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Famine, Affluence, and Empathy

One of the greatest challenges to ordinary moral thinking and to recent moral theory has been the views and arguments advanced by Peter Singer in his classic paper, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality."[1] Philosophers have struggled with and in many cases attempted to refute Singer's conclusion that our moral obligation to relieve hunger or disease in distant parts of the world is just as great as, say, our obligation to save a child drowning in a shallow pool of water right in front of us. But although this debate continues to be very lively, virtue ethics has not joined in the fray. It has simply not taken up the main issue Singer's paper has been thought to raise, the issue of whether the making of substantial sacrifices in order to help those suffering in distant parts of the world is obligatory or (merely) supererogatory. In the present essay, however, I shall attempt to grapple with Singer's ideas from a virtue-ethical perspective. But I shall be making use, not of the tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics that has occupied so prominent a place in the recent revival of virtue ethics, but of a form of virtue ethics that has its roots in eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism [as espoused by] Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. Let me now say a bit about recent developments within this alternative tradition of virtue ethics and then go on to discuss how such an approach might be able to offer us an answer to the questions Peter Singer raises.

 Neither Hume nor Hutcheson focuses on "caring" about others as a motive: their discussions of morality made use, rather, of concepts like benevolence and sympathy. But the ethics of caring recently proposed and developed by Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and others seems very clearly in the moral sentimentalist tradition and is naturally (and typically) also regarded as a form of virtue ethics, since it evaluates human actions by reference to how much (of the inner motive of) caring they express or exhibit.[2] And I regard a virtue ethics of caring as the most promising (and interesting) form of present-day sentimentalism. Speaking very roughly, an ethics of caring holds that an act is morally (all) right if it doesn't exhibit a lack (or the opposite) of caring and wrong if it does. (Brushing your teeth may not evince caring, but the point is that it also doesn't evince, exhibit, or reflect a lack of caring concern about others.)

However, when Noddings originally wrote about caring, she had in mind the kind of caring for others that takes place, so to speak, in intimate or at least face-to-face relationships. Caring *about* the fate of (groups of) people one has merely *heard* about didn't come under the rubric of caring; and since morality does take in our relations with such distant and personally-unknown others, Noddings held that the ethics of caring represented only a limited—though important and previously neglected—part of morality. Others who came later, however, sought to show that caring about people who are distant from us can and should be taken within the purview of the caring approach to ethics (these others include Virginia Held and myself); and nowadays and in recent work Noddings seems to be convinced of the essential rightness of making such an expansionist move on behalf of the ethics of caring.

Therefore, when I speak of acts exhibiting a caring attitude or one inconsistent with caring, the caring I am speaking of includes attitudes toward distant and personally-unknown others, not just attitudes toward people we are acquainted with or love. The term "caring" is thus a placeholder for a description of an overall attitude/motivational state, one that takes in both one's concern for people one knows (intimately) and one's concern for distant others and that embodies some sort of proportionality or balance between these concerns. An ethics of caring will hold that it is virtuous to be more concerned about near and dear than about strangers or those one knows about merely

by description; but it will also insist that an ideally or virtuously caring individual will be substantially concerned about people who are distant from her (not to mention animals). The question of what constitutes an ideal or morally required proportionality or balance as between these concerns is a complex and difficult one, and our discussion in what follows will constitute an attempt at least partly to deal with it. Certainly, Singer seems to hold that we have as much reason to concern ourselves with distant others as with individuals we are personally intimate with; but there also something morally counterintuitive about this. The idea that we have special (or stronger) moral obligations to those who are near and/or dear to us is both familiar and ethically appealing at a common-sense level. But I hope now to show you how an ethics of caring, which has so far tended merely to *assume* such special obligations on the basis of the intuitive plausibility of such an assumption, can say something at least partly to justify it.

To do so, however, the ethics of caring needs to make use of some notions that play an important role in the thinking of Hume and other eighteenth-century figures, but that have been largely neglected by those seeking to develop a systematic ethics of caring. Hume (especially in his *A Treatise of Human Nature*) holds that our concern for others operates via a mechanism he calls "sympathy," but the notion he is working with (there) is actually closer to our contemporary term "empathy," and the difference or disparity may be partly accounted for by the fact that the latter term didn't enter English till the early twentieth century. So Hume doesn't have the terminology for distinguishing empathy from sympathy, but the phenomenon he calls sympathy seems much closer to what we mean by empathy than by sympathy.

