

Doing What Another Would Want

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Abstract. We often do what another would want us to do, as when we continue a dead parent's tradition, listen to a friend's favorite musician, or channel a lover's moral commitments. Such actions can be emotionally resonant and relationally significant. But if we have merely instrumental reasons to do what others would want given by the value of the underlying activity or of downstream outcomes, it's unclear why these actions would have this significance. I introduce a paradigmatic form of doing what another would want I call "action from empathetic concern," which requires, first, adopting an empathetic stance, and second, acting in light of the reasons that appear within that stance. By investigating our reasons for acting from empathetic concern, I explain why doing what another would want can be emotionally resonant: by valuing through another's eyes and acting on those values, we respond to and strengthen our valuable relationships.

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1. Introduction

Suppose that, because you liked their sweet refreshing fruit, you planted fig trees with your parents as a child. You enjoyed tending to the trees over the years. You came to love not only their fruit but their broad, lobed leaves and earthy scent. Each fall, you've shared fig tarts and jams with loved ones. Your childhood friend knows about your special relationship with fig trees and would occasionally play with you under them, but she doesn't have a similar relationship herself. After many years, she writes to tell you that she decided to plant a fig tree in her own yard. Compare three reasons she might give for her decision:

1. "Figs are sweet and refreshing."
2. "I can make money by selling figs."
3. "I knew you would have wanted me to."

One reason to plant a fig tree—indeed, your reason—is that figs are sweet and refreshing. Another reason to plant a fig tree is that you can make money by selling figs. But the third reason can carry a special significance. Suppose the other considerations in play are not decisive: your friend doesn't prefer

the taste of figs to alternative fruit, and she has no plan to sell the figs. You may be especially touched to hear that her reason to plant the tree was that she knew you would have wanted her to. Her decision reveals that she has *seen* or *understood* you and your distinctive concern for fig trees. And it may reveal something about your friend's attitudes: that she still values you and your relationship. And, I will suggest, it strengthens the relationship itself, inviting you to treat her as a closer friend.

This kind of reason is familiar from many of our most valuable relationships. Consider how you might carry on your mother's tradition of camping in the mountains every summer, listen to a friend's favorite musician, or channel a lover's distinctive commitment to generous forgiveness because they would want you to. In each case, you see and understand another and their distinctive concerns, you value another and your relationship with them, and, I will suggest, you strengthen the relationship itself.

Despite the significance and familiarity of doing what others would want, our reasons to do what others would want are sometimes unclear.

In some cases, we have *instrumental reason* to do what another would want, as when we do so out of deference to their expertise. For example, if your friend is new to gardening, she may know less than you about the relative merits of different fruit trees. She can then use your wants as a heuristic. We often do what another would want out of deference to an expert. Consider how you might swing the bat as your coach would want you to, feed your child as the doctor would want you to, or frame an argument as Aristotle would want you to. Another kind of instrumental reason to do what another would want can be given by the good consequences of pleasing them by satisfying their preferences. Consider how you might mop the floors as your boss would want you to (in order to keep your job), mow your lawn as your neighbor would want you to (in order to stave off his fits of rage), or fix the salad that your partner would want you to (in order to satisfy her palette). Such instrumental reasons are straightforward, non-mysterious reasons to do what others would want.

But in some cases, we seem to have *non-instrumental reasons* to do what another would want. And such cases are apt to be especially emotionally resonant. For example, suppose that you've died and your friend thinks to herself, "I know, on some level, that fig trees are just as valuable as apricot trees. I have equally weighty fruit-tree-given reasons to plant either. But I don't just want to engage with valuable things. I want to be moved by the very same values that move my friend. In that spirit, I'm doing what she would want me to do." Your friend is not treating you as an expert on fruit-tree-given reasons. She is not merely valuing fig trees. Nor is she angling for a valuable outcome like pleasing you, since you are dead. She is not merely valuing the consequences of satisfying your preference. Rather, she sees some non-instrumental reason to do what you would want her to do. She seems to be valuing fig trees *through your eyes* in part because you are her friend. More generally, we have non-instrumental reasons *grounded in our valuable relationships* to do what others would want us to do. Or so I will argue.

Apart from a brief discussion in Raz,¹ the phenomenon of doing what another would want is surprisingly unexplored. There are nearby discussions of the reasons given by an agent's own desires and the difference (or lack thereof) from the reasons given by a third party's desires,² of the reasons to benefit others,³ of the reasons to understand another's concerns,⁴ and, perhaps closest to my target, of the reasons to take on your beloved's ends.⁵ But none of these quite capture the familiar idea, operative in the fig tree case, that there's something distinctively significant about doing what another would want you to do, especially where doing so involves valuing through another's eyes and acting on those shared values. I aim to fill that lacuna.

Here's the plan. In section 2, I clarify the paradigmatic species of doing what another would want on which I will focus, which I term *acting from empathetic concern*: such action requires, first, taking an empathetic stance by imagining one's reasons as they seem to your target and, second, acting in light of those reasons. In section 3, I answer the question, What are our reasons to act from empathetic concern? I argue that, while we have instrumental reasons to act from empathetic concern given by the value of the underlying activity and the value of downstream consequences, we also have non-instrumental reason to do so given by our *relationship* with our target. I argue, further, that these reasons subtly interact. In section 4, I explain why we have reasons to act from empathetic concern—that is, to act on the reasons made available by empathy—and not merely to empathize with them, nor merely to do what they would want without empathizing with them. In section 5, I discuss the kinds of relationships that give us reason to act from empathetic concern and when, within such relationships, we have those reasons. In section 6, I conclude.

2. Acting from empathetic concern

To know whether there could be non-instrumental reasons to do what another would want, it will help us to have a more concrete, paradigmatic notion of what can be involved in doing what another would want, especially one that can capture the kind of emotionally resonant, relationally significant action that seems to feature in the fig tree case. In particular, I propose to focus on cases of doing what another would want that involve valuing through another's eyes and then acting on those shared values. Though

¹ Raz (1986: 32–33) discusses the phenomenon of doing what another would want to illustrate a point about higher-order reasons. He claims that when we listen to Byrd's music because a friend would want us to, our friend does not want us to do so for the reason that he wants us to do so. Rather, he wants us to do so for the reason that we like Byrd. Raz claims that "[t]he fact that I love him and that he wishes it is for me a second-order reason—a reason to act for that reason." (33) My discussion of the paradigmatic form of doing what another would want that I focus on—acting from empathetic concern—is compatible with, but does not entail, Raz's claim about second-order reasons.

² See Nagel 1970, Pettit and Smith 1990, Darwall 2001, Schroeder 2007, Marušić 2010, and Arpaly and Schroeder 2014.

