge,* I want to look at Nussbaum's description of what she calls *learning to fall,* because in it she shows how it is that one may come to take the chance that love invites, the chance to grow. We previously looked at Nussbuam's discussion of Henry James' character Maggie who artfully executes a moral maneuver that rescues a situation from suffering on all sides. I compared such a skillfulness to the refined, and self-forgetting virtue that the Chinese call of *wu-wei*. In Confucianism, *wu-wei* is achieved through thousands of hours of practice (usually of an art form like calligraphy or a ritual). There is a problem, however, in the invocation of such artistry, and that is the possible misunderstanding that such rarified sorts of practices are the pinnacle of moral behavior, which is not the case. What Maggie does in *The Golden Bowl* shows an exemplary skill, but the stakes were not dire.

Diving in front of a car to save a toddler may not require the perceptive sophistication or subtlety necessary for saving someone's reputation and self-image, but most of us would agree that saving a life has more value and may require a greater sacrifice. Expertise in social skills may not always translate to moral behavior, insofar as one may be artful in behaving with cunning to make others believe that there is genuine regard without any sincere feeling behind it. This is something Jane Austen loves to bring to our attention in the forms of Mr. Wickham, Mr. Eliot, Mr. and Miss Crawford in her various novels who are congenial, respectable, and dishonest. The focus of my work is motivating empathic regard and prosocial action in all the mundane and ordinary as well as the exceptional situations in which we find ourselves.

Nevertheless, even mundane moral acts require something of us because we must cultivate the ability to discern and the willingness to offer. Moreover, the fear of loss is an important impediment to overcome. Nussbaum's discussion looks at the relationship of risk and vulnerability by looking at Ann Beatie's (1987) story *Learning to Fall*. As we explore the relationship of the self and other as one of profound intersubjectivity and a necessary reciprocity, we need an appropriate appreciation of our anxiety about the risks in intersubjectivity. In order to be receptive, we must accept a certain amount of risk. Even in the story, where we are physically safe from its events, we are not safe from the emotional import of the story—from the threat that it will change us. What is needed, then, is a willingness to suffer, to undergo. Nussbaum claims that a willingness to fall, to let go, is necessary to open ourselves to both fiction and life.

In the pursuit of knowledge about love, for example whether we love, whom we ought to love, etc., we pursue insight in various ways. One way Nussbaum describes

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draws on Marcel Proust's character Marcel who, in a flash of suffering, realizes that he loves Albertine when she has finally given up on him and left[45]. Marcel believes he has obtained the truth through this suffering. While Nussbaum does not disagree that suffering can reveal certain truths to us, she regards Marcel's insight as dubious because it is a solipsistic achievement. She quotes Marcel's reflection, "'I understood that my love was less a love for her than a love in me…It is the misfortune of beings to be for us nothing else but useful showcases for the contents of our own minds'(III.568)" (271). Albertine hardly seems to matter to his insight or even his love, it is the suddenness and the pain that verify its truth (266). According to Nussbaum, "love's knowledge" must be verified by another relevant to the concern, but even then, it might more properly be called faith. She contrasts her preferred method (learning to fall) against what she regards as a solipsistic private reflective insight into one's relationship that no one else is called upon to verify and that one believes to be absolutely true.

Nussbaum asks whether this form of knowledge is not a "form of flight—from openness to the other, from all those things in love for which there is in fact no certain criterion?" (270). Because Marcel discovers this truth in a vacuum, which seems to have more of romance than of enduring love to it, Nussbaum is skeptical of the genuineness of its insight. In contrast to this privately achieved 'knowledge,' she introduces a shared, reciprocal, and more malleable form of knowledge, love's knowledge (277).