Now these terms are not easy to define, but by "sympathy" I think we mean a kind of favorable attitude toward someone. One feels sympathy for someone in pain, for example, if one feels *for* them (or their pain), wishes they didn't have the pain, wants their pain to end. By "empathy," on the other hand, we mean a state or process in which someone takes on the feelings of another: one empathizes for another who is in pain, if one "feels their pain" (as opposed to feeling *for* their pain). Obviously, a great

deal more could be said about this distinction, but, given the prevalence of these notions in contemporary parlance, I hope the reader will readily follow what I shall be saying about empathy. Hume saw empathy/sympathy as a kind of *contagion* whereby the feelings of one person spread to (cause similar feelings in) another person, but in recent years there has been enormous interest in the subject of empathy on the part of social psychologists, and in that literature the "contagious" aspect of empathy is but one feature of the landscape. Numerous studies of the factors that affect empathy and of how empathy develops have been published, and various psychologists have also offered general accounts of the role empathy plays in human psychology and in human life. But one central aspect of that literature will most concern us here as I suggest a way of developing the ethics of caring further.

Recent work on empathy has to a substantial extent focused on the question whether the development of empathy is necessary to an individual's development of altruistic concern for others—this is called the "empathy-altruism hypothesis." Many (but by no means all) psychologists have seen recent work in the field as supporting the empathy-altruism hypothesis, and this literature is relevant to the present essay at least in part because it is possible to hold that caring works via empathy and that the contours of morally good caring can be specified in relation to how human empathy develops or can be made to develop. I believe that a virtue ethics of caring that grounds caring in human empathy as recently studied by psychologists can provide us with a way of answering Singer's arguments. But before appealing further to this interesting recent psychological literature, let me just briefly say how I came to realize the usefulness of appealing to (developed human) empathy in working out a sentimentalist virtue ethics of caring.

An ethics of caring can easily say that we have a greater obligation to help (born) fellow human beings than to help animals or fetuses, and such a comparative judgment has the kind of intuitive force or plausibility that a virtue ethics of caring might wish to rely on (though I assume that the intuition about born humans and fetuses will operate more weakly or will be undercut altogether in someone with a strong

religious conviction that the fetus has an immortal soul). Some years ago, however, I was led in a different direction as a result of having my attention called to an article by Catholic thinker (and U.S. Circuit Court judge) John Noonan, in which (I was told) abortion is criticized, not for failing to respect the rights of the fetus, but for showing a lack of empathy for the fetus. I was absolutely galvanized by hearing about Noonan's article because (for one thing) it immediately occurred to me that the notion or phenomenon of empathy is a double-edged sword, and reading the article itself did nothing to disturb this conclusion. If we believe that empathy has moral force or relevance, then since it is in fact much easier for us to empathize with born humans (even neonates) than with a fetus, we can argue that it is for this reason morally worse to neglect or hurt a born human than to do the same to a fetus or embryo. And this conclusion might end up giving more sustenance to the pro-choice position than to the pro-life view of abortion.

Moreover, it almost as immediately occurred to me that a virtue ethics of caring, rather than rely on our intuitions about our stronger obligations to born humans than to embryos, fetuses, or animals, could explain the intuitions, the differential obligations, by incorporating the idea of empathy. (In thinking thus I was implicitly regarding the empathy-altruism hypothesis as at least somewhat plausible.) Instead of claiming that actions are right or wrong depending on whether they exhibit or reflect what intuition tells us is properly contoured and sufficiently deep caring, one can say that actions are wrong or right depending on whether or not they reflect or exhibit a deficiency of normally or fully empathic caring motivation. It would then, at least other things being equal, be morally worse to prefer a fetus or embryo to a born human being, because such a preference runs counter to the flow of developed human empathy or to caring motivation that is shaped by such empathy. And similar points, arguably, could be made about our moral relations with lower animals.

