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Sympathy

A HISTORY



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The Eighteenth-Century Context of Sympathy from Spinoza to Kant

Ryan Patrick Hanley

1. THE AGE OF SYMPATHY

That the eighteenth century was the age of sympathy is well appreciated today. Literary theorists have insisted on this for some time, political theorists are now more than ever emphasizing it, and versions of it are today commonplace even among economists.¹ Taken together,

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1 For a helpful introduction to the way in which scholars of literature and the theater have conceived of sympathy in the eighteenth century, see e.g. David Marshall, *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau, and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 1–8. On eighteenth-century sympathy from the perspective of political theory, see e.g. Michael Frazer, *The Enlightenment of Sympathy: Justice and the Moral Sentiments in the Eighteenth Century and Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). In experimental economics, see esp. the work of Vernon Smith, e.g. *Rationality in Economics: Constructivist and Ecological Forms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15–16. In this volume, see also on eighteenth-century sympathy esp. chapter 7 and Hayes’s reflection.

such efforts ought to be welcomed, as they have done much to lead us to rethink convenient but sadly oversimplified associations of the Enlightenment with the “age of reason,” and have also done much to remind us of the eighteenth-century foundations of a great deal of contemporary ethics. But for all this a key issue remains unexplained. Even amid our general agreement *that* the eighteenth century was the age of sympathy, less well understood is *why* this was so. Exactly what then explains the remarkable ubiquity of the concept of sympathy in the eighteenth century?

This, I will be the first to admit, is a staggeringly difficult question—which perhaps explains why so little work has been done to answer it. Part of the difficulty concerns the plasticity of the concept. Thus Marc André Bernier, in one of the best recent surveys of eighteenth-century sympathy, calls our attention to “l’incroyable vitalité et la surprenante hétérogénéité qui caractérisent la notion de sympathie au cours de la période.”² Yet the concept was hardly up for grabs, as three meanings are particularly common in eighteenth-century philosophy. These include sympathy as “mechanical communication of feelings and passions,” as a “process of imagination, or of reason, by which we substitute ourselves for others,” and as our “delight in the happiness and sorrow in the misery of other people.”³ Each definition points in a different direction and has a distinct heritage, as explored in several contributions to this volume; sympathy as mechanical communication of course harkens back to understandings of sympathy as *contagio*; sympathy as substituting self for others harkens back to traditions of common sense, or *sensus communis*; and sympathy as passionate concern for

2 Marc André Bernier, “Les Métamorphoses de la sympathie au siècle des Lumières,” in *Les lettres sur la sympathie (1798) de Sophie de Grouchy: Philosophie morale et réforme sociale*, ed. Bernier and Deidre Dawson (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2010), 1–17 at 4. For similar statements of the heterogeneity of the eighteenth-century concept, see e.g. Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009), 18; and Evelyn Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy: Sympathetic Imagery in Eighteenth-Century Social Theory and Physiology,” *History of Political Economy* 35 (2003): 282–308, esp. 284–89.

3 These helpful definitions are given in Luigi Turco, “Sympathy and Moral Sense, 1725–1740,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1999): 79–101, at 79.

others hearkens back to traditions of other-directedness like compassion, pity, and charity. Clearly then, eighteenth-century sympathy was plural in both its meanings and origins. But it was also plural in its contexts, for sympathy was hardly an idea exclusive to philosophers but also key to chemists and physicists who invoked it to describe principles of affinity, astronomers and physicians who used it to describe interactions and attractions of material and corporeal parts and functions, novelists and playwrights who used it to describe the interactions of characters and readers and actors and audiences, and moral and political theorists who used it to describe the nature and extent of our obligations to distant others.