The main character in Beatie's story is unnamed, married, in love with another man named Ray whom she's not seen for months, and she checks her watch incessantly. Her only real friend is a warm, soft woman named Ruth who is a single mother with a developmentally delayed son named Andrew. Ruth teaches at a community college and

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[45] From *Remembrance of Lost Time.*

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takes dance lessons in the evening. The woman takes Andrew into the city sometimes,

giving Ruth some time on her own. Ray lives in the city. The woman has spent the day

guiding Andrew around, somehow has missed her train, and calls Ray to see if he'd like

to meet for coffee. They go to a café and sit awkwardly in the booth not drinking their

coffees,

> Andrew shifts in the booth, looks at me as if he wants to say something. I lean my head toward him. "What?" I say softly. He starts a rush of whispering.
> "His mother is learning to fall." I say.
> "What does that mean?" Ray says.
> "In her dance class," Andrew says. He looks at me again, shy. "Tell him."
> "I've never seen her do it," I say. "She told me about it—it's an exercise or something. She's learning to fall."
> Ray nods. He looks like a professor being patient with a student who has just reached an obvious conclusion…
> "Does she just go plop?" he says to Andrew.
> "Not really," Andrew says, more to me than to Ray. "It's kind of slow."
> I imagine Ruth bringing her arms in front of her, head bent, an almost penitential position, and then a loosening in the knees, a slow folding downward.
> [Ray pulls her outside for a walk with Andrew.]
> I clutch the envelope. Ray looks at me and smiles, it's so obvious that I'm holding the envelope with both hands so I don't have to hold his hand. He moves in close and puts his hand around my shoulder. No hand-swinging like children—the proper gentleman and the lady out for a stroll. What Ruth has known all along: what will happen can't be stopped. Aim for grace. {pp. 13-14}.

For Nussbaum, this scene exemplifies what is happening when we let ourselves

go to love and be loved. "What this means is that she lets herself not stop it, she decides

to stop stopping it…She discovers what will happen by letting it happen," according to

Nussbaum (1990, 278). Nussbaum claims, like Scheler, that this experience is a

combination of creation and yielding (279). This *eros* movement seems to capture the

paradoxical activity and passivity that Ricoeur describes in the acting and suffering self-

other relation. For Nussbaum, this movement is essential in the good life. In order to

thrive, we must learn to fall. The letting go is an active release of control to the

unfolding, an acceptance of sharing the control with another. Empathic engagement requires the same release. When we allow ourselves to care for the other in empathy, we unfold in relation to them.

In the last chapter we looked at Ben Bergen's work on embodied simulation as meaning. Notice that in the passage above, there is a visual description of Ruth, the warm teacher dancer, learning to fall. "I imagine Ruth bringing her arms in front of her, head bent, an almost penitential position, and then a loosening in the knees, a slow folding downward." The woman is simulating this image in her body-mind and Ray is hoping that she is catching on. A few minutes later, he wraps his arm around her and her tightly held envelope. The embrace assures her, and the reader, that he is an active participant. He, too, is falling and they will hold each other—provided she doesn't bail. He is offering himself and his care to the shared opportunity of acting and being acted upon. "Aim for grace," seems to be the woman's thought, or the narrators advice. It suggests that she is letting go.

Ray's risk is real; she could wound him deeply if her fears prevent her from holding him, also. When we offer ourselves in an empathic encounter, we do not have guarantees that we will be received, or reciprocated. We leap, as it were, in faith. This movement expresses well what Ricoeur (1992) describes in the self-other relation. We are never entirely active, since we require the response of the other to fulfill our action, nor are we entirely passive, since the other needs our attentiveness, perception, judgment, and response to complete his or her action. One is both actor and sufferer. Learning to fall is thus accepting this vulnerable and receptive role. Taking it up is rather like faith, real faith, not certain knowledge. "Faith is never beyond doubt; grace can never be

assured," according to Nussbaum (1990, 279). Even Ruth, who is normally a good judge

of character, chose the wrong man to love. Life is not under our control. In the first three

chapters, I discussed the ways in which we ourselves are not under our control: much of

what we do and say is the product of automatic processing. So, the better part of wisdom

recommends acceptance and a mature bearing toward the world aims for grace.

