Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective

EXPLORING KNOWLEDGE AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON

Participatory Sense-Making as a Route Towards 'Genuine Empathy': A Response to Dinishak's Reply, Janna van Grunsven and Sabine Roeser

BY SERRC *on* OCTOBER 4, 2024 • (0)

Janette Dinishak's work has helped shed critical light on the scientifically questionable and ethically troubling tendency in psychology and philosophy of mind to theorize autistic people as deficient empathizers. In a recently published reply on the *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective*, Dinishak (2024) brings her important perspective on this topic to bear on our paper "AAC Technology, Autism, and the Empathic Turn" (2022). Dinishak is largely sympathetic to our view while also raising a number of rich and thoughtful philosophical questions. Since each of these questions is capable of jumpstarting a lengthy exchange, we focus our response on those questions that, we hope, are particularly fruitful for advancing further conversation. With this aim in mind, we also engage with some of Dinishak's own insights from her 2016 chapter "Empathy, Like-mindedness, and Autism." ... [please read below the rest of the article].

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Article Citation:

Van Grunsven, Janna and Sabine Roeser. 2024. "Participatory Sense-Making as a Route Towards 'Genuine Empathy': A Response to Dinishak's Reply." *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 13 (10): 8–19. **https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-9bN**.

🔷 The **PDF of the article** gives specific page numbers.

This Article Replies to:

❧ Dinishak, Janette. 2024. **"Reflections on Genuine Empathy: A Reply to van Grunsven and Roeser's 'AAC Technology, Autism, and the Empathic Turn'."** *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 13 (6): 24–30.

Highlighted Resources:

❦ Van Grunsven, Janna and Sabine Roeser. 2022. **"AAC Technology, Autism, and the Empathic Turn."** *Social Epistemology* 36 (1): 95–110.

❦ Bollen, Caroline. 2023. **"Towards a Clear and Fair Conceptualization of Empathy."** *Social Epistemology* 37 (5): 637–655.

1. What is Genuine Empathy? An Initial (and Purposely Evasive) Answer

The over-arching question running through Dinishak's reply concerns the notion of *genuine empathy*. In our paper, we define genuine empathy as "a capacity for relating to others who [can] have genuinely different experiences of the world," whereby we "open ourselves" (96) to "the other person in her otherness as someone who occupies her own perspective onto a world we can nevertheless share" (101).[1] The ability to empathize with others who have genuinely different experiences of the world is vitally at stake in real-life contexts of allistic-autistic interaction. There is a deeply fraught history of allistic (i.e. non-autistic) people failing to perceive autistic people's embodied behaviors as expressive of robust lived experiences, intentions, needs, and desires.[2] For instance, autistic "stimming" (e.g. rocking, humming, flapping) is often perceived and theorized as meaningless and non-communicative, while an abundance of testimonial evidence shows that stimming is in fact richly expressive (Kapp et al. 2019).

A host of interventionist therapies and technologies have been developed with the aim of training (or forcing) autistic people (often beginning in early childhood) to express themselves in ways that match allistic embodied expressions of mindedness and agency. These assimilatory efforts, which fail (or refuse) to recognize certain autistic embodied behaviors as meaningful expressions of autistic people's lived experiences, have often had detrimental effects on autistic people, who express a desire to be empathized with on non-assimilatory terms (Sinclair 2012). Thus, establishing routes towards 'genuine empathy' could play a significant role in promoting autistic people's well-being.

In light of these stakes, Dinishak wants to know how our "notion of 'genuine empathy' constitutes (or at least contributes to) a rethinking of practical and philosophical understandings of empathy in desirable ways." As there is admittedly much more to be said about this than we managed to do in our paper, she rightfully asks:

> *But what is genuine empathy? ... Is it a feature an individual person may have or lack, or ... a co-constituted feature of successful social interaction? If it is a feature of an individual person, is it ... (a)n experiential state? A way of perceiving? Is it affective or cognitive or both (25)?* [3]