We are left then with a truly dizzying array of substantive definitions as well as historical and methodological contexts. Untangling these alone would be more than the work of a day. Even so, there remains our other task of explaining just why sympathy, in all its forms, became so ubiquitous in the eighteenth century—and it is to this task that this effort is dedicated. And thus the thesis this chapter aims to defend. Sympathy's eighteenth-century explosion, it will argue, is best traced to its unique status as a sophisticated philosophical response to a pressing practical challenge. This practical challenge concerned the disorientation consequent to the seismic shift in the forms of social organization experienced over the course of the eighteenth century. Most simply, the eighteenth century (especially but not only in Britain and France) witnessed a shift from traditional and more intimate forms of community to new forms of social organization; now societies of strangers emerged alongside more traditional and familiar communities of intimates. But what holds a society of strangers together? Some of course posited that self-interest alone could maintain a social structure, but it seems fair to say that this was a minority opinion then and now. Others continued to defend traditional Christian ideas of charity, but here too it seems fair to say that secularizing and skeptical tendencies in eighteenth-century epistemology and ethics made this remedy increasingly less viable. Where then to turn? It is here that sympathy emerged and

then flourished, specifically as a new and creative philosophical response to the practical political problem of human connectedness in an increasingly disorienting world. Sympathy, that is, emerged as an other-directed sentiment capable of sustaining the minimal social bonds needed to realize the new social order and indeed one capable of so doing without requiring acceptance of the theistic foundations of Christian conceptions of neighbor love. In this sense, the eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy not only cemented its shift or translation from the domain of the physical to the domain of the ethical—that is, from a principle primarily dedicated to explaining connections between substances to a principle dedicated to explaining connections between human individuals—but in so doing also gave birth to a novel concept that, we might say with only a minimal amount of hyperbole, was intended to serve as a substitute for love.

2. SPINOZA'S CONCEPTION OF SYMPATHY

Such in any case is our thesis—now to the demonstration. We begin with Spinoza, who more than any other single thinker would inaugurate the eighteenth-century tradition of thinking about sympathy. As Karolina Hübner's contribution to this volume demonstrates, Spinoza was an active participant in a debate over "the metaphysical doctrine of sympathy" that looked back to antiquity.⁴ Yet Spinoza was also a key figure in the emergence of the ethical concept of sympathy, and his categories would shape later debate in this vein. In particular, his theory introduces three discrete elements of the concept that would prove central to later eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy: its foundations in epistemic associationism, its role as an action-motivating sentiment, and its relationship to self-interest and self-love.

Spinoza's idea of sympathy is itself a direct product of and key contribution to his broader ethical outlook. As is well known, this ethical

⁴ Chapter 5, 1–2.

outlook is founded in large part on the proposition that the primary motivating concern of human beings is the preservation of their material substance—the notion that “each thing, in so far as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being.”⁵ Spinoza of course would go on to reinterpret all ethical phenomena through this specifically egocentric lens, but most important for our purposes is how this lens leads him to rethink love. Love, Spinoza notoriously explains, is “merely ‘pleasure accompanied by the idea of an external cause’” and hatred “merely ‘pain accompanied by the idea of an external cause.’”⁶ To say only the very least, this is a pronounced shift away from traditional theological definitions of love in the context of the divine or transcendent toward an understanding of love grounded in the perspective of the self. And it is this perspective that frames Spinoza’s ethical theory of sympathy. For not only do we love or hate those things that immediately affect us, he asserts, but so too we “love or hate some things without any cause known to us, but merely from sympathy and antipathy.”⁷ Spinoza is clearly fighting battles on several fronts here; in continuing he explicitly distances his sympathy from conceptions that associated it with occult qualities.⁸ But he also makes also another fundamental move here. Sympathy, in his theory, connects us to distant phenomena that might not seem to be immediately related to the self in any obvious sense, but which in fact shape its pleasures and pains.

Spinoza develops this claim as part 3 of the *Ethics* progresses. Gradually he reveals that sympathy is best regarded as a type of association: “as soon as we think of an object that we have seen in conjunction with others, we immediately recall the others as well and thus from regarding

5 Spinoza, *Ethics* pr.6.III; cf. pr.7.III and sch.pr.44.III. Quotations from the *Ethics* are from the translation by Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992). For an extremely helpful introduction to the way in which Spinoza’s ethics derives from his understanding of the conatus, see Don Garrett, “Spinoza’s Ethical Theory,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), esp. 271–74 and 302–5.

6 *Ethics* sch.pr.13.III.

7 *Ethics* sch.pr.15.III.