I particularly focus on Nussbaum's discussion of learning to fall because it helps

articulate the risks and the rewards of empathic engagement, both in narratives and in

living ethical situations. As my discussion on the ambivalent qualities of *empathic*

distress shows, we are able to turn away from empathic encounters. And while this may

be the right thing to do in a given situation, it requires reflection and judgment to ensure

that one is not in danger of being immoral by omission. Part of what I see as necessary in

this moral cultivation project is to cultivate the moral courage to face suffering, to endure

suffering, and to aid it by offering balm and/or support. Stories can cause us suffering

which is why sometimes we avoid them. I felt a painful anguish when I read *The Color*

Purple. I felt guilt and shame as a white woman of privilege. But, I also felt joy for

Celie, and more, I felt inspired by her. She taught me what a person can overcome when

she feels loved by another, even when that person is flawed. Might it not be that as we

learn to fall into stories whose characters undergo genuine challenges, including suffering

the harder trials of the human condition, that we grow some of the courage that we need

to face suffering in our lived experience?

Growing requires submitting to the difficulties of the lessons. It means

persevering in the struggle, and often, it means loss. Anyone committed to an athletic or

aesthetic skill knows that endurance and talent are built up from a great deal of practice

and many mistakes. It takes faith to persevere into an open future. Our ability to empathize or to feel with another means that we may actually feel their pain. Perhaps it is the emotional pleasure of connection with the particular other, or the feeling of connection with humanity in general, that draws us to the other even when it means enduring pain. Even though the threat of pain is real, the promise of meaningful connection is worth it?

Two literary characters exemplify such a willingness to undergo challenges that unmake their self-conception and the confidence in their own perceptions of the world. They are made to grow, and do grow, and find meaningful connection in the end. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* is a well-known novel whose heroine Elizabeth Bennett and hero Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy are famed lovers. These two characters begin like Shakespeare's Beatrice and Benedick with their witty repartee regarding decorum and virtues, but the pains that they endure through the story bring them to a new self-understanding and a mutual respect, in addition to love. George Butte, Marshall Gregory and Richard Eldridge each devote particular attention to Austen's work because her focus on the inner world of her heroine's sheds light on our own inner worlds. Austen attunes readers to the feelings of her characters and to their perception of the cues of other characters. When Elizabeth self-complacently has settled on hating Mr. Darcy, she is shocked to receive a marriage proposal from him. Given in a most "ungentlemanlike manner," she is relieved of the guilt of rejecting it. When he interrogates her on her grounds for rejection, she accuses him of separating her sister and his friend Bingley from marrying, as well as his mistreatment of her favorite officer Mr. Wickham. That night, Darcy writes her a letter justifying himself, and Elizabeth learns how seriously she

had misjudged appearances and is mortified by the foolishness of her own vanity. This

self-revelation, based on a description of events from his perspective, provokes shock and

pain at her misunderstandings and blindness to the real improprieties of both Mr.

Wickham and even her own family. Elizabeth, the brightest of the Bennett sisters is not

only witty and intelligent, but also generally prudent and insightful, so the revelation of

her mistakes in judgment jar her into humility.

> She grew absolutely ashamed of herself. –Of neither Darcy nor Wickham could she think, without feeling that she had been blind, partial, prejudiced, absurd.
> 'How despicably have I acted!' she cried. —I, who have prided myself on my discernment! —I, who have valued myself on my abilities! Who have often disdained the generous candour of my sister, and gratified my vanity, in useless or blameable distrust.—How humiliating is this discovery! –Yet, how just a humiliation! –Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. –Pleased with the preference of one and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away, where either were concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself.'
> …When she came to that part of the letter in which her family were mentioned, in terms of such mortifying, yet merited reproach, her sense of shame was severe. The justice of the charge struck her too forcibly for denial…(236).

This impassioned self-reflection is not the kind of experience of the other's inner

world that we are often privileged to participate in. Sometimes our closest loved ones

will share such painful discoveries, but here in Elizabeth's 19th century narrative world,

we experience for ourselves her demoralizing feelings. Elizabeth is charming and an

easy character to care for and feel with. And because we see her judge much else in the

scenes justly, first-time readers cannot help but share her feelings of dislike for Darcy and

liking for Wickham. The narrator does hint to us from time to time of the feelings of

Darcy which contradict Elizabeth's perception however, so we understand that there is

more to Mr. Darcy than Elizabeth knows.