There are different ways to answer this series of questions. Most obviously, one could tackle them one by one in a manner that clearly situates our notion of genuine empathy within the wider landscape of empathy research. Though we will give substantive answers to some of these questions below, we also believe there are good reasons for resisting clear and fixed answers to at least some of them. Let us explain. When Dinishak confronts us with the above series of questions, she is

effectively capturing a point widely recognized by empathy researchers: disagreements and confusion surrounding the meaning of empathy are high—perhaps so high that the fruitfulness of the concept is called into question (Dinishak 2016; Goldman 2011; Nicolaidis et al. 2019). In fact, the confusion doesn't end at the conceptual level. As shown by our (now former) PhD. candidate, Caroline Bollen, much of the research in psychology that seems to support a view of autistic people as deficient empathizers utilizes methods for measuring empathy that are either in tension with precisely the type of empathy allegedly measured or that involve circular reasoning (Bollen 2023b). These methodological problems affect research that presents autistic people as having deficient affective empathy, cognitive empathy, or the right "equilibrium" between these two dichotomized forms of empathy.

Dinishak is cognizant of such issues and brings out the ethical harms that might stem from operating with these entrenched dichotomized conceptualizations of empathy: "Research findings on cognitive and affective empathy in autistic individuals are mixed, and autistic individuals have argued that the cognitive-affective distinction ... perpetuates harmful stereotypes." Put differently, it is not only in light of the conceptual and methodological confusions surrounding the concept of empathy (what it is and how it is to be measured, assuming it is the sort of thing that can be measured), but also in light of *the fact of neurodiversity itself* that one might have legitimate reasons to resist calcified views about empathy.[4] The fact that people process information, experience the world, and express their minded experiences, intentions, and emotions in a rich variety of ways, should caution us against adopting fixed views about the mechanisms and behavioral markers characteristic of empathy.[5]

In line with these concerns, our initial characterization of 'genuine empathy' was mainly motivated not so much by an ambition to offer a positive vision of a distinctive form of empathy, situating yet another (sub)type of empathy in an already complex and fraught landscape. Rather, our point can be understood as a constitutive one: if empathy minimally entails the capacity to relate to or be open to another person as a particular individual with a distinctive viewpoint onto the world, then empathy, if genuine, should encompass forms of relating to others that do not depend upon the detection of similarities. After all, a narrow focus on similarity could leave out precisely those aspects of their personhood that makes them the distinctive being that they are. How this is in fact achieved by a given individual or between two individuals within a given context, can take on a variety of shapes; it can unfold without much effort through a direct perceptual grasp of the other's bodily expressed affects and intentions; through a more effortful cognitive process of figuring out what things might be like for them; through a 'feeling' for and with them, and also, as we will argue momentarily, through a certain openness to that which can emerge through processes of embodied interaction and adjustment.

Dinishak may already anticipate a rejoinder along these lines. As she notes, our "ways of characterizing what genuine empathy involves appear neutral with respect to whether genuine empathy is affective, cognitive, or both." Still, she presses on:

> *Given the prevalence of the affective-cognitive empathy distinction in theorizing about autism and issues autistic individuals' have raised about it, I would be curious to hear what implications, if any, van Grunsven and Roeser's rethinking of empathy, particularly their concept of "genuine empathy," has for the (purported) distinction. For example, would distinguishing cognitive and affective dimensions of empathy or treating them as two separable capacities be misguided within their enactive framework (29)?*

The dichotomy between reason and emotion that seems to underly the distinction between cognitive and affective empathy has been challenged by many authors in the philosophy and psychology of emotions; so-called cognitive theories of emotions that emphasize that emotions have cognitive and affective aspects and can be a form of practical rationality (cf. e.g. Solomon 1993; Nussbaum 2001; Roberts 2003; Roeser 2011; Frijda 1987; Lazarus 1991; Damasio 1994; Scherer 1999).[6] In line with our earlier point about the fact of neurodiversity, these theories show that affect and cognition can be intrinsically intertwined as well as on a spectrum that can come in different degrees and compositions, varying both per person and per a concrete situation. Enactivism, too, rejects the rigid dichotomy between affective and cognitive empathy operative in the bulk of today's mainstream empathy research. Elaborating more on enactivism and its bearing on empathy research is important, since Dinishak invites us to expand on this more than once. In particular, she is also interested to hear more about our suggestion that *participatory sense-making*, a central enactive notion, is "the soil of genuine empathy" (Van Grunsven and Roeser 2022, 105) We are grateful to Dinishak for raising these points. They allow us to say more about a philosophy of mind that offers a stark contrast with the very different picture of human mindedness that informs much of today's mainstream empathy research. As we discuss in the next two sections, one vital difference between these two pictures is that they offer different perspectives on the possibility of genuine empathy in contexts of emphatic dissimilarity.