I believe that the concept or phenomenon of empathy can also help us to formulate a virtue-ethical answer to the questions Singer raises in "Famine, Affluence, and Altruism" (and elsewhere). An ethics of caring expanded and reconfigured so as to hinge on the idea of *developed human empathy* gives us reason to hold, pace Singer, that a failure to save the life of a distant child by making, say, a small contribution to Oxfam is not morally as objectionable or bad as failing to save the life of a child who is drowning right in front of one. We shall see that such a sentimentalist ethics of empathic caring can also allow us to draw other important moral distinctions, and I shall then also speculate briefly on the prospects of such a theory as a general and systematic approach to morality and metaethics.

Recent moral philosophers have written a great deal on the question, raised by Singer's article, of how much we are obligated to spend of our own time, money, or other resources in order to save the lives of people who are personally unknown to us but whom we are in fact in a position to save. But this issue, as I have suggested, rests on the question of whether we are more obligated to help a child drowning before our very eyes than to help any given child whom we know about only indirectly (as part of some labeled group rather than via personal acquaintance). As Singer points out in his article, the most *obvious* difference between the drowning child and a child we can save via contributions to Oxfam is one of spatial distance, and Singer himself hold that sheer distance simply cannot be morally relevant to our obligations to aid (or to how morally bad or objectionable it is *not* to aid). As a result, he concludes that we are just as obligated to give to Oxfam as to save the drowning child, and iterations of this argument lead him to the conclusion that most of us are morally obligated to make enormous sacrifices of our time, money, comfort, etc., in order to help distant (or nearby) others who are much worse off than we are.

However, in recent years Singer's quick dismissal of distance has come to be questioned on the basis of considerations that I want to examine here while, at the same time arguing that empathy in fact gives us a firmer basis than distance for distinguishing the strength of our obligations to the drowning child and our obligations to those we can only help (say) through organizations like Oxfam. Spatial distance and (decreasing) empathy do in fact correlate with one another across a wide range of cases, and that very fact may have helped to obscure the role empa-

thy potentially has in explaining the sorts of distinctions people intuitively, or common-sensically, want to make with regard to the kinds of cases Singer mentions. But before saying anything further about the role of empathy here, it will be useful to say a bit more about the role sheer spatial distance might be thought to play in Singer-like cases.

Some of those who have lately considered the moral relevance of distance have regarded that issue as effectively involving two separate questions: first, whether we intuitively regard distance as making a difference to our obligations and, second, whether different intuitive reactions to third- or first-person cases involving distance would show anything important about (differences in) our actual obligations. In his book *Living High and Letting Die,* for example, Peter Unger considers both these issues and defends a negative answer to both of them.[3] He thinks that our superficial intuitions about cases may not ultimately carry much weight in moral theory of in determining where our obligations really lie. But he also holds that our differing moral intuitions about relevant cases don't track distance so much as (what he calls) salience and conspicuousness.

However, Frances Kamm disagrees with these views. She thinks that (a rather complicated notion of) distance *does* help to explain our differing intuitions about cases and also is relevant to our actual obligations in such cases.[4] Singer asks us to consider the difference between a situation where we can save a child from drowning at small cost to ourselves and one where we can save a distant child from starvation by making a small contribution to a famine relief organization, noting, but also deploring, our initial tendency to think that saving the child is morally more incumbent on us in the former situation than in the latter. But Kamm believes the factor of distance (or proximity) makes a relevant moral difference in/between these two cases, and, in order to rule out other factors that might be thought to be determining our moral judgments in those cases (like whether others are in a position to help), she devises other examples that she believes bring out the intuitive and real moral force of the factor of distance (proximity).

Both Unger's book and Kamm's paper are rich and extremely complicated, and what I have to say here won't go into every nook and cranny of what they say. But I find it interesting and a bit surprising that neither one of them considers the moral importance of our empathic tendencies or capacities. For example, in denying the intuitive or actual moral relevance of distance, Unger comes up with a category of salience/conspicuousness (also with a category of the dramatic or exciting, but I will discuss that a bit later) that he does take to be relevant to our intuitive judgments, but never once considers how what one might easily take to be a related notion—what we can readily or immediately empathize with—might be relevant, or thought to be relevant, here. Similarly, Kamm considers and rejects what Unger says about salience or conspicuousness (she also talks about vividness) in favor of the idea that (complexly understood) distance is relevant to distinguishing between cases like the drowning child and starving examples mentioned earlier, but somehow the subject of empathy never comes up.[5]

But I believe the notion of empathy can help us sort out our intuitive reactions to the kinds of cases Singer, Unger, and Kamm describe better than the explanatory factors they mention, and let me say something about this now. In the familiar drowning examples, someone's danger or plight has a salience, conspicuousness, vividness, and *immediacy* (a term that, for reasons to be mentioned below, I prefer, but that Singer, Unger, and Kamm don't use) that engages normal human empathy (and consequently arouses sympathy and concern) in a way that similar dangers we merely know *about* do not. So if morality is a matter of empathy-based concern or caring for/about people, we can not only explain why a failure to help in the drowning case seems worse to us than a failure to give to famine relief, but also justify that ordinary moral intuition.