³ See the classic accounts in Hume 1998, Kant 1994, Mill 1969, as well as more recent discussions in Singer 1972, Murphy 1993, and Gert 1998.

⁴ See, for example, Prinz 2011, Bloom 2017, and Bailey 2022.

⁵ See Ebels-Duggan 2008.

the phenomenon of doing what another would want is more general, as I discuss in section 4.2, and the normatively relevant phenomenon is somewhat broader, as I discuss at the end of section 3, it will help to start with a narrower target.

Three observations can bring the target into focus.

First, the target notion is that of doing what another would want *the agent* to do, rather than doing what another would do *themselves*. In the fig tree case, these two may overlap: you may have wanted your friend to plant the fig tree, and planting the fig tree may be what you would have done in the same situation. But in other cases, they come apart. Suppose that you enjoy a private run every morning and your friend decides to join, against your wishes. She is not doing what you would want *her* to do but what *you* would do (indeed, what you are doing) yourself. The former notion is our target, at least at the outset.

Second, doing what another *would* want is a counterfactual notion. This is most obvious with respect to the dead. Suppose your mother has died. When you continue her camping tradition because she would have wanted you to, you need not satisfy her *actual* wants. Indeed, she no longer has any actual wants, nor need she have had relevant actual wants when she was alive. Roughly, you are doing what your mother would want if she knew your options. But the counterfactual element also emerges with respect to the living. Suppose your partner has been a committed vegan for many years, but, after a long day and a few drinks, he asks you to get him a meatball sub rather than his usual falafel. You might feel a conflict between the reasons to respect his request and his actual wants by getting the meatball sub and the reasons to do what he would really want you to do, if he were thinking authentically or thinking in tune with his deep values, by getting the falafel. When we do what another *would* want, rather than what they *actually* want, we seem to be thinking about their sensibility or deep values, where sensibilities and deep values can come apart from occurrent wants.⁶

Third, consider how *you* see fig trees when you value them. In general, valuing something requires being emotionally vulnerable to it, being motivated to respect its value through action, and believing that you have reasons for that vulnerability and motivation. (Kolodny 2003: 150, Scheffler 2004) When you value fig trees, you are emotionally vulnerable to them: you are disposed to be pleased when they are planted and when they are doing well and disposed to sadness when they are pointlessly chopped down. And you are motivated to respect their value through actions like watering them, pruning them, or convincing your neighbor not to chop them down. And you believe that those dispositions and motivations are responses to reasons given by the value of fig trees.

Then, we can helpfully think of doing what another would want as a form of empathic,

⁶ Further, deep values need not only manifest as wants or desires. They can also manifest as judgments and emotions. It can be valuable to do what another would want, as I have been suggesting. But it can also, in seemingly the same way, be valuable to do what another would *think is right* or what another *would be proud of*. Nevertheless, for simplicity, I will continue to speak in terms of what another would *want, desire, or prefer*.

imaginative perspective-taking, at least in those paradigmatic cases that involve valuing through another's eyes and then acting on those shared values. Your friend is imagining what it's like to value fig trees as you do.⁷ She's mentally modelling your deep values and applying those values to her situation. To do that, she imagines what it's like to be emotionally vulnerable to fig trees, to be motivated to respect their value, and to see the related reasons that you see.⁸ Your friend adopts an *empathetic stance* with respect to you and the objects of your emotional and evaluative attitudes.⁹ When she then does what you would want, she is acting in light of the reasons that appear from within that empathetic stance. In such cases, doing what another would want involves two (potentially simultaneous) decisions: the decision produced from within the empathetic stance and the decision to adopt that stance in the first place.

More specifically, I suggest to focus on paradigmatic cases of doing what another would want understood as acting from empathetic concern, where

I act from empathetic concern for you iff I act on the reasons as I accurately imagine they appear to you.

When your friend does what you would want by planting the fig tree, she is guiding her deliberation by the reasons as she imagines they appear to you. And her imaginative reconstruction of the reasons as they appear to you is reasonably accurate: she's right that you would see greater reason for her to plant the fig tree. She's not, say, wishfully imagining that you would see greater reason for her to steal your hedge trimmers. Further, she is acting on those reasons: she is *doing* what you would want, not merely *imagining* what you would want.¹⁰

⁷ "Empathy" is a term with a notoriously diverse set of possible definitions. For a useful overview, see Batson 2009. I use the term to refer to an imaginative adoption of another's evaluative perspective, rather than, say, concern for another's welfare, contagion of another's occurrent emotions, or knowledge of another's emotional state. However, though "empathy" is sometimes used to describe an agent's projection of themselves into a target's situation, where the agent takes their own evaluative perspective with them into the target's situation, the form of empathy involved in valuing through another's eyes requires, instead, taking a target's evaluative perspective on board in the agent's own situation.

⁸ For accounts on which empathy plays an important epistemological role in helping us understand the reasons as they seem to others, see Steuber 2006. See also Grimm 2016. For more critical perspectives, see Hempel 1965 and Kim 1984, 1998.

⁹ Note that an empathizer cannot literally adopt another's perspective, since the empathizer must take as fixed the attitudes that the other could revise through deliberation. (See Moran 2001 and Goldie 2011.) Note, too, that one adopts an emotional and evaluative point of view not at will, but by attending to facts, typically those salient to the target, meant to induce an emotional and evaluative change.

¹⁰ Acting from empathetic concern for another is familiar and important, especially in intimate relationships, as I will argue. But of course, there are cases where we cannot act from empathetic concern. Epistemic barriers limit our ability to empathize with others: we cannot empathize with someone whose life we know nothing about. And acting from empathetic concern is impossible with respect to a desire not to be empathized with, as when our target would rather keep their point of view private. Further, when others' values are inconsistent at a time or over time, we may find it impossible to faithfully empathize. For example, Parfit's Russian nobleman, a young radical who becomes an old conservative, has no unified set of political

2.1 *Empathetic concern and sympathetic concern*

We can clarify the target notion further by comparing it to nearby phenomena. First, compare my notion of empathetic concern with sympathetic concern. The two terms are sometimes used synonymously to describe concern for another's welfare.¹¹ Though there may be a contingent, empirical connection between the two, empathy (understood as imaginative perspective-taking) has no necessary, conceptual connection to sympathetic concern (understood as altruistic motivation for another's welfare).¹² There is a conceptual difference between what matters to a person and what benefits a person. There's a corresponding difference between what I've called *empathetic concern*—concern for what matters to a person—and *sympathetic concern*—concern for that person herself and her welfare. When I act from empathetic concern for you, I aim to do what you would want. When I act out of sympathetic concern for you, I aim to benefit you.¹³

One might object that we should accept a *wide* theory of welfare, on which one's life goes better whenever one's preferences are satisfied.¹⁴ On wide theories, there is no gap between what matters to a person and what benefits her: you directly benefit your mother by continuing her tradition, if she would have wanted you to, even if she's dead. But we have good reasons to instead accept a *narrow* theory of welfare, on which one's life does not always go better when one's preferences are satisfied.¹⁵

First, narrow theories are best able to make sense of the paternalistic attitudes parents have toward their young children.¹⁶ There is often a stark contrast between what a child wants and what is good for her. My child might want to stay up and watch cartoons when it would be good for her to go to sleep, since she has school in the morning. I might deny her want to promote her good. A narrow theory can straightforwardly draw this contrast between wants and goods. We can want what's not good for us, and we can fail to want what's good for us.