2. The Possibility of Genuine Empathy: as Seen from the 'Like-Mindedness Paradigm'

One's views about w*hether* empathy in contexts of significant dissimilarity is possible and *how* empathy might be achieved in such contexts, will depend on one's underlying philosophy of mind. After all, empathy concerns the meeting of two minds; the ability of one minded being to understand, see, connect with, another minded being as someone who occupies her own distinctive

perspective onto the world. As Dinishak has argued (2016), the dominant way of thinking about empathy is informed by the *like-mindedness paradigm*. This paradigm, which holds that empathy presupposes the detection of similarities between empathizer and empathize, has been articulated into different theoretical proposals, most notably *simulationism* and *theory-theory*.

While simulationism and theory-theory present different views about the mechanisms and capacities of the mind that enable a person to empathize with another person, both theoretical approaches accept the same starting point. According to this starting point, mental states, mainly beliefs and desires, are the core constituents of human mindedness. These mental states are intangible; we cannot directly touch, see, or feel them. This, then sets up the challenging question of how one mind relates to another mind precisely *as* a mind, with simulationism and theory-theory offering different answers to that question.

As Dinishak (2016) discusses, the simulationist answer has been particularly influential in empathy research. Simulationism is essentially an ego-centric approach to empathy, with empathizers using their acquaintance with their own mind as a model for simulating the other's perspective. According to simulationism, we often run these simulations quite successfully without any effort and with (near) automaticity. At other times, the establishment of empathy requires more effort. In either case, a sense of like-mindedness facilitates the process. As Dinishak puts it:

> *Recognition of like-mindedness helps us determine which of our beliefs, desires, commitments, values, and so forth to include in the simulation and which to quarantine. When the empathizer and the target are like-minded and the empathizer perceives them to be such, the empathizer can rely more on egocentric defaults in the initial stage of simulation. Fewer adjustments (i.e., supplementing individuating information and quarantining one's own genuine states) to the egocentric starting point need to be made for successful simulation (7-8).* [7]

In certain instances the process of "supplementing individuating information and quarantining one's own genuine states" could enable genuine empathy, which, to repeat, we defined as an ability to be open to the other's distinctively different experiential perspective onto the world. For instance, when you perceive your child reaching for a cold glass of milk, you will likely be able to see their action in terms of *their* desire for milk, even though you yourself profusely dislike the flavor of milk. Quarantining "one's own genuine states" (e.g. one's dislike of milk) might work fine in these instances, as there are also plenty of shared beliefs and desires in place to make sense of your child's minded agential behavior.

However, as Dinishak has argued (2016), this simulationist method for 'unselving' likely runs into profound limitations when it comes to allistic people's ability to genuinely empathize with autistic others (and vice versa).[8] The problem, Dinishak explains, is that the simulationist process of empathizing is focused on matching and quarantining the relevant "beliefs, desires, commitments, values, and so forth" (7). This focal point is not surprising, given the simulationist's commitment to a philosophy of mind that sees inner mental states (typically beliefs and desires) as the mark of the mental. Dinishak, however, notes that breakdowns in empathy between allistic and autistic people are prone to occur at the more primordial level of embodied sensorimotor experience and movement:

> *The wide array of sensory, movement, and perceptual differences reported in autism suggest that how autists perceive and sense the world may differ, but also, even more fundamentally, what they perceive and sense may differ. What they look at, how they move, what they orient to and attend to, and how they respond to the same kinds of stimuli non-autists encounter make for experiences, perspectives, and ways of being in the world that are atypical and unfamiliar to those without these differences (2016, 13).*

Dinishak argues that this creates an insurmountable challenge to the possibility of allistic-autistic empathy *if empathy works by means of simulationist mechanisms and methods.* In a passage worth citing in full, she helpfully brings out the problem:

> *Suppose that one tries, through simulation, to understand the thoughts, feelings, and actions of an individual who has developed along this atypical [autistic] trajectory. To achieve isomorphism during the matching phase of simulation one would have to somehow inhibit and suppress pervasive aspects of one's perspective on the world, including one's basic orientation towards one's physical and social environment and how one responds and moves in such environments. It is doubtful that [autistic-allistic] forms of different-mindedness are the kinds that can be corrected for through the piecemeal addition and subtraction of particular beliefs, desires, commitments, and values. Even if these differences are the kinds that can be addressed by quarantining aspects of one's cognitive system that clash with theirs in relevant ways, one might still wonder whether enough or the right kind of like- mindedness is "left" after quarantining to use oneself as a model and imaginatively take the perspective of the unlike-minded other (Dinishak 2016, 21–22).*