Elizabeth suffers these insights into her failures of judgment, but her lessons in suffering are not yet complete. For that, her sister Lydia must elope with the misjudged Wickham who is so despicable as to have no intention of marrying Lydia. Such a devastating loss of family honor in 19th century England means that Elizabeth will never be able to marry—a problem as much financial as emotional. We readers suffer with her as she breaks down crying in humiliation and fear in front of Mr. Darcy (294). Readers feel that she was wrong in her prejudices, but she does not deserve such desolation. Elizabeth does not know (nor does the reader) that Darcy's feelings and convictions at this moment are compassionate, genuine, and attentive. He pities Elizabeth in compassion for what has come down upon her, but he also feels his own sense of obligation and resolve to repair the situation if he can. It is the tragedy of public shame that finally brings Elizabeth from gratitude to love and Darcy from love to respect. Darcy pays Wickham's extensive debts and orchestrates the marriage between Wickham and Lydia, saving her honor, the family's name and Elizabeth's possibility of an honorable mate.

Richard Eldridge claims that Darcy and Elizabeth have grown to a serious and profound recognition of one another's subjectivity. "If we are to honor the marriage of Elizabeth and Darcy, and accept it as an accomplishment, then these developing *Bindungsqualitaten* (attachment qualities) that lead to it must be both the ground and the consequence of their relations" (169, translation added). It is what they have been through, their experience which has taught them humility and understanding to replace their pride and prejudices. Both have suffered from their follies and from the vices of others and they see in each other the consolation of genuine sympathy and understanding.

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Shared judgment, shared wisdom, shared action, and shared humility have deepened their regard for one another. Darcy's pity of her plight, and his right action on her and her family's behalf facilitates this wisdom and love. Having followed their respective growth journeys and participated in their hopes and their choices, we have played the parts of vain judgments and pride, and eventually humility, justice, and wisdom.

Both Elizabeth and Darcy are characters who were loved by at least one parent and who have tender relations with a sibling and a good friend. This is no accident on Austen's part, I think. She shows over and over in her novels how our loved ones and friends can help and/or hinder us. In *Mansfield Park*, Sir Thomas Bertram laments at the end of the novel when three of his four children have gone astray morally that he did not sufficiently attend to their character development in their rearing. "…[A]nguish arising [in Sir Thomas] from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters, was never to be done away. Too late he became aware how unfavorable to the character of any young people, must be the totally opposite treatment which Maria and Julia had been always experiencing at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt [Mrs. Norris] had been continually contrasted with his own severity….Here had been grievous mismanagement…" They "had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers, by that sense of duty which can alone suffice." They had not been taught to bring principle "into daily practice" (476-477).

This might be Elizabeth Bennet's lament regarding her own parents' childrearing of her three younger sisters. Austen shows us the contrast of character of a person cared for in childhood and beloved by some family and friends. Such love nourishes the moral imagination and capacity, it seems. Might it help mitigate the risks of caring for others?

Fortunately for Lizzy, she was blessed with such care and cultivation, and we see the fruit of it in her ability to care for the worries and challenges that others face. We readers see that she is capable of genuine pity in her deep concern for her sister Jane's silent suffering from the loss of Mr. Bingley.

We do not much like the term pity in our culture, but Nussbaum (2001) claims that for empathy to make the movement to compassion, it requires the addition of moral emotions like pity. Pity is a useful term in that it seems to get at the larger picture of the human condition more than compassion might. When we feel pity, while it does contain the taint of self-satisfaction, it can also be understood as a fearful recognition of what John Gardner (1994) calls our shared victimicy, and Ricoeur (1992) refers to as suffering. Nussbaum aids our understanding of this role of enduring the winds of fate by turning to the Greek term as employed by the Greeks regarding tragedy. *Eleos*, which we translate as "pity," expresses the sentiment of suffering for the sufferer (301-303). Nussbaum (2001) prefers the Greek term to the English because of the latter's condescending connotation. *Eleos* is what one feels for Oedipus, who is an unwitting victim of fate, conveying a recognition of moral luck, to which we are all subject. *Eleos* shows an understanding and perhaps even an awe before the tragic in recognition of certain events as utterly beyond our control.