Second, only on narrow theories are purely self-sacrificial actions possible. Suppose a father works a high paying but emotionally draining job so that he can give his child a better life. Intuitively, the father's action is self-sacrificial. He is sacrificing his good for his child's. The wide theorist cannot

attitudes. (Parfit 1973: 145-6) So we cannot act from empathetic concern for the nobleman with respect to politics. And when another's values are deeply different from our own, we may find it difficult, even impossible, to empathize.

¹¹ As in, for example, Batson et al. 1987.

¹² This conceptual distinction is drawn in more detail in Wispé 1986, Sober and Wilson 1998, Darwall 1998, and Nichols 2004, especially chapter 2.

¹³ This distinction takes inspiration from Darwall 2002's view of sympathy. On Darwall's view, sympathetic concern is "a feeling or emotion that (i) responds to some apparent obstacle to an individual's welfare, (ii) has that individual himself as object, and (iii) involves concern for him, and thus for his welfare, for his sake." (Darwall 2002: 51)

¹⁴ The most plausible version of a wide theory of welfare restricts the relevant preferences to those suitably connected to one's own life and projects. Restricted preference-satisfaction theories preclude, for example, the possibility that one's welfare could be affected by a preference that a stranger on a train have a good life. (Parfit 1984: 494)

¹⁵ Those already convinced of narrow theories may skip to 2.2.

¹⁶ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

accept this claim. She can grant that he may be *motivated* by the benefit to his child, not to himself. But she must say, implausibly, that the satisfaction of this motive constitutes a benefit to him. She must say that he trades one personal benefit for another.

These are not knock-down arguments against wide theories of welfare. The wide theorist could mimic the right conclusions. She could say that sleep is better for my child than watching cartoons not because there is a difference in kind between wants and goods, but because sleep better satisfies preferences *over time*. And she could say that the father's action is *partially* self-sacrificial, even if not *purely* self-sacrificial. Pursuing replies to these lines of thought would take us far afield. I will just note: the narrow theory can take these cases at face value. That gives us compelling evidence for the narrow theory.

We are creatures that value many things besides ourselves: family members, relationships, cultures, communities, ecosystems, traditions, etc. This tempts us to conceive of our own welfare in terms of the flourishing of the things that we value. But we should resist that temptation, in order to make straightforward sense of our paternalistic attitudes toward young children and of the possibility of self-sacrifice. Then there is a difference between what matters to a person and what benefits them, and a corresponding difference between empathetic concern and sympathetic concern.

2.2 Empathetic concern and sharing ends

To clarify the notion further, note that acting from empathetic concern is close to, but distinct from, an ideal of love as sharing the beloved's ends. On Ebels-Duggan's view, your beloved's choice of ends gives you reason to help her pursue those ends.¹⁷ Love-as-sharing-ends is meant to contrast with love-as-beneficence: for example, your partner's choice to take a new job gives you a reason to help her pursue that job, even if taking the job is a self-sacrificial decision on her part.¹⁸

Acting from empathetic concern is in one way broader than the phenomenon of sharing a beloved's ends. You can only share your beloved's ends once she has set those ends. But you act from empathetic concern for another by channeling her deep values, and deep values can come apart from the choice of particular ends. For example, we sometimes act akratically, making choices that are out of alignment with our deep values. To return to the sandwich example, your partner's deep values speak in favor of the falafel, and his akratic choice speaks in favor of the meatball sub. In such cases, our reasons to share our beloved's ends and our reasons to act from empathetic concern will pull in different directions. Another kind of example comes from cases in which agents generously set aside their distinctive values to make a particular choice. Suppose your friend's distinctive sensibility speaks in favor of joining a neighborhood trash cleanup crew this weekend, but she must keep an earlier promise to watch her brother's dog in another town. Love might give you a reason to help her pursue her end—

¹⁷ Ebels-Duggan 2008.

¹⁸ This example recurs throughout Ebels-Duggan's paper, but see its introduction on Ebels-Duggan 2008: 152.

you could let her borrow some dog toys, or water her plants while she's out of town. (Suppose you can't watch the dog in her stead.) But you could also act out of empathetic concern by joining the trash cleanup yourself. You can act on your friend's deep values, even when those deep values haven't manifested in a chosen end you could help her pursue.

Thus, you can act out of empathetic concern for another in a wider range of cases than those in which you can share her ends. Indeed, we can see this in the examples with which I began. Your friend's choice to plant a fig tree need not further *your* ends at all. You may merely have aimed to plant and care for *your* fig trees. And your decision to continue your mother's camping tradition need not further *her* ends at all. She may merely have aimed to camp herself. But our values can bear on a wider range of deliberative situations than we ourselves have confronted. Your friend can bring your values to bear on her choice of what to plant without furthering your ends. And you can bring your mother's values to bear on your choice of what trip to take this fall without furthering her ends. So acting from empathetic concern is in one way broader than the phenomenon of sharing a beloved's ends.

But it's in another way narrower. Sharing your beloved's ends requires doing certain actions. Acting from empathetic concern requires not only doing certain actions, but also seeing those actions in a certain light, and, indeed, doing those actions *because* you saw them in a certain light. Sharing another's ends has no similar mechanism-restriction: you don't need to empathize to share another's ends.¹⁹

2.3 *Valuing through another's eyes*

Acting from empathetic concern is, I submit, a reasonable specification of what it is to do what another would want, in cases where we do so by valuing through another's eyes and acting on those shared values. Acting from empathetic concern involves not simply valuing the object of your action (or the valuable consequences of satisfying your target's preferences), nor simply valuing the target who would want you to act as you do, but valuing the object of your action through your target's eyes.

Indeed, acting from empathetic concern for another requires more than merely valuing them, since it also involves valuing the object of one's action, insofar as one sees the object as giving reasons for that action. Acting from empathetic concern brings the objects of your target's values into the picture: it involves valuing another by responding to the reasons revealed by empathy, which, in turn, involves valuing what they value. But acting from empathetic concern also requires more than merely valuing the object of one's action in the same way as one's target. In particular, it requires that one come to value the object in a certain way *because* one's target would so value the object: one acts on a reason by imagining how that reason seems to one's target. Valuing through another's eyes has a causal, historical dimension. When your friend values fig trees through your eyes, she does not merely value fig trees in

¹⁹ This distinction naturally raises the question whether there's anything ethically significant about the mechanism of empathy, or whether it's merely one instrumentally valuable tool among others like observation or testimony. Here I ask the reader's patience—I'll return to that question in section 4.2.

the same way that you do. Rather, she values fig trees in the same way that you do because you would so value them. Her values are causally downstream of yours.