This impossible matching activity (of somehow 'unselving' all the way down to 'how one responds

and moves in [one's] environment' while simultaneously keeping in place enough of one's self to serve as a model for empathic connection), seems to make genuine empathy deeply enigmatic in contexts of heightened experiential differences (Dinishak 2016, 26). Crucially, though, the flailing method described here is tethered to a very specific picture of mindedness and social cognition that one need not accept. Glancing beyond this outlook, Dinishak asks:

> *Could other accounts of social cognition accommodate [allistic-autistic] understanding, given these forms of unlike-mindedness among autists and non-autists? Most theories of interpersonal understanding would seem to depend on the condition of like-mindedness. ... Still, it would be premature to say there are not or could not be other such accounts (23–24).*[9]

If there would be no alternative accounts, we might be all but forced to give up on the possibility of genuine empathy between autistic and allistic people. Quite probably, the troubling ethical upshots of this skeptical conclusion are what compelled Dinishak to ask us to expand on the relation between genuine empathy and the enactive approach to social cognition and participatory sense-making. Turning now to this approach, we will argue that enactivism can indeed provide an alternative paradigm that can help overcome the limitations of the dominant like-mindedness approaches to empathy.

3. From Separated Simulating Minds to Exposed, Expressive, Entangled and Emotional Bodies

The like-mindedness paradigm paints a rather linear and static picture of how human minds can relate to one another empathically. This stems from a background understanding of human minds as marked by hiddenness and separateness. With each human mind essentially closed off from other human minds, social cognition becomes the feat of one mind finding its way into the minds of others—a feat we (presumably) accomplish by finding cues, detected similarities, that enable us to simulate or infer the hidden mental states that constitute other people's perspective onto the world. From this starting point of methodological individualism, the 'soil' of empathy is those (affective and/or cognitive) mechanisms and capacities located inside the mind-brain of each individual person that enable them to cross that bridge into the mind of the other.[10]

Enactivism works with a decidedly different picture of (human) mindedness, making available a different approach to empathy. From an enactive perspective, the like-mindedness paradigm misses something vitally important about the human mind, namely its embodied entanglement with its environment. To a degree, Dinishak (2016) highlights this as well, when drawing attention to the

differences in autistic vs. allistic people's embodied sensorimotor ways of being in the world. We agree with Dinishak that we should take very seriously the fact that autistic people can differ profoundly from allistic people in how they engage their environment as expressive self-moving sensorimotor embodied minds. Enactivists too have insisted on this point (De Jaegher 2013), and a failure to recognize genuine sensorimotor differences between autistic and allistic people might lead us straight back to the problematic assimilationism that we spoke of before. That said, we also believe there is more to be said about autistic and allistic embodiment.

One could argue that Dinishak's view of embodiment, as characterized above, retains a remnant of the like-mindedness framework. Put in a somewhat exaggerated way, Dinishak relocates the picture of minds as more or less self-enclosed spheres populated by mental states to the level of sensorimotor embodiment, with autistic and allistic people being locked inside their sensorimotor embodied perspectives. But this way of framing human embodiment leaves out something vital. From an enactive perspective, human bodies are not fortresses that lock us into our experiential perspective. Rather, to be embodied is to be a self-maintaining organic system that is simultaneously bounded *and* semi-permeable.

As an entity that actively has to maintain its integrity as a bodily bounded system, the "primary condition" of a living being is "one of concern and want," propelling it "outward and forward, beyond its present condition in space and time" and condemning it to continually make sense of and with a world upon which it depends and by which it is ineluctable affected (Thompson 2007, 156). This outward propelling world-dependency of needful living bodies, which enacts an environment that is meaningful in relation to a living embodied self's self-maintaining activities, *just is* cognition. Crucially, though, cognition is at bottom inextricably interwoven with affectivity, as living embodied beings sense-making relationship to the world is "fueled by want, concern, and need" (Thompson 2007, 156).