Yet, pity might still be able to remain at stoic distance. The further addition of love pulls us into the sufferer's world. Nussbaum describes various religious ideas like the Christian god's suffering on behalf of its beloved humans and the bodhisattva who "*experiences* the ills that he pities, even if by now he no longer expects to do so. Furthermore, the attachment to the concerns of the suffering person is itself a form of

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vulnerability: so a god, in allowing himself to be so attached, renders himself to a degree needy and non-self-sufficient, and thus similar to mortals" (318 emphasis mine). Such compassion is inculcated by the myths, rituals, and practices of many religious traditions, practices that engage the imagination and move the feelings.

Courage in Suffering, Courage for Suffering

Nussbaum (2001) then claims that we must feel ourselves to be at stake in the other's wellbeing. We cannot find relief from suffering until they do. Recall from my discussions of empathy how Hoffman claims that we feel personal distress and other distress mixed up together and that when the other's distress is relieved, then ours is also. Nussbaum describes this experience as compassion (for her, empathy lacks the emotional depth), but the description accords well with Hoffman's. The empathizer "must consider the suffering of another as a significant part of his or her own scheme of goals and ends. She must take that person's ill as affecting her own flourishing. In effect, she must make herself vulnerable to the person of another. "It is this *eudaimonistic judgment*, not the judgment of similar possibilities, that seems to be a necessary constituent of compassion…The recognition of one's own related vulnerability is then, an important and frequently an indispensable epistemological requirement for compassion in human beings," according to Nussbaum (319). Solicitude as Ricoeur describes it is bound up with this recognition.

A deep understanding, however explicitly philosophical or commonsensical, of our vulnerability to chance, to material and emotional want, to death, are necessary assistants to our grasping our primordial dependence on one another. If we understand the vulnerability of our very existence, as our actual human condition every minute of

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every day, then we may better understand that the rewards of connection to others far outweigh the risks. Love relationships as experienced in living and in imaginative stories may be the best teachers of such truths.

Narratives of suffering, like *The Color Purple,* show us how the love of someone like Shug can help someone like Celie find and develop her voice, listen to herself, and stand together with those who love her. In such stories we can see that there is reprieve from suffering, especially if we hold on to each other. Such narratives show us the darker side of life and in this way, it does seem that they teach us to be a little braver in the face of suffering, whether our own or someone else's.

Eleos, or pity infused with the recognition of our shared vulnerability, is a penetrating sentiment, evoked at times when the horrors of how we treat each other as humans is more than we can comprehend. When we cannot understand the magnitude of the tragedy, we feel its weight and pity the sufferers. Particular stories of particular people help take us inside the horrors of such events and teach us what it means to be human in those barbarous worlds. While benevolence or humaneness might seem like an overly idealistic virtue to pursue, it may be that our inability to appreciate it is due to our own lack of imagination or our inexperience in making meaning out of our suffering. I want to look at the account of Victor Frankl (1959/2006) and the diary of Etty Hillesum (1983) to deepen our understanding of how the cultivation of narrative empathy might help build up one's inner life. Adding to this the cultivation of an appreciation of our vulnerability and the meaning of pity may strengthen one's courage to face profound hardship and still maintain one's humanity.

Victor Frankl (1959), a clinical psychologist, philosopher, and a Jew who survived the concentration camps of WWII, claims that it is the ability to make meaning that transforms even the worst of suffering. In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he describes his experience in the concentration camp as a "soul-destroying mental conflict" of not wanting to be reduced to mere animal thoughts of food and material comforts (31). He makes the observation that contrary to what one expects, it was not the hale and hearty who fared well in the camps, but those with a rich inner life. "Sensitive people who were used to a rich intellectual life may have suffered much pain…but the damage to their inner selves was less. They were able to retreat from their terrible surroundings to a life of inner riches and spiritual freedom" (36). Those whose imaginative worlds were full of the love of people, music, history, religion, god, philosophy, art, and science found an inner resource for enduring suffering and more, for sustaining their humanity. Love is a vital moral emotion for such endurance, according to Frankl.