The idea that seeing or perceiving makes a difference in arousing or eliciting empathic and altruistic reactions is by no means, however, a new one. Hume makes this essential point (while using the term "sympathy") in the *Treatise;* and Hume also seems to hold that differences in what naturally or normally arouses sympathy/empathy affect the strength of our moral obligations and what virtue calls for.[6] Moreover, there are recent psychological studies of empathy that bear out Hume's earlier observations/speculations. Martin

Hoffman's recent book, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice,* usefully summarizes and reflects upon numerous psychological studies of the development of empathy and its role in creating or sustaining caring/concern for others, and one thing that both Hoffman and the previous studies emphasize is the difference that perceptual immediacy tends to make to the strength of empathic responses.[7] (However, Hoffman is more cautious than Hume is and I want to be about the moral implications of these psychological differences.)

In the light of the present moral emphasis on empathy, then, let's next consider what Kamm and Unger say about various cases. For example, in discussing the salience/conspicuousness that Unger invokes in explaining our (for him misguided) intuitions, Kamm distinguishes subjective and objective salience. Then, focusing on the former, she speaks of the science-fiction case of someone who can see a person suffering overseas with long-distance vision.[8] The suffering would then be salient, conspicuous, or vivid for the individual with the long-distance vision, but Kamm says that it is (intuitively) acceptable for that individual to "turn off" her long-distance vision (and pay no more attention to the fate of the person she has seen than to the fate of distant others she *hasn't* seen). But if she can turn it off, presumably she is also permitted simply to *turn away, avert her gaze;* and that is certainly what the view Kamm defends about the relevance of proximity implies.

However, I don't think this conclusion is in fact morally intuitive, and I believe considerations of empathy help to explain why. Turning away from someone we see (even if only at an extreme distance) seems *worse* than ignoring someone whom one knows about only by description; and assuming, for example, that one has the means instantly to deliver help either to someone whose danger or need one sees through long-distance vision or to someone whose danger or need one merely knows about, most of us, I think, would consider it inhumane to turn away from the person whose plight one saw and then (coldly) decide to give the aid to someone one merely knew about. What is inhumane here arguably has something to do with empathy, with a failure of empathic response to someone whose need one sees. The

immediacy or vividness of such perceived need engages our (normal or fully developed) human empathy more deeply or forcefully than need known only by description, and so a morality that centers around empathy in the way(s) I have been suggesting can explain our moral reactions to Kamm's case here better than Kamm's appeal to (complexly contoured) distance and proximity does, and it is difficult to see how Kamm can use this example to argue successfully against the view that subjective salience or vividness is relevant to our moral intuitions.

Interestingly, Kamm does say that what we see at an overseas distance would exert "psychological pressure" on us to help. But she dismisses that pressure as somehow outside the bounds of our moral intuitions, because she thinks that we lack any intuition that tells us we have more obligation to the person we see than to someone we don't. If, however, and as I have just claimed, we do have such an intuition, then what she terms mere psychological pressure is in fact a moral intuition that her emphasis on distance fails to account for, but that a view based on empathy can.

Kamm then turns to an example of objective salience a la Unger. She imagines that the person with long-distance vision sees a group of people in trouble and that one of the people is wearing a clown-suit and is much more dramatically exhibiting his need for help than the others. Kamm holds that that should make no moral difference to whom one feels one should help, and she uses this example to argue for distance as opposed to objective salience. But a view emphasizing empathy can also (and perhaps more fully) account for our intuitions about this kind of case. The person in danger of drowning or starvation who is in a clown-suit and busy waving his arms or making histrionic gestures may be more visibly obtrusive; but such a person may seem to be faking fear or pain (hamming it up), whereas someone else who is quieter or less demonstrative may bear the marks of suffering or anxiety more genuinely than the person in the clown-suit and for that very reason more strongly engage our empathy. Such a case creates problems for an Ungerian objective-salience account of our moral intuitions, but not for a moral theory that is based in empathy; and I also believe the

latter can account for differing intuitive reactions to variants on this kind of case better than a view that stresses distance.