Similarly, in cases where you carry on your mother's camping tradition, listen to a friend's favorite musician, or channel your lover's distinctive habit of generous forgiveness because they would have wanted you to, you are often acting from empathetic concern for others. You do not immediately see the reasons for acting, but, by imagining the reasons as they appear to your target, you bring yourself to act as they would want you to.

Having clarified our target notion and distinguished it from nearby phenomena, we're now in a position to assess the reasons for acting from empathetic concern.

3. Reasons to act from empathetic concern

Doing what another would want requires two decisions: the decision produced from within the empathetic stance and the decision to adopt that stance in the first place. Different reasons apply to these different decisions. I consider each in turn.

3.1 Reasons that appear from within the empathetic stance

When we empathize with another, we can appreciate the reasons as they appear from her point of view. But we should distinguish between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons.

Empathy is not *necessary* for appreciating agent-neutral reasons. But empathy is a useful epistemological tool for doing so. For example, the sweet, refreshing taste of figs gives agent-neutral reasons to plant a fig tree, conditional on some tree being planted. Your friend has this reason, but may appreciate it only by empathizing with you. We often come to appreciate value in the world not by attending to the valuable thing directly, but by seeing it through the eyes of someone who already values it.

But your reason to plant a fig tree might be partly explained by a meaningful history with fig trees, which gives you an *agent-relative* reason to do so. Your friend may be able to inherit this agent-relative reason by empathizing with you. Even if she cannot cite her own meaningful history with fig trees as a reason to plant one, she can cite yours.²⁰

In some cases, the reasons that appear from within the empathetic stance may be *merely* apparent, as when your relative has rotten values. Suppose Michael's father is racist. If Michael were to empathize with his father, he would think he sees reason to pursue racist projects. But there are no such reasons: in this case, the empathetic stance casts no light on the reasons Michael has. The most plausible thing to say in this case is that Michael has no reason to act from empathetic concern for his father: any

²⁰ Consider how your friend might inherit your reason to fulfill a promise, if you have died and can no longer fulfill the promise yourself. Strictly speaking, these reasons are not the same, but one shadows the other: that *I* made a promise vs. that *my friend* made a promise.

reason to do so must be conditional on the empathetic stance revealing actual reasons. Michael's father's deficient values cut his son off from a valuable way of relating to him.²¹

I'm thus assuming a background picture of realist value pluralism: there are objective, mind-independent facts about the reasons we have, but a wide range of valuable projects which we can permissibly pursue, instantiating different, sometimes incompatible virtues.²² It's within this diverse range of permissible projects, where the empathetic stance reveals real reasons, that we most plausibly have reason to act from empathetic concern: to plant the fig tree rather than the apricot tree, to go camping rather than rent a room in the city, to generously offer forgiveness rather than judiciously withhold it.²³

3.2 Reasons to empathize in deliberation

There are both instrumental and non-instrumental reasons to empathize with others in our deliberation about what to do. I discuss each in turn.

We have instrumental reasons to empathize to guide our deliberation in at least two kinds of cases.

First, when our target is a relative expert on the reason we have, empathy with them can be a useful epistemological tool for appreciating our own reasons. Recall how if your friend is new to gardening and knows less than you about the relative merits of different fruit trees, then she can use your wants as a heuristic. When your friend does what you would want her to do, she is better able to act in accordance with her fruit-tree related reasons. And empathy with you can help her understand what you would want her to do. Similarly, when you empathize with your coach, your doctor, and Aristotle, you're better able to act in accordance with your baseball-, health-, and philosophy-related reasons, respectively.

In such cases, agents have reasons to act independently of their relationship with the target with whom they empathize. For example, your reason to empathize with your coach is fundamentally given by the reasons to play baseball a certain way, reasons you more fully act in accordance with by empathizing with your coach. You would have greater reason to empathize with a better coach. In such

²¹ You might wonder if this is also true in cases where values become deficient as an adaptation to injustice. (Elster 1982) I think that even in such cases we lack reason to act from empathetic concern. Suppose that, as a response to her sexist society, a mother formed the sexist preference that her daughter not go to college because of her sex. The daughter plausibly lacks reason to act from empathetic concern for her mother by not going to college. This reflects the fact that sexism changed what really matters to the mother, cutting off the daughter from a valuable way of relating to her mother.

²² See Raz (1986: 395–399) for a consonant characterization of value pluralism.

²³ The claim that we have reason to act from empathetic concern only when empathy reveals real reasons may be too strong. When our target has seriously deficient values—like racist values—it seems plausible. But in cases where our target has harmlessly mistaken values, we may still have reason to act from empathetic concern. Suppose your friend belongs to a false religion, and empathy with him doesn't reveal real reasons. Still, as long as acting out of empathetic concern for your friend is harmless, you may have reason to do so by, say, following his religion's traditions for a day.

cases, we treat the other's values as a Razian authority: empathizing with the other to guide our deliberation better enables us to act in accordance with the reasons we have independently of our relationship with the other. For Raz, "the normal way to establish that a person has authority over another person involves showing that the alleged subject is likely better to comply with reasons which apply to him (other than the alleged authoritative directives) if he accepts the directives of the alleged authority as authoritatively binding and tries to follow them, rather than by trying to follow the reasons which apply to him directly."²⁴ In cases of acting from empathetic concern out of deference to experts, I am suggesting that another's *wants* play the same heuristic, instrumentalist role as another's *directives* in classic cases of Razian authority.

Of course, we can often simply *listen* to an expert's expression of her preferences to guide our deliberation by her values. You might better comply with your reasons to play baseball a certain way simply by paying attention to your coach's advice. But we often don't have easy access to an expert's advice: you might have graduated from your best mentor's tutelage, or she may have died, or perhaps she has gone on vacation. In such cases, you might try to empathize with her to see how her values would apply to your deliberative situation. And even when you do have easy access to an expert's actual advice, it's often helpful to supplement the expressed advice—especially vague guidance like "Not so aggressively" or "More oomph" that are typical of instruction in physical and creative practices—with a mental model of the expert's sensibility.