Many of the wants, concerns and needs that texture the embodied lives of human beings are emphatically social. There is robust empirical research supporting the view that infants too young to have the *concept* of, say, an intention or a belief or the ability to detect similarities between self and other, perceive and respond to others as minded intentional agents with viewpoints of their own. As enactive-aligned developmental psychologist Vasu Reddy puts it: "It is also clear that from birth infants are not 'just perceiving' others' intentional actions, but are jumping right in to imitate, respond, anticipate, and invite, adjust to and, before the end of the year, even deliberately disrupt them (Reddy 2008, 175). **[11]** Through emotionally charged interactions, infants acquire a growing sense of themselves and of others as agential expressive beings who they gain a better understanding of by engaging with them. Bodily modes of expressivity (gestures, sounds, prosody), rhythmic turn-taking, distance standing and other embodied dimensions of interpersonal interaction play a vital

role in how we navigate our lives with others, how we connect (or fail to connect with them), and if/how we are able share a world together. This is participatory sense-making; the enacting of shared spaces of meaning through a continual attunement and adjustment to the other's expressive embodied agency.

One important upshot of this enactive perspective is that a person's minded life is not reducible to their sum total of beliefs, desires, perceptions, and reasons for action. Hence, obtaining a sense of another person's "humanity in its specificity" as Dinishak so nicely puts it, doesn't necessarily depend upon simulationist-style efforts to understand their beliefs and desires (2016, 26). We also obtain a sense of who someone is as a continually enacted self by getting a sense of their bodily rhythms, movements, styles of comportment, the ways in which our coordinated activities succeed (and sometimes fail) to enact shared spaces of meaning.[12] At the same time, while our "humanity in its specificity" is in part reflected in our individual bodily rhythms, styles of expression, etc., the embodied enactive self is emphatically not static, but continually 'reshaped' through interaction (Fuchs and De Jaegher 2009).

Having this in view might help answer one of Dinishak's questions: "Perhaps genuine empathy and participatory sense-making are two stages in a longer process of relating to and interacting with another, or genuine empathy is a product of a process of participatory sense-making." This way of framing the relationship between participatory sense-making and empathy is too linear. On the one hand, participatory sense-making requires that we already recognize the other, to a degree, as an expressive minded being, and in that sense one could argue that it presupposes empathy. On the other hand, participatory sense-making can profoundly deepen, even transform, what we see about the other as a minded being. As Reddy puts it, this is because there "is a circularity ... in terms of mind knowledge: what we know of minds must depend on our engagements with them, but these engagements must themselves depend on what we know of them. ... The more you engage with other minds, the more there must be to engage with" (2008, 31–32). This is not only because there is more of the other that we come to see in the process of engagement, but also because we ourselves are affected by the interaction process: we are "constantly being re-shaped as an entity in relation and gradually building up awareness of ... [ourselves] in these relations" (Reddy, 2008 148-9). The static picture of empathy, of a pre-given self using itself, and detected similarities between self and other, as a model for gaining access to a pre-given other is turned on its head within an enactive framework.

People's sense of self and of the other are constantly open to (self)transformation while shared worlds of meaning are capable of being enacted. These jointly enacted worlds can loop back into how people experience the minded life of the other with whom they are interacting. In many contexts of allistic-allistic interaction such participatory sense-making can unfold in a nearly

seamless manner. In contexts of allistic-autistic interaction, breakdowns in participatory sense-making are frequent (indeed, participatory sense-making may not even get off the ground) which both fuels and is fueled by breakdowns in mutual empathy. In the next section, we aim to show that sometimes interactions between allistic and autistic people can be mediated by technological artefacts helping to enact a shared world that can enable two very differently situated and embodied people, in a gradual processual sense, to make sense of and with each other. This likely wouldn't have seemed possible if the starting point or soil of empathy would have been restricted to the detection of similarities in mental states and their behavioral markers and the piecemeal quarantining of one's own mental states. We hope this example helps to clarify our claim that the enactive notion of participatory sense-making can be regarded as the soil of empathy.