Thus imagine that the person in the clown-suit isn't hamming it up. He and all the others are genuinely writhing in pain, but you notice him first because of his clown-suit and find yourself absolutely riveted on him. Assuming you can help only one of the people in the group, would we find it equally acceptable for you to turn away from the clown-suited man and decide that you might as well help *someone else* in the group, as for you to decide to help him? I think not. I think, again, we would find it lacking in or contrary to normally flowing human empathy, inhumane, for you to turn away from the man instead of helping him *in response to* your vivid recognition of his need. If his need has greater initial immediacy for you, then that, I think, is an intuitively good reason to go with the flow of empathy and help him out, given that one can only help one person in the group. But Kamm's account in terms of distance doesn't allow for this sort of reason. Let us, however, consider a further example.

Unger denies that there is any intuitive or real moral difference between cases where an accident victim one can help is nearby and visible to one and cases where the victim is at some distance and one learns about his plight via Morse code.[9] But Kamm thinks he is mistaken here about our intuitions and claims the difference is due to factors of distance;[10] and while I agree with Kamm that there is a significant difference between such cases, it seems to me more plausible—or perhaps I should say more promising—to explain it in terms of empathy.[11]

We have illustrated the moral force of (considerations relating to) natural human empathy in terms of examples having to do with our moral relations with the fetus (and animals) and have gone on to discuss cases, familiar from the literature that has grown up around Peter Singer's work, that raise issues about our obligations to people whom we see or don't see, or who are near or far from us. The latter kinds of examples all involve dangers or emergencies of one kind or another, but we have yet to consider another sort of danger/emergency case that has often been discussed by philosophers, cases where the issue is not so much (or cannot so easily be imagined to be) spatial proximity or distance, but rather *temporal* proximity or distance.

I am thinking of the well-known example of miners trapped in a coal-mine (as a result, say, of a cave-in). We typically feel morally impelled to help the miners rather than (at that point) expend an equivalent amount of money to install safety devices in the mines that will save a greater number of lives in the long run. But some have disagreed. Charles Fried discusses this example in his *An Anatomy of Values* and claims that we/society should prefer to install the safety devices and let the miners die. (He gives his argument a rather barbaric twist by saying we should even be willing to convey this decision to the ill-fated miners face-to-face, if that is somehow possible.)[12]

This example, this choice, doesn't turn on a contrast between near and far or between what is perceived and what is not, because we can easily imagine that those who have to choose whom to save are at a distance from the mine and don't know or perceive either the trapped miners or those who might be in danger there in the future. We can well imagine, for example, that *we* are somehow empowered to make the choice, having heard or read reports of the mine cave-in, and I don't think the tendency to prefer saving the presently-trapped miners would then be explainable in terms of an empathy-derived preference for saving those whose dangers we are perceptually aware of rather than those whose dangers we merely know about.

Still, if we have to choose between the presently-trapped miners and those who will be in danger in the future, there is an immediacy to the danger the former are in that does, I think, engage our empathic/sympathetic juices in a way that the danger to the latter does not. Of course, there is also an immediacy to our previous examples of a child drowning and of a clown-suited person whose distress is (immediately) visible to us, but this immediacy, clearly, is perceptual and hinges on issues about the *spatial* distance that direct perception can accommodate. A rather different kind of immediacy is at issue in the miners example, an immediacy having more to do with the present-tense temporal character of the miners' danger—the fact that it is a "clear and present danger"—than with any

spatial or spatially-correlated factors. But both kinds of immediacy appeal to our empathy in a way that situations not involving these forms of immediacy tend not to do. (The fact that the word "present" applies both to a time and to a mode of sensory contact seems very apt, given this common appeal to empathy.)