8 Cf. e.g. among others Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 468; on sympathy and occult qualities see also chapters 5 and 3 in this volume.

the one we immediately pass on to regarding another.”⁹ This is especially true of our ideas of other people; indeed “from the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves, towards which we have felt no emotion, to be affected by an emotion, we are thereby affected by a similar emotion,” and thus “if we imagine someone like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, this thought will express an affection of our own body similar to that emotion. So from the fact that we imagine a thing like ourselves to be affected by an emotion, we are affected by a similar emotion along with it.”¹⁰ And herein lies both the import of sympathy as an epistemic concept of association and as a normative ethical concept. Our experience of the emotions felt by others not only conveys their feelings to us but also leads us to feel certain pains and pleasures that themselves prompt specific behaviors. For Spinoza, sympathy is thus crucially action motivating, and indeed action motivating in a socially salutary manner: “that which affects with pain a thing that we pity affects us too with similar pain, and so we shall endeavor to devise whatever annuls the existence of the former or destroys it: that is, we shall seek to destroy it; i.e. we shall be determined to destroy it. So we shall endeavor to free from its distress the thing we pity.”¹¹

Herein lies the key point. Sympathy leads us to relieve the distress of others; in this sense it serves other-directed purposes. At the same time, the motive behind our so doing is self-interest; we seek to relieve the pain of others because of the pain that we feel as a consequence of their distress. Spinoza like many after him does not explicitly entertain the possibility that sympathetic pains might lead their possessor to flee such scenes rather than to alleviate them. It may be that this would simply muddy the waters to such an extent that his central claim would be obscured: that pity prompts a form of practically beneficial

⁹ *Ethics* pr.52,III.

¹⁰ *Ethics* pr.27,III.

¹¹ *Ethics* cor.3, pr.27,III. Spinoza's explicit focus here is pity (*commiserato*), defined earlier (and importantly for the eighteenth-century debate) as “pain arising from another's hurt” (*Ethics* pr.22,III), and which he explicitly equates with compassion (*misericordia*).

other-directed ethical activity consistent with his egocentric commitments. This is not to say that he fails to see the limitations of such a conception; indeed, Spinoza explicitly notes that “from the same property of human nature from which it follows that men are compassionate, it likewise follows that they are prone to envy and ambition.”¹² But for now the crucial point is that Spinoza largely inaugurates the eighteenth-century tradition of theorizing about sympathy by articulating several discrete elements of the concept as it would come to be used, including especially the claim that sympathy concerns identification of one individual with another via an associative process founded on resemblance, the claim that sympathy is action motivating and leads its possessor to seek to relieve the distress of others, and the claim that the grounds for such action is not an altruistic concern for others but principally a concern for the self and its pleasures and pains.

3. SYMPATHY, SELF-INTEREST, AND OTHERS

What follows takes up each of these themes in order to show how these three discrete strands of Spinoza’s theory of sympathy came to be much more thoroughly developed by later eighteenth-century theorists. We begin with the most common way in which sympathy was discussed in the eighteenth century: namely as an action-motivating sentiment capable of serving to establish social bonds between individuals. Interestingly, this side of sympathy tends to receive the least attention from scholars today. This may be because contemporary scholarship on sympathy emerged in part out of the battles over “Das Adam Smith Problem” that had occupied earlier scholars. As an influential generation of revisionists demonstrated, the notorious “Problem” (which concerns the ostensible tension between the supposedly self-interested moral psychology of Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and the other-directed moral psychology described in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*) is in fact predicated

¹² *Ethics* sch.pt.32,III.

on a false dichotomy between self-interest and sympathy.¹³ Much good came out of these revisionist efforts, including not only a more sophisticated understanding of Smith but also a greater appreciation of the role of moral sentiments in judgment more generally.¹⁴ At the same time, the counterreaction to the simplifications on which “Das Problem” was founded had the effect of leading scholars to distance sympathy from related other-directed sentiments like compassion and pity and charity, and to emphasize instead its role as a mechanism of epistemic transfer for the purposes of conveying passions. One result of this has been a lack of emphasis on sympathy as an action-motivating sentiment capable of encouraging reciprocal care—a key element of the eighteenth-century definition.