But you might wonder whether such cases can ever really arise. If you have a mental model of an expert's assessment of your reasons, doesn't that just make you an expert? Certainly, those who can to some degree empathize with experts are in a better epistemic situation than those who can't. But there's a difference between having some access to an expert sensibility and actually inhabiting such a sensibility. Even with significant experience in some practice, you may need to supplement your default deliberative mode with a new set of eyes, even an imagined one. Suppose you're stuck in your writing. You might ask yourself, "What would my advisor suggest?" Even if your reconstruction of your advisor's point of view will be foggy and piecemeal—supposing that there is a genuine gap in expertise between you—such promptings shake you out of your deliberative slump.

The second kind of case in which we have instrumental reason to act from empathetic concern for others is one in which we can achieve good consequences by satisfying another's preferences and pleasing them. Recall the earlier examples: you might mop the floors as your boss would want you to (in order to keep your job), mow your lawn as your neighbor would want you to (in order to stave off his fits of rage), or fix the salad that your partner would want you to (in order to satisfy her palette). In such cases, you can achieve a valuable outcome by pleasing another, and their wants guide you to what would please them. Then you have instrumental reason, given by the value of pleasing them, to empathize with

²⁴ Raz 1986: 53.

them as you deliberate. For the same reasons as given above, empathy is often helpful as a supplement to another's expressions of her preferences, or a replacement for those expressions when the expressions are not available.

But the instrumental reasons to empathize in our deliberation fail to fully explain why acting from empathetic concern can be emotionally resonant and relationally significant. If your friend defers to you as an expert on fruit trees, you may feel seen and understood by her, and you may feel appreciated and respected. But her action doesn't directly reveal anything about her attitudes toward your friendship. Nor does it have any forward-looking implications for your friendship: you wouldn't feel invited to treat her as a closer friend if she's merely using your wants as a heuristic. Similarly, although your friend's intention to please you by satisfying your preferences may reveal that she values your friendship, and it may invite you to treat her as a closer friend, the decision to do so by the efficient means of empathizing with you seems to have no direct relational significance. Furthermore, if your friend intends to please you for some further reason, e.g., to win a bet, then her action has no bearing on your relationship at all.

This suggests that there are some non-instrumental reasons to empathize in deliberation. Recall the variant of the fig tree case in which you are not an expert on fruit-tree-related reasons (so empathizing with you does not better help your friend act in accordance with such reasons), and you are dead (so your friend cannot please you by satisfying your preferences). In that case, your friend lacks instrumental reason to empathize with you in her deliberation. But your friend still seems to have some reason to do so. And, further, that reason seems to be grounded in your friendship with her.²⁵

We can explain this with a general picture on which many loving relationships bear the virtue of *value transmission*, a virtue achieved when one relative comes to value as the other does because the other does. It is a healthy, fitting part of many loving relationships that one relative passes their values along to the other: that your friend come to value fig trees as you did, that you come to value camping in the mountains as your mother did, that I come to value generous forgiveness as my lover did, etc. Shared valuing, much like shared activity, is a way of being *close* to your beloved. This is most obvious with respect to the dead: we can no longer talk to them, benefit them, or do things with them, but their values and our relationship with them can shape the way we see and engage with the normative world. That shaping is both a testament to and constitutive of a close, loving relationship with them. This is part of what we mean when we say that the dead live on in the hearts of their loved ones.

²⁵ For more on the idea that relationships can give reasons, see Kolodny 2003. It is plausible that acting from empathetic concern is only valuable because people are valuable, and respecting their distinctive evaluative outlooks appropriately responds to their value. One might then object that reasons to act from empathetic concern stem from the *target's* value, not the *relationship's* value. But it is also plausible that one has greater reason to be swayed by the points of view of one's intimates than by the points of view of strangers. If one's relationship gave no reason to act from empathetic concern, it's unclear why intimacy would matter.

The idea that value transmission is a virtue of loving relationships is consonant with Cocking and Kennett's mutual drawing view of friendship, on which close friends are "characteristically and distinctively receptive to being directed... by the other,"²⁶ i.e., "developing interests or activities, which they do not already pursue, primarily because they are the interests and activities of the other."²⁷ For example, a friend might happily join another at the ballet even if she has no independent interest in the ballet. A good friend gets "infected" by the other's enthusiasm.²⁸ In the same spirit, I am suggesting that within certain loving relationships, loved ones are infected by the other's values generally.²⁹ Thus, within many loving relationships, I submit, you have reasons to value as your beloved does merely because she so values.

Now, supposing that you do have reason to value as your beloved does, how does it follow that you have reasons to empathize with them in order to deliberate? My thought is that doing so makes you *receptive* to value transmission. When we successfully act from empathetic concern, we value as another does because they so value. Take the case of your friend acting out of empathetic concern for you by planting a fig tree. She comes to value fig trees as you do—perhaps temporarily, only while she's planting the tree—because you do. You transmit your values to her, bringing you closer together. This explains why acting from empathetic concern can be emotionally resonant and relationally significant. When we act out of empathetic concern for another merely because they are our friend, or sister, or beloved, we respond to our valuable loving relationship with them. In contrast, when we act out of empathetic concern for another because they are an expert, we are responding merely to the independent value of the underlying activity, a value we expect the expert to be better attuned to.³⁰

Many loving relationships are partly constituted by a transmission of values, and that transmission of values is one of their valuable features. Loving relationships, in general, are *attitude-*

²⁶ Cocking and Kennett 1998: 503.

²⁷ Cocking and Kennett 1998: 504. Cocking and Kennett also emphasize that close friends are receptive to their interpretation by the other.

²⁸ Cocking and Kennett 1998: 504.

²⁹ See also Lingle (forthcoming)'s claim that respecting another's perspective and being open to influence by it is part of a valuable interpersonal ideal, most obviously in intimate relationships but perhaps more generally.

³⁰ Empathetic concern may not be *necessary* for value transmission. Suppose your grandmother loved tiramisu. Years later, acting on a subconscious impulse, you decide to try making it, and you come to love it yourself. You come to value what your grandmother did, though not because you acted on the reasons as you imagined they appeared to her. That transmission of values may be a subconscious but loving response to your relationship with your grandmother. You might reasonably feel closer to her, once you realize that her values have affected yours. This confirms the idea that value transmission is one virtue of many loving relationships, but it raises the question whether *empathy* in particular has any normative significance. I return to this question in 4.2. But here I'll just note that empathizing with another in order to deliberate is perhaps the most *direct* means of making yourself receptive to value transmission. We can't generally *decide* to be subconsciously influenced. But in some cases, we lack the imaginative resources to get in another's head: I just can't understand what my partner likes about tennis. In that case, I might just *play tennis* to see what my partner likes about it, rather than trying to empathize with her prior to acting. But we can think of such cases, loosely, as part of an extended, experience-assisted exercise in empathy.

dependent, requiring, and partially consisting in, an ongoing history of certain attitudes between the relatives: to be friends with another, for example, you must care for them, care for your relationship with them, and intend to engage in certain activities with them.³¹ For many loving relationships, I suggest, these attitudes include empathetic concern and value transmission.