Thus we may not see or hear or personally know the miners who are now trapped, and, because they are thus known to us only as a class or by description, the empathic appeal of their plight—as compared with the plight of those who are going to be in danger later—is different from the empathic (moral) appeal of (dangers to) those we are perceptually aware of. But it is natural to think of both kinds of cases as involving some sort of immediacy, and that may be the best term for describing the (projected?) objective correlate, in certain kinds of situations, of our (subjective or psychological) tendency toward empathy. And the fact that we can use such correlated immediacy and empathy to explain our moral reactions not only in the cases discussed in the Singer literature, but also in the miners case gives further support to what was said above about Singer-type cases and to the general account of morality I have been sketching.[13]

If that account is correct, then what is morally wrong with installing safety devices (as Fried suggests) rather than helping miners who are in clear and present danger is that it exhibits (or reflects or expresses) a deficiency of normal(ly developed) human empathy.[14] But by the same token someone who turns away from someone she sees in order to help someone she merely knows about (as in the kinds of examples Kamm and Unger talk about) will (other things being equal) also exhibit/demonstrate an underdeveloped capacity for empathy and a consequent coldness that we regard as morally questionable. And this sentimentalist (and virtue-ethical) way of approach moral issues also helps to explain why Singer is wrong to think that failures to save via organizations like Oxfam are in the same moral boat (so to speak) as a failure to save a child drowning right in front of one: the former simply doesn't exhibit as great a lack of (normal) human empathy as the latter does or would.

One implication of what I have been saying is that an ethics based on empathy yields a partialist, rather than an impartialist, understanding of morality.

Fried's suggestions about what we should do in the miners case are ethically repugnant or worse, but it is not as if he is advocating a selfish or egoistic indifference to the miners. Rather, he is urging us to see them and everyone else, present or future, in terms of a strictly impartial concern for humans (or sentient beings) generally. If this seems morally inadequate, and if a virtue-ethical sentimentalist approach can make use of the idea of empathy to offer us a promising explanation of why it is inadequate, then we are given reason to see morality (and the world of our moral concern or caring) in a partialist way; and the same partialism likewise conflicts with and tells against the views Peter Singer defends. Indeed, Singer has claimed that partialism has never been given an adequate principled defense;[15] and whether or not this is true, the approach I am taking is intended as offering, or being on the way to offering, such a defense of partialism.

The observant reader may have noticed, however, that I have not so far explicitly argued that Singer is wrong to maintain that we are under a moral obligation to sacrifice a great deal of our time and/or money to help those less fortunate than ourselves. He reaches that conclusion via a lemma that we *have* questioned, namely, the idea that we are as obligated to help distant individuals we don't know as to save a child drowning right in front of us. But it is time for us now to be a little more explicit about the reasons why, on the present approach, we are not obligated to make enormous sacrifices of the kind Singer recommends, but can view such sacrifices, rather, as *supererogatorily* good or praiseworthy.

The social-psychological literature supports, on the whole, the idea that human beings have a substantial capacity for empathy and for altruistic concern(s) based on empathy. Hoffman in particular gives a fascinating and in many ways compelling account of how moral education can lead us in fact toward an empathic concern for (groups of) people we don't know very well or even at all (the people of Bangladesh, the homeless, victims of AIDS).[16] But Hoffman also makes it clear that (he thinks) there are limits to how much empathy for (disadvantaged) groups people can be led to develop. Self-interest (or egocentric desires, fears, hatred, etc.) can often strongly oppose or qualify

what we may or might otherwise do out of empathy or empathic concern for others.[17] If so, then our general account will yield the conclusion that we are not morally obligated to sacrifice most of our time and money to help needy others, because a failure to do so doesn't evince an absence of normally or fully developed human empathy. In that case, if it would take someone with an unusually high degree of empathy and empathic concern—a degree of empathy and empathic concern beyond what most people can be led to develop—to be willing to make such a sacrifice, then such sacrifice will be morally supererogatory—morally praiseworthy and/or good but *not* (pace Singer) obligatory.[18]

But even if this is so, it may still be obligatory for individuals like ourselves to make some sort of substantial contribution toward the relief of hunger (or similarly worthy causes). Those who do not may be acting wrongly because they evince a degree of empathic concern that is *less* than what most people can be led to develop. (Hoffman and others say a great deal about how moral education can in fact induce empathy and caring for people we don't know personally.) At the very least, then, even if Singer exaggerates what morality demands of us, it may nonetheless be true that many of us should give a good deal more for the relief of famine or disease around the world than we actually do.