Frankl describes how images of his wife nourished him and taught him the necessity of love, even in the imagination. "*The salvation of man is through love and in love*. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved" (37). Frankl describes a few experiences of sharing his bread ration, or, though totally exhausted, managing to console fellow prisoners with gentle words, drawing on the resources of his training and his own feelings in their shared suffering. In such actions, he felt himself connected with the others in a way that gave him a dull courage to continue to struggle in spite of starvation and exhaustion. Shocking to us readers in the comfort of our security, Frankl states that he found beauty in the camp. "As the inner life of the prisoner tended to

become more intense, he also experienced the beauty of art and nature as never before"

(39). One evening a fellow prisoner pointed to the sky, "Standing outside we saw sinister

clouds glowing in the west and the whole sky alive with clouds of ever-changing shapes

and colors, from steel blue to blood red…Then, after minutes of moving silence, one

prisoner said to another, 'How beautiful the world could be!'" (40). The hunger for

beauty might even usurp the hunger for the little food they received. Prisoners would

sometimes miss their food ration in order to hear musical performances (41).

The rich world of the imagination can continue to nourish our hearts and minds

when we are famished for physical nourishment and emotional intimacy. Stories (like

music and other aesthetic engagements) provide the furniture and feelings that facilitate

our imagination's power to face moral challenges. Charles Dickens' character David

Copperfield speaks of his many books as the friends who comforted his solitude after the

marriage of his loving mother to the cruel Mr. Murdstone. Imaginary friends can move

us and support us when our living ones cannot. The life of the mind then, rather than

being a flight from the living world of challenges and hardships, is often the means of

growing the skills and the courage to face that world.

Etty Hillesum, a young Danish Jew who died at Auschwitz, refused to give in to

hate. I share this summary of her experience before her death as evidence of the work

that the imaginative life can do in our moral responses to lived experience. Her diary,

published as *An Interrupted Life* (1983), describes a vibrant, strong, curious woman with

a passion for life and romance. She is a mystic and an intellectual who draws on

Judaism, Christianity, and European thought and literature to develop her inner world.

As the occupation and deportations close in, she shrinks her needs ever smaller, but her

inner life expands. She wants to understand the "relationship of literature to life" (64).

Her life is as active as it is reflective, but she grows in the realization of the exigencies of

life and death.

> I have looked our destruction, our miserable end, which has already begun
> in so many small ways in our daily life, straight in the eye and accepted it into my
> life, and my love of life has not been diminished. I am not bitter or rebellious, or
> in any way discouraged. I continue to grow from day to day, even with the
> likelihood of destruction staring me in the face…I have come to terms with life,
> nothing can happen to me, and after all my personal fate is not the issue; it doesn't
> really matter if it is I who perish or another. What matters is that we are all
> marked me.
> By coming to terms with life I mean the reality of death has become a
> definite part of my life; my life has, so to speak, been extended by death, by my
> looking death in the eye and accepting it…It sounds paradoxical; by excluding
> death from our life we cannot live a full life, and by admitting death into our life
> we enlarge and enrich it (155).

Before she voluntarily goes away to Westerbork where she works helping and

nursing other Jews, she is growing her resolve. "There is a difference between hardy and

hard…I believe I get hardier every day, except for the recalcitrant blister of mine, but I

shall never grow hard" (195). Over and over she reflects on the need to love her

neighbor. After working at Westerbork for two months, she is allowed to return home for

a short time to recover her health which has severely weakened. Writing in her diary to

God, she says, "And talking to You, God. Is that all right? With the passing of people, I

feel a growing need to speak to You alone. I love people so terribly, because in every

human being I love something of You. And I seek You everywhere in them and often do

find something of you" (198). She is too tired to reach out for her Dostoyevsky,

Shakespeare, or Kierkegaard, but she reaches inward to what she calls Rilke's "'cosmic

interior'" (199).