4. Participatory Sense-Making and AAC for Genuine Empathy

As paradigms do, the like-mindedness paradigm shapes our ways of thinking about what a phenomenon (empathy) looks like and the conditions under which it is possible. In a less obvious sense, the like-mindedness paradigm has also shaped how we intervene in the world via technological innovation, providing a natural theoretical home for interventions that nudge autistic people to acquire and assimilate to neurotypical skills and norms of bodily expressivity, agency, and interaction. In our (2022) paper, we critiqued these types of intervention and argued that the notion of participatory sense-making can inform the development of AAC Tech (augmentative and alternative communication technologies) in a manner that can create interpersonal environments supportive of genuine empathy. What was missing from our paper was a concrete example of what this might look like. Here, we gratefully make use of a case that Dinishak hinted at in her reply, referencing an insightful article by Rachel Chen (2024). In this article, Chen discusses The Magical Musical Mat (MMM), which she co-designed in part on the basis of insights from enactive embodied cognition and Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of embodiment. In Chen's words, the MMM is:

> *[A]n interactive environment that maps interpersonal touch to dynamically changing music and sound ... Different types of touch, such as holding hands, high-fives, or gentle taps, dynamically and spontaneously change auditory qualities, resulting in a rich diversity of sound-touch expression (2024, 3).*

Echoing enactive insights, Chen takes seriously that "autistic individuals experience a deep sense of permeability with external systems of organization" and that autistic stimming, while often theorized as solitary and non-communicative behaviors, can afford participatory sense-making

mediated by the MMM. As she notes:

> *Sustained, mutually elaborative interactions often occurred when parents attended to the stimming of their children, whether through engaging in tapping, swinging, or playing the same piece of music together. These old patterns and routines of the children—stimming—were always solitary and did not tend to involve others. In the new circumstance of the intervention, however, new forms of relating emerged when parents joined in the stimming routines of their children, facilitating their production, and transforming them into new shared experiences (2024, 7).*

These transformative shared experiences developed over time and required certain adjustments on the part of the caretakers (all mothers) at the level of bodily rhythm, movement, and gesture. Initially, the mothers displayed built-up embodied habits that inhibited genuine interaction, such as inviting interaction via subtly controlling reaching gestures and getting swept up in temporal bodily rhythms reflecting neurotypical goal-oriented expectations. However, as Chen observes, gradually "the foregrounding of interpersonal touch guides parents into their children's sensory activities" (2024, 11–12).

To be sure, this MMM-mediated form of participatory sense-making requires some recognition of like-mindedness, for instance the sense that the other (much like oneself) has the sort of body that affords interaction, can enjoy certain forms of interaction, can solicit attention, etc. But this doesn't confirm the simulationist point that a linear detection of similarities is what fuels the process of shared understanding. An alternative, and in our opinion phenomenologically more truthful reading of what unfolds, is that the mat helps to enact a shared playful space while encouraging the mothers to adjust their bodily expressivity and goal-oriented behavior and pacing. There is a kind of unselving happening here, but not in the forms of quarantining beliefs or values in order to imagine oneself into the mind of the other, but in the form of letting the possibility of new ways of interacting together be primary.

Situated within that possibility, the unselving facilitated by the mat consists of a continual inhibiting and adjusting of one's bodily expectations and rhythms to explore what might become possible between oneself and the other. Tweaks and changes to the environment mediate new ways of attending to one another—facilitating shared forms of understanding but also awareness on the part of caretakers how subtle changes in their own embodied expressivity and agency have a bearing on the degree to which they can see and meet their non-speaking kids on their terms. Chen describes this as the practice of empathy:

> *Empathizing with a differently disposed social actor is about opening oneself to transformation through contemplating dimensions of experience that are different from one's own and thus arriving at a new commonsense. As a neurotypical interlocutor, coming into attunement with an autistic mind involves ... coming into a shared world of perception and action that allows people to build new actions together. These new routines can happen if neurotypical minds seek to understand and participate in rhythmic routines different from one's own (2024, 12-3).*

While we think the term 'contemplating' in the above passage isn't quite right in this context, we agree with Chen that this constitutes a way in which empathy, genuine (technology-mediated) empathy grounded in embodied participatory sense-making, can emerge.

5. Conclusion

With this reply we tried to explicate our ideas further, inspired by the extremely thoughtful questions posed by Dinishak (2024). We argued that genuine empathy is not crucially grounded in similarity and likemindedness and does not presuppose a dichotomous understanding of cognitive versus affective empathy. Instead, we proposed an understanding of empathy that takes seriously the fact of neurodiversity and that can emerge through participatory sensemaking.