Joseph Butler sounded one of the first keynotes for much of the eighteenth-century debate on this point. In his influential discussion of compassion in his *Sermons*, he argued that human beings, as “imperfect creatures,” necessarily always “depend upon each other.”¹⁵ This state of perpetual interdependence is furthered by specific passions natural to human beings that lead them to be reticent to become the agents of another’s harm. Thus compassion, according to Butler, may not lead its possessor always to promote the happiness of others, yet it will “prevent him from doing evil” and at least sometimes “incline him to relieve the distressed.”¹⁶ Compassion thus provides a necessary and salutary check on self-interest, in the absence of which “men would certainly be much more wanting in the offices of charity they owe to

13 For an excellent history of this debate, see esp. Leonidas Montes, “Das Adam Smith Problem: Its Origins, the Stage of the Current Debate, and One Implication for Our Understanding of Sympathy,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 35 (2003): 63–90. Montes’s article also does much to reestablish the centrality of Smith’s own insistence on the action-motivating aspects of sympathy. I treat the specific implications of this debate for Smith scholarship in my “Adam Smith: From Love to Sympathy,” *Revue internationale de philosophie*, 68 (2014): 251–73.

14 For helpful recent developments, see Frazer, *Enlightenment of Sympathy*, esp. 3–10; and esp. Sharon Krause, *Civil Passions: Moral Sentiment and Democratic Deliberation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), and chapter 7 in this volume.

15 Joseph Butler, “Upon Compassion” (sermon 5), in *Fifteen Sermons*, in *The Works of Joseph Butler* (London: William Tegg, 1867; reprint, Adamant Media, 2006), 45–56 at 49.

16 Butler, “Upon Compassion” (sermon 6), in *Fifteen Sermons*, 56–65 at 58.

each other, and likewise more cruel and injurious, than they are at present.”¹⁷ Other eighteenth-century thinkers would make related claims. Foremost among them is Rousseau, whose second *Discours* presents *pitié* as one of the two passions natural to men, and itself valuable not because it leads us to do positive good but because it compels us to be reticent to do harm by “moderating in every individual the activity of self-love”: a check that Rousseau of course claims has been wholly and tragically overcome by civilization.¹⁸ Rousseau would extend this claim in *Emile*, in arguing that *pitié* has a specific role to play not just in the life of the savage but also in the life of civilized man, insofar as a more cognitively developed pity is responsible for regulating *amour-propre*, the particular form of self-love endemic to developed human beings.¹⁹

Butler and Rousseau, together with Bernard Mandeville, who did much to stimulate Rousseau’s thinking on pity in this sense, thus stand at the head of eighteenth-century traditions of thinking about the normative implications of other-directed passions such as pity and compassion as checks on self-interest. In time later thinkers would come to regard sympathy itself through this lens. Citing Butler’s account of compassion, the influential Aberdeen philosopher David Fordyce observed that sympathy stands as a “security” devised by God for the public well-being, one that “draws us out of ourselves to bear a part of the misfortunes of others, powerfully solicits us in their favor, melts us at a sight of their distress, and makes us in some degree unhappy until

17 Butler, “Upon Compassion” (sermon 5), 45–56, at 52–53.

18 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality*, in *Discourses and Other Early Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), at 154.

19 See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Allan Bloom, in *The Collected Works of Rousseau*, ed. Christopher Kelly and Roger D. Masters (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2009), 13,373–75. In a similar vein, see e.g. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, who would wonder what heart could be so cruel never to have felt “cette Sympathie tendre qui le lie aux autres êtres” and could be drawn to agree with a cynical moralist who has “tout vu dans l’amour-propre & rien dans cette impression vive du sentiment qui l’entraîne & le maîtrise” (*La Sympathie, histoire morale* [Amsterdam, 1767], 7–8). I develop this side of Rousseau’s own theory of pity at greater length in my essay “Pitié développée: Aspects éthiques et épistémiques,” in *Philosophie de Rousseau*, ed. B. Bachofen, B. Bernardi, A. Charrak, and F. Guénard (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 305–18.

they are relieved from it.” Sympathetic compassion is thus “particularly well adapted to the condition of human life” insofar as it provides “an admirable restraint upon the more selfish passions, or those violent impulses that carry us to the hurt of others.”²⁰ Thus the evidence that “men are formed for society and the delightful interchange of friendly sentiments and duties” lies precisely in that “instantaneous sympathy” by which “the impulses of pleasure or pain, joy or sorrow, made on one mind” are “communicated in some degree to all.”²¹