The attitude-dependency of loving relationships reveals a further instrumental reason for empathizing in deliberation. By doing so, we can *strengthen* our valuable relationships, making them more valuable.³² Attitude-dependent relationships can be strengthened by instantiating the attitudes on which they depend. A relationship's strength has a backward-looking, descriptive component: to describe someone as your *close* friend or your *good* friend is to say, in part, that you have a strong history of exhibiting the attitudes toward each other in which friendship consists. But a relationship's strength also has a forward-looking, normative component: to have an especially close or good friend is, in part, to see especially strong reasons for continuing to have such attitudes toward them.

A stronger valuable relationship is, all else equal, more valuable, in the sense that it gives rise to stronger reasons to preserve, cherish, and value it. If we have reason to give rise to more valuable friendships, then we have an instrumental reason to act from empathetic concern for our friends: doing so increases the value of our valuable friendships, by increasing their strength.³³ But unlike acting on the other instrumental reasons, acting on this instrumental reason can still be emotionally resonant, in the same way that a new friend's invitation to a dinner party can be emotionally resonant as an invitation to strengthen the relationship.

3.3 *How the reasons interact*

At the level of motivation, there is a clean separation between the reasons that appear from within the empathetic stance and the reasons to take that stance in the first place. Suppose that an agent Agatha acts from empathetic concern for a target Terrence by ϕ -ing. When she decides to take the empathetic stance, she is motivated by her relationship with Terrence, which gives her reasons to be receptive to value transmission. But when she decides to ϕ from within the empathetic stance, the relationship sinks

³¹ Kolodny 2003: 149.

³² Strengthening a valuable relationship only makes it more valuable if the relationship is valuable in the first place. For example, if the relationship between mafiosos is not valuable, then strengthening the relationship makes it no more valuable, and may make it less. There also may be limits to how strong a relationship can be, in which case empathetic concern would merely sustain it, not strengthen it.

³³ The result can be a virtuous cycle. A valuable relationship gives its relatives reasons to act from empathetic concern. That action then in part constitutes a more valuable relationship, which gives its relatives stronger reasons to act from empathetic concern, etc. In the limit, as in certain kinds of marriages, the relatives' two emotional and evaluative points of view become impossible to disentangle.

into the background: she is motivated merely by the reasons for ϕ -ing to which Terrence is attuned.³⁴ At the limit, Agatha may internalize Terrence's way of seeing things as her own. His values may take hold. If so, then her relationship no longer appears as a reason for ϕ -ing, not even a backgrounded one: she is consciously motivated only by the reasons she and Terrence share.

Nonetheless, I submit, Agatha's relationship with Terrence remains a *justifying* reason to ϕ . If asked why she ϕ s, Agatha might cite not only her directly motivating reasons, which she shares with Terrence, but also her relationship with Terrence, which gave her reason to take the empathetic stance. Recall the causal, historical dimension of valuing through another's eyes: when Agatha values ϕ -ing through Terrence's eyes, she does not merely value ϕ -ing in the same way that Terrence does. Rather, she values ϕ -ing in the same way that Terrence does *because* he would so value ϕ -ing. Her values are causally downstream of his. Terrence's values have transmitted to Agatha. The historical dimension of valuing through another's eyes has a normative upshot: our justification for acting on a certain value can depend on where we got that value. Agatha came to see things the way she now does because she earlier responded to the value of her relationship with Terrence. Her present responses to value, though they are not themselves direct responses to the value of her relationship, bear the trace of an earlier such response, like a scar bearing the trace of earlier hostility.

I suggest that Agatha's present responses to value, and her decisions to act on those responses, strengthen her relationship with Terrence, even if the relationship no longer appears to her as a reason for action. This would explain why, were Agatha and Terrence to reconnect after several years apart, Terrence might be touched to hear Agatha say, "You know, I still ϕ ." Had Agatha come to see the reasons to ϕ without ever empathizing with Terrence, her decision to ϕ may still be justified but would not strengthen a valuable relationship. To see another way that our present responses to value bear the traces of their history, consider how your responses to valuable activity change after a breakup. If you often made pasta with your beloved, watched noir films, or danced to "our song," then you will do those things with difficulty, with a twinge of sadness, after breaking up. You cannot attend only to the valuable qualities of those activities without remembering that you came to appreciate that value from a point of view shared with another.

To summarize, when your friend plants the fig tree because you would want her to, what are her reasons, and why is her action emotionally resonant and relationally significant? She plants the tree partly for relationship-independent reasons, e.g., that figs are sweet and refreshing. These are the reasons that you acted on when you planted a fig tree, and empathy with you better helps your friend act in accordance with those relationship-independent reasons. But she also plants the fig tree *because you value fig trees*.

³⁴ Compare Pettit and Smith 1990's view that, while deliberating, reasons for action are foregrounded and the agent's desires are backgrounded. This also fits with Raz's claim that when another would want us to ϕ , that generally gives us a second-order reason to ϕ for a reason given by the underlying value of ϕ -ing, reasons that appear from within the empathic stance.

That's a reason she has in virtue of her relationship with you. Then, by imagining her reasons as they seem to you, she makes herself receptive to value transmission. She not only appreciates, abstractly, that your point of view is just as respectable as hers. She sees it as fitting that your point of view guide hers in a way characteristic of many valuable loving relationships. She reveals that she values her friendship with you: she sees it as one that gives her reasons to have empathetic concern for you. And her decision then strengthens the relationship itself, by making it one in which one friend is swayed by another's values. The stronger relationship then gives each participant reasons to treat each other as closer friends.³⁵

As the reader may have noticed, your wants no longer play a central role in our story. On this story, it's actually misleading to say that your friend's reason to plant the fig tree is that you would have wanted her to. Rather, her reasons are that figs are sweet and refreshing and that you value fig trees, where she has the latter reason in virtue of your friendship. In fact, these are the same as your reasons to *want* her to plant the fig tree. Your reasons to so want are that figs are sweet and refreshing and that you value fig trees, where you have the latter reason in virtue of your friendship. Your friend's *decision* to plant and your *desire* that she do so are two responses to the same normative considerations. Some cases confirm this. Suppose that your father loves building radios but doesn't especially care whether others do so. It seems this doesn't block your relationship with him from giving you a reason to take up building radios: doing so is still a way of making yourself receptive to value transmission, which is a fitting response to your valuable relationship with him. Thus, the phenomenon we've landed on—acting from empathetic concern, making oneself receptive to another's distinctive values—is in one way broader than our initial target—doing what another would want you to do.³⁶

4. Partial credit

In another way, we've landed on a narrow phenomenon. We've discussed a concrete notion of what is paradigmatically involved in doing what another would want—one that, I hope, captures the kind of emotionally resonant, relationally significant action that features in the fig tree case. In particular, we've focused on acting from empathetic concern: valuing through another's eyes and then acting on those shared values. But one might wonder whether each of these components contributes to the relational

³⁵ Because one can take the empathetic stance in order to deliberate for merely instrumental reasons, one could also, on our current definition, act from empathetic concern for merely instrumental reasons. We could give a more restrictive definition of acting from empathetic concern to rule this out. That is, we could add a motivational condition, such that I act from empathetic concern for you iff I act on the reasons as I accurately imagine they appear to you, *and I do so as a response to our relationship*. I flag this as a possibility, but, for simplicity, I will not assume the motivational condition going forward.