According to the like-mindedness camp, genuine empathy in contexts of emphatic difference, if it is achievable at all, is by and large a matter of using imaginative acrobatics to get into the other person's head in the right way, trying, in some sense, to jump over one's own shadow in nearly impossible acts of self-quarantining while simultaneously using oneself as a template for understanding the other. Undoubtedly, we can find examples from our own personal lives that match this way of characterizing empathy in its more effortful moments. But what an enactive theory of embodied participatory sense-making draws attention to is that efforts towards achieving genuine empathy in contexts of emphatic experiential differences can also be located elsewhere, by entering into spaces that encourage novel (playful) forms of interaction and a willingness to adjust, alter, inhibit, and change one's bodily rhythms, gestures; not as a form of sorting out differences and similarities but as a way of allowing for the enactment of new shared meanings, making room for and bringing in view the other's embodiment and experience of a world one can share.

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[1] Note that in our original paper that we cite here, we did not include the modal qualification 'can'. As we explain in more detail in the main body of the text, in section 1, this would, however, been the more apt way of phrasing things. What we would like to emphasize is that genuine empathy should not have to depend on similarity, and that it is also possible to be genuinely related to another person in their unique way of experiencing the world (See also Willemsen and Roeser 2004 And Bollen 2023a).

[2] The challenges on the part of autistic people to empathize with allistic people are well-documented, but problematically framed and researched. Following Dinishak (2016) we therefore focus our discussion on the different perspective of allistic people failing to empathize with autistic people.

[3] For brevity's sake, we are leaving out a series of other relevant questions that Dinishak raises in this passage.

[4] Though it is beyond the scope of this response to delve into this issue, we do want to highlight that an approach to empathy that takes seriously the fact of neurodiversity might also have to question a human-centric approach to empathy. Some autistic people, perhaps most famously Temple Grandin, have an easier time empathizing with certain non-human animals. A human-centric notion of empathy should also be placed in the context of a predominant Western, Cartesian tradition. Other cultural and philosophical traditions can offer a more capacious approach to when and where empathy is possible (and between which kinds of minded lives). Among these traditions

is the enactive approach to mindedness, as it understands minds as prefigured in life, though this too is beyond the scope of our paper.

[5] In an SERRC article, Bollen refers to this tendency as *the neurotypical gatekeeping of empathy* (2023a).

[6] Such a rich understanding of emotions can also be grounded in the phenomenological tradition (cf. Scheler 1948/1923), just as enactivism finds its roots there.

[7] These page numbers correspond with Dinishak's penultimate draft, accessed through https://escholarship.org/content/qt4gq9g4ww/qt4gq9g4ww_noSplash_c4a4f3e92d6a75f891bc5 t=rj1427. The printed version of the chapter is listed in the references.

[8] Though it is beyond the scope of our reply to discuss this, there are plenty of reasons to question simulationism as a method for achieving empathy even in contexts of strong similarity (See Gallagher 2007; 2008; Ratcliffe 2007; Reddy 2008).

[9] Dinishak (2016) suggests that similar conclusions would follow for theory-theory, given that it is also based on the likemindedness paradigm.

[10] In the enactive embodied science field this picture has also been referred to as the 'sense-model-plan-act' framework (Froese & Di Paolo, 2009, 454), which aptly captures the static linear approach to social cognition at work in the like-mindedness paradigm.

[11] In early infancy, these embodied interactions tend to begin with imitative acts, as infants and care-takers copy (or match) each other's bodily expressions and embodied intentions (e.g. tongue protrusions). Reddy also argues that the complex characteristics of neonatal imitation indicate that " mirror neurons ... are likely to be red herrings for explaining neonatal imitation: the firing of mirror neurons cannot, for a start, explain delayed imitation lasting as long as twenty-four hours; nor can they explain the very active self- correction that was observed in the neonates during imitation in ...[several] studies." (Reddy, 2008, 55-6)

[12] Iris Murdoch seems to have something like this in mind when she talks about a person's *texture of being*. Similarly, Merleau-Ponty argues that: "Along with existence, I received a way of existing, or a *style*. All of my actions and thoughts are related to this ... that meaningful life, that particular signification of nature and history that I am" (Merleau-Ponty 2012, 482, our italic). (One of us also discusses this, and the link between enactivism and Iris Murdoch's way of thinking about moral perception and what it means to get other people right and wrong in our experiences of them in Van

Grunsven 2015, chapters 1 and 5; 2022).