Of Westerbork she says, "Those two months behind barbed wire have been the two richest and most intense months of my life, in which my highest values were so deeply confirmed. I have learned to love Westerbork" (205). She describes the people whom she was touched by with lines of remembrance like, "I am suddenly reminded of that woman with the snow-white hair and the fine oval face. She carried a packet of toast in her knapsack, all she had for the long journey to Poland…She was so incredibly lovely and so serene with her tall girlish figure" (206). At the end of September, she receives a note saying that she is "exempted" from returning to Westerbork. She does not want it. The meaning that she has found in "being a balm for all wounds" is more important to her than mere survival. On her final postcard thrown from the train bound for Auschwitz with her parents and brother she writes,

> Christine, Opening the Bible at random, I find this: 'The Lord is my high tower.'…We left camp singing, Father and Mother firmly and calmly, Mischa, too. We shall be traveling for three days. Thank you for all your kindness and care. Friends left behind will still be writing to Amsterdam; perhaps you will hear something from them. Or from my last letter from [Westerbork] camp. ~Good-bye for now from the four of us. *Etty* (360).

I feel like Kierkegaard's Johannes de Silentio in saying that her story stupefies me. Etty Hillesum's well-furnished imagination draws on her religious, literary, and practical experience to come up with a way of being that aided her in transcending her self-concern, even for her own survival. She is a marvel to me, refusing to "give in to hate." At the end of Hillesum's diary, she says, "I have broken my body like bread and shared it out among men. And why not, they were hungry and had gone without food for so long" (230). Hillesum's resolve to cultivate love rather than hate in a context in which most would consider her justified in hating, indicates the power and potential of empathic regard. While there are many contingencies in the development of empathy and

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impediments to its expression, what these snippets of Etty Hillesum's life suggest is the possible fruit from cultivating empathy.

Conclusion: Cultivating Empathy, the Way to Flourishing

The title of this work is "The Enchantment of Ethics," but it would be more accurate to say the enchantment of ethical subjects *for ethics*. Stories enchant us, entice us to follow the rabbit. And because stories are inherently normative, our ethical intuitions are engaged. We fall into the hearts, minds and lives of others, and from inside their longings and in their world, we emerge again into our own world with the flavor of them still on our palette. The enchantment of the story provokes self-transcendence, and if it is a good story, it can promote our regard for the other. The spell of a story requires, as Nussbaum points out, that we learn how to fall. It is risky and dangerous, but it is the means to a fuller self. It is an invitation. One may become a self-aware of her need of the other and the other's need of her: A self with other selves.

Aristotle compares happiness, flourishing, thriving (*eudaimonia*) to health. He chooses this metaphor because of its dynamic quality. To be in health is an effort on the part of the patient. Similarly moral health requires a striving after virtue and the development of *phronesis* (VI.35ff, 1144a). We require good parenting, friendship, and love to help us with this work that never ends. Ricoeur's *solicitude* teaches us how much we need these relationships and how we, in turn, are needed. We need others in order to realize our projects and even just to be properly human. Empathy is the means of acknowledging and fulfilling this need, so the cultivation of the empathic moral perception is essential to helping us judge and act with a proper appreciation of our dual

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need of self-realization and relations with others such that we may respond toward growth for ourselves and our relations.   Turning to narrative engagements, our neurophysiological structures are enabled to envision the moral behaviors of the characters and learn how one might act in particular situations.

This project was inspired by the desire to understand what motivates us to be ethical and how to put such understanding into a meaningful project of moral self-cultivation. I began with the claims and supporting evidence that because 1) we are not autonomous individualists but instead are ultrasocial storytelling animals and because 2) we are not rational deciders and are instead moral intuitionists, we need ethical cultivation programs and practices that suit our anthropological aptitudes and inclinations, shaping them in the present for a future character that automatically tends toward the behavior we prefer. That means cultivating empathy in accord with those behaviors. Our maxims, values, and principles are helpful to our reflective engagements that can help select the aspects of our moral cultivation projects, but maxims alone cannot give us enough knowledge to support us in the myriad moral dilemmas that face us in life.

We need the insight of narratives like those of Celie and Eliza Bennett that focus on particular moral problems with particular people and particular stakes to give us opportunity to imaginatively practice our values, shaping empathy to be aptly attentive to others in lived experience. We also need their stories to take us into the particular histories of human history to learn meanings of the historical realities that the nonfiction narratives may not offer. Moral living is a science in that we need seek understanding of ourselves as biological, psychological animals so that we may better form the art of our

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moral life as an expression particular and beautiful.   If we are wise, we will read broadly,

learning to understand, appreciate, and support the plurality of ways of being human.

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