³⁶ However, another's wants could still play two indirect roles. First, another's wants could be a useful heuristic for their assessment of your reasons: another would want you to ϕ , that could attest to the fact that she sees reason for you to ϕ . Second, another's wants could bear on the quality of the relationship and the reasons it gives, given the attitude-dependency of many relationships: if another doesn't want you to value what they value, then that may *make it the case* that your relationship is not the kind of relationship in which value transmission is a virtue.

significance of such actions. Perhaps one can achieve the relational significance of doing what another would want merely through one of these components, decoupled from the other. I discuss each possibility in turn.

4.1 *Empathy without action*

One might think that merely empathizing with another, without acting from empathetic concern, would be just as emotionally resonant and relationally significant: it would reveal that one has seen or understood the target; it might reveal that one values one's target and relationship with them; and it might strengthen the relationship itself.

Empathy can certainly be emotionally resonant and relationally significant. We reasonably care that others, especially our loved ones, can see where we're coming from, evaluatively. Consider how you might say of your beloved, "No one *gets* me like her," or how you might lament, "My parents never really *understood* me."³⁷ And empathy can be emotionally resonant and relationally significant even without action. For example, you might respond to the value of your relationship with your sister by seeing a political protest the way she would, without being moved to join it. But, first, if you are not moved in the same way your sister would be, then perhaps you don't really see the protest the way she would. And, second, empathizing with another is simply not always a response to a relationship. Consider a detective who empathizes with a killer to predict his next move. The detective empathizes with the killer, but not to deliberate from within the empathetic stance. She does not expect empathy to reveal underappreciated values. Rather, she empathizes to unearth psychological facts about the killer that will help her catch him. The detective has reasons to empathize, but those reasons are not given by a valuable relationship with the killer. The detective is not responding to a relationship in part because she does not *appreciate* the point of view she adopts, and she is not making herself receptive to value transmission. But by deliberating from within the empathetic stance, we endorse the other's emotional and evaluative point of view. By deliberating, we assert both that we understand their perspective and that it is fitting or reasonable to be guided by it.

But then one might wonder whether this *empathetic deliberation*—deliberation guided by the reasons revealed by empathy—is maximally emotionally resonant and relationally significant, whether or not one *acts* on the new reasons that appear from within the empathetic stance. After all, empathetic deliberation is all it takes to understand another and appreciate their distinctive concerns. For example, suppose you were on your way to continue your dead mother's camping, but you encounter a child drowning in a pond. By empathizing with your mother, you see reason to continue the tradition. But that reason is outweighed by the reason to save a drowning child, a reason you did not need to empathize with your mother to appreciate. It is tempting to say that you realize all the relational value there is to realize in this case, and that the relational value cannot be hostage to the weight of competing reasons.

³⁷ For a consonant view of empathy, see Bailey 2022.

It is tempting to say that one appropriately responds to the value of a relationship by giving reasons to do what another would want due consideration, regardless of whether one actually *does* what another would want. That view is plausible.

But there is a compelling alternative. In this case, you can reasonably regret that you did not get to *do* what your mother would have wanted.³⁸ That regret is partly grounded in your relationship with your mother, not just in the reasons that appear from within the empathetic stance. We do not only want our values to color our view of the world and how we deliberate. We want to act on those values. In a full life, one's distinctive values play an active role. We are drawn to see the world from our loved ones' points of view, and we want our loved ones to be similarly drawn. We want to share our values with our loved ones. But we also want our loved ones to be able to *act* on our shared values. The virtue of value transmission is most fully realized when the relatives act on their shared values. So some relational value may be realized by *doing* what another would want beyond the value of empathetic deliberation.

4.2 Action without empathy

On the other hand, one might wonder whether empathy contributes at all to the emotional resonance and relational significance of doing what another would want. One can, in a minimal sense, do what others would want without seeing those actions in the light that they would. Consider Kris, who finds her friend's list of favored charities and donates to his favorite, an animal welfare charity. She cannot see, and does not try very hard to see, what her friend finds valuable about animal welfare. She says to herself, "So long as this charity isn't morally abhorrent, it's enough that this cause matters to my friend. I don't need to understand his concerns to be moved by them." Kris is, in a minimal sense, doing what her friend would want. But, since she is not empathizing, she is not acting from empathetic concern. One might wonder whether Kris misses out on anything by not empathizing. Indeed, one might suspect that empathy would make Kris's action *less* emotionally resonant. Doing what another would want in the minimal sense, without empathizing with them, requires *faith* in one's relative. By acting on her friend's preferences, Kris expresses faith in her friend and his values, even if she doesn't understand them. If Kris empathized with her friend and saw animal welfare the way he does, she could no longer have faith in him in this area. Since such expressions of faith are plausibly responses to the value of a relationship, one might think, empathy deprives Kris of a mode of responding to the value of her relationship.

This line of thinking is correct, but incomplete. As an expression of faith in one's relative, doing what another would want in the minimal sense does fittingly respond to the relationship. And doing so

³⁸ Your mother may have wanted you to save the drowning child. But if your present decision has no causal connection to your mother's drowning-child-related values, then you don't respond to or strengthen the value of your relationship with her by saving the child. On the other hand, if your mother wouldn't have wanted her to save the drowning child, then you may have been empathizing with her with respect to the restricted domain of family traditions. In either case, saving the drowning child would not respond to or strengthen the value of your relationship with your mother.

may be emotionally resonant and relationally significant. But, first, there are the values of empathy itself that Kris misses out on: Kris's friend cannot say that Kris has understood where she's coming from. And, second, acting from empathetic concern is a *distinct* way of responding to a relationship, even if it is not the only way. Compare Kris to Liz, who, by empathizing with her friend, comes to see that animal welfare is valuable and that she has compelling reason to donate to his favorite charity. After her realization, she donates. Because Liz is motivated directly by animal welfare, she doesn't express faith in her friend. But she is still responding to her friendship. By acting from empathetic concern, Liz is making herself receptive to her friend's values. When we exercise the evaluative muscle that takes us from seeing- ϕ -ing-as-worthwhile to ϕ -ing, the guiding values might actually take hold in our character.