However, in making use of a virtue-ethical moral sentimentalism based on empathic caring in order to argue against Singer's views, I have not considered certain well-known problems that any attempt to revive moral sentimentalism would have to face. Sentimentalism needs to be able to offer a plausible account of deontology (roughly, the moral distinction between doing and allowing, between killing and letting die), and this is something that it has, arguably, never successfully done. It also needs to explain how moral utterances or judgments can be grounded in sentiment rather than in rationality and rational concepts, and there is no doubt that this task represents a very difficult challenge to any attempt to revive moral sentimentalism. There are other difficulties too,[19] but let me at this point, and having noted these problems, simply say that I think that a contemporary sentimentalist ethics of caring is in

fact up to tackling these challenges (something I attempt to do in a forthcoming book entitled *Moral Sentimentalism*). In any case, for present purposes it is enough, I think, to see that and how an ethics of empathic caring can offer us a substantive and intuitively plausible response to the ideas and arguments of Singer's classic paper.

NOTES

1. *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, 1972, pp. 229–43.

2. See, e.g., Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982; and Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984. Noddings sees her approach as continuous with eighteenth-century sentimentalism; but the connection has also been frequently mentioned by others.

3. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

4. See her "Famine Ethics" in Dale Jamieson, ed., *Singer and His Critics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999, pp. 162–208.

5. I don't think Kamm ignores empathy because she thinks it too *subjective*. Unger's salience, as she notes, has a subjective aspect, but can also be viewed in a more objective way as what is or would be salient to a normal observer. But empathy also allows such a distinction, and the view I want to defend focuses on what calls forth (more or less) empathy (or empathy-involving concern) in a human being with a fully developed capacity for empathy.

6. On these points see the *Treatise*, ed., L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958, pp. 370, 439, 441, 483f., 488f., 518f.

7. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp. 209ff.

8. Pp. 182f.

9. Op. cit., esp. p. 36.

10. Op. cit., p. 184.

11. Unger in fact notes (p. 36) that such cases differ with respect to "experiential impact," a notion that ties in with empathy. But he doesn't pay much attention to impact, presumably because he (mistakenly) thinks that it makes no significant difference to our intuitions.

12. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970, pp. 207–27 (esp. p. 226).

13. Interestingly, Hoffman, loc. cit., speaks of empathy as having a "here and now" bias, and the studies he cites make it very clear that our empathy flows more readily not

only in regard to what is visible or perceived, but also in regard to what is current or contemporaneous.

14. Unger (op. cit., pp. 78f.) describes a case in which a meteor has fallen to earth and will explode with disastrous consequences in a densely populated area unless someone immediately steals an "Ejector" machine from its rightful owner and uses it to hurl the meteor to a deserted canyon. He thinks one is permitted to steal and operate the Ejector in such circumstances, but says that the "dramaticness" of the trouble involved here makes no difference to that permission. Yet this example involves just the sort of clear and present danger that we saw in the case of the trapped miners, and if empathy is relevant to morality, then dramaticness (or at least what makes for drama in the case Unger describes, namely, the clear and present danger) may in fact make a difference not only to our intuitions, but to (the strength of) our moral obligations.

15. See Singer's "A Response [to Critics]" in Dale Jamieson, ed., *Singer and His Critics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1999, p. 308.

16. Hoffman, op. cit., esp. Chapters 3 and 13.

17. See op. cit., esp. Chapters. 2, 8, and 13.

18. A virtue ethics based on empathy can point to the greater ease or naturalness of empathizing with those near and dear to us (with those we know and love) as a basis for arguing that we have especially strong moral reasons to be concerned with such people. But, for simplicity's sake, I am treating the issue of self-interest vs. concern for the unfortunate as if it didn't also involve issues about our obligations to near and dear. Note too that, if what I have been saying is on the right track, the issue of helping needy distant groups will arise (or will arise with greatest force) only when one is not facing any more *immediate* issue of need or danger.

19. For example, one might wonder whether our reliance on empathy would lead us to make *too many* moral distinctions. Thus if people of one race or gender are more empathically sensitive to those of the same race or gender, then the distinctions in our attitudes and behavior that empathy explains may, at least some of them, be morally invidious; and this would represent a serious problem for any attempt to explain morality systematically in terms of empathic caring. I offer a response to such worries in *Moral Sentimentalism*.