None of this is to say that Kris is a bad friend, or even that Kris is a worse friend than Liz, only that Kris and Liz achieve different virtues as friends. Kris expresses faith in her friend. Liz understands her friend and makes herself receptive to the transmission of her friend's values. These are each distinctive, valuable ways to be a friend.

5. Scope

In many relationships, we have reason to act out of empathetic concern for our relative. But, as Kris and Liz illustrate, action from empathetic concern achieves merely one distinctive relational virtue among others. More generally, what kinds of relationships give us reason to act out of empathetic concern? And within those relationships, when do we have such reasons, given that there are other distinctive ways to achieve relational virtues? I'll discuss these questions in turn.

Loving relationships, including friendships, are the most familiar case in which we have reason to act out of empathetic concern for another. Making yourself receptive to another's values can be especially intimate, thus the emotional resonance and relational significance of acting from empathetic concern. Acting out of empathetic concern outside of loving relationships risks overstepping relational bounds. Suppose that your neighbor, with whom you've chatted in the elevator, starts wearing clothes in your style. He tells you, "I wasn't initially drawn to these chunky boots, but I wanted to see things your way, to value what you value." Such an expression of intimacy would be inappropriate and creepy, given that you hardly know each other. (Indeed, that's why your neighbor may not be doing what you would want him to do, even if he is channeling your values.) This might suggest that *only* within loving relationships do we have reason to act out of empathetic concern.

However, I think this would be too narrow. Note, first, that many of our relationships inhabit particular evaluative domains. Your relationship with a student takes place within a scaffolding of certain academic, philosophical values that structures your conduct: you press her to make her arguments sharper, her prose clearer, her conclusions less vulnerable to counterexamples, etc. Similarly, your relationship with your neighbor takes place within a scaffolding of certain neighborly values: you share sugar, watch each other's animals, invite each other to holiday parties, etc. Even if these are not

loving relationships, I submit that they give their participants reasons to act out of empathetic concern for each other *within their common evaluative domain*.³⁹ It would be inappropriate for your student to act from empathetic concern for you when she decides what to name her child. But, in writing her essay, she might do what you would want and deploy a literary example rather than a contrived one. Similarly, it would be inappropriate for your neighbor to act from empathetic concern for you when he decides what to wear. But, when you move away and a new neighbor moves in, he might do what you would want and greet her with banana bread rather than cookies. And those decisions might be responses to valuable relationships with you, relationships which give reasons to channel your distinctive philosophical or neighborly values. I don't feel pressure to insist that these valuable relationships be *loving* or *intimate* ones in order to give such reasons. Nevertheless, having registered my openness to this extension of scope, I will set such cases aside because I think loving relationships are the most familiar case.⁴⁰

But even within loving relationships, we don't always have reasons to act from empathetic concern. Not all loving relationships are conducive to value transmission. You can love a young child, even if you can't make yourself receptive to the child's distinctive values—supposing young children have values. And some loving relationships are adversarial. If you have a long-running respectful rivalry with another philosopher, you might develop a loving relationship with them. However, that relationship might not give you reasons to value what they value. Indeed, you might have reason to value what they *don't* value.

And even within typical, non-adversarial loving relationships, there are some limitations on *when* and *how* we should act out of empathetic concern for our loved ones. First, as I argued in section 3.1, when your loved one has seriously deficient values, you lack reason to act out of empathetic concern for them. Doing so could even be morally precluded: you shouldn't shoplift, even if your brother would want you to. Similarly, acting from empathetic concern could be wrong for the banal reason that you're obliged to do something else, like keep a promise.

Second, typical friendships will feature a fair distribution of empathetic concern: neither friend is always ditching their values for the other's without reciprocation, just as neither friend is always giving the other gifts without reciprocation.⁴¹

³⁹ Similarly, you can act from empathetic concern restricted to a certain evaluative domain. For example, suppose Alice's father is sexist and would prefer that she quit her job to live a domestic life. Alice can still do what her father would want with respect to the restricted domain of what movie to see tonight—perhaps his distinctive values would go for the musical comedy over the historical tragedy. Deep disagreement along one dimension of value need not preclude empathetic concern along another.

⁴⁰ However, a relationship does need to be valuable to give us reasons to act from empathetic concern. If the fellow-mobster relationship lacks value, then we have no reason to respond to its (nonexistent) value.

⁴¹ Different kinds of relationships may call for different distributions. For example, parent-child relationships have distinctive trajectories that call for distinctive patterns of empathetic concern. Parents of young children will seldom act out of

Third, while a healthy loving relationship will feature empathetic concern, empathetic concern should not crowd out other attitudes. Friends, for instance, have reason to do what each other would want, but this doesn't exhaust their reasons as friends. They also have reasons to give gifts and favors, to tell secrets and jokes, to lend compassionate ears and candid advice, to express faith in each other (as Kris does), to share ends, and to just enjoy shared activities. We can't bring all this under the heading of empathetic concern, nor should we try to. And excessive empathetic concern for others could objectionably alienate us from our own values. A healthy relationship with our values often requires commitment even in the face of reasons to reconsider them.⁴² Empathetic concern is thus part of a balanced diet of attitudes loved ones should have for each other. So although, as I've argued, we have reason to act from empathetic concern for others, centrally in loving relationships, it's not as though we should always be acting out of empathetic concern for everyone.

6. Conclusion

I've investigated a paradigmatic way to do what another would want that I call acting from empathetic concern, where we act from empathetic concern for others by acting on the reasons as we accurately imagine they appear to them. While we have instrumental reasons to empathize with others in order to deliberate, given at least by the reasons to perform the underlying activity or the reasons to please our targets, we also have non-instrumental reasons to do so, given by our loving relationships with others. These non-instrumental, relationship-based reasons explain why doing what another would want can be emotionally resonant and relationally significant: when we act from empathetic concern for others, we reveal that we understand our target and their distinctive concerns and that we value our relationship with them by making ourselves receptive to value transmission. We also strengthen the relationship itself, making it one in which one relative is swayed by another's distinctive perspective. A more minimal form of doing what another would want, one that doesn't require empathy, can also be emotionally resonant and relationally significant, as can empathy without action. But action from empathetic concern achieves a distinctive relational virtue, especially within loving relationships.

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empathetic concern for their children. And as their children age, they will want to strike a balance between passing their values onto their children and letting their children autonomously form their own values. At a certain point, parents will have reason to make themselves receptive to their children's distinctive values by acting from empathetic concern for them: by listening to their favorite band, by coaching their little league team with a mind open to what they value about baseball, etc. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the subtleties of this case.

⁴² For argument for an analogous claim about faith and commitment to one's beliefs, see Buchak 2021.

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