This aspect of sympathy would receive further important expressions from a diverse range of thinkers crossing several traditions—including, among others, such prominent thinkers as Edmund Burke; Henry Home, Lord Kames; Immanuel Kant; and Sophie de Grouchy. Thus Burke, in his account of sympathy in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, notes:

as our Creator has designed that we should be united by the bond of sympathy, he has strengthened that bond by a proportionable delight; and there most where our sympathy is most wanted, in the distresses of others. . . . The delight we have in such things, hinders us from shunning scenes of misery; and the pain we feel, prompts us to relieve ourselves in relieving those who suffer; and all this antecedent to any reasoning, by an instinct that works us to its own purposes, without our concurrence.²²

Burke’s statement attests to his belief that the particular pains and pleasures that we have been taught to feel by nature strongly incline (if not compel) us to come to the assistance of suffering others, as the pleasure derived from so doing outruns the mere relief of pain we could expect to experience were we to simply flee such scenes and try

20 David Fordyce, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Kennedy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), 44–45.

21 Fordyce, *Elements*, 91.

22 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 42–43.

to forget about them. A related position is developed by Hume, who calls humanity—itself a proxy for sympathy in his later ethics—the only passion that can alone “be the foundation of any general system and established theory of blame or approbation,” and more pointedly by Kames, who calls sympathy the “cement of human society” as it “attaches us to an object in distress so powerfully as even to overbalance self-love, which would make us fly from it.”²³ For Kames, sympathy stands as the passion “to which human society is indebted for its greatest blessing, that of providing relief for the distressed.”²⁴ Indeed society could hardly be imagined without it:

as no state is exempt from misfortunes, mutual sympathy must greatly promote the security and happiness of mankind. That the prosperity and preservation of each individual should be the care of many, tends more to happiness in general, than that each man, as the single inhabitant of a desert island, should be left to stand or fall by himself, without prospect of regard or assistance from others.²⁵

This perspective can even be found in the precritical Kant, for whom “sympathy and complaisance are grounds for beautiful actions that would perhaps all be suffocated by the preponderance of a cruder self-interest,” though even in his precritical stage Kant took care to note that sympathy “is nevertheless weak and is always blind,” and “not enough to drive indolent human nature to actions for the common weal.”²⁶ In his most prominent comments on sympathy Kant quite

23 David Hume, *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch (1751; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 95 (see Ryan P. Hanley, “David Hume and ‘the Politics of Humanity,’” *Political Theory* 39 (2011): 205–33); Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*, ed. Mary Catherine Moran (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 19–20.

24 Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Elements of Criticism*, ed. Peter Jones (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 308.

25 Kames, *Essays*, 17.

26 Immanuel Kant, *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, ed. Günter Zöllner and Robert Loudon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 18–62, at 29–32 (Ak. 2:215–18).

notoriously suggests that even if actions done out of sympathy might “conform with duty” they should not be mistaken for actions done “*from duty*.”²⁷ Yet this claim should itself be read against his claim in the *Metaphysics of Morals* that even though we indeed are under no duty to “share the sufferings of others,” we yet indeed have “a duty to sympathize actively in their fate,” and thus have an “indirect duty” to cultivate our benevolent affections insofar as they can help to spur us to our genuine duty. Thus Kant too insists that it is “a duty not to avoid the places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out,” and indeed ultimately counts sympathy as among “the impulses nature has implanted in us to do what the representations of duty alone might not accomplish.”²⁸

Perhaps no eighteenth-century thinker emphasized this side of sympathy quite so strongly as Sophie de Grouchy. In her influential writings on sympathy de Grouchy calls special attention to those “new bonds of sympathy that unite us with other men” and constitute “an indissoluble tie between ourselves and our fellow men.”²⁹ Herein indeed lies the chief import of sympathy on her definition:

sympathy is the first cause of the feeling of humanity, the effects of which are so precious. It compensates for a portion of the evils issuing from personal interests in large societies, and it struggles against the coercive force that we encounter everywhere we go and that centuries of Enlightenment alone can destroy by attacking the vices that

27 Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Reason*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 37–108, at 53–54 (Ak. 4:398–99).

28 Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Reason*, ed. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 353–604, at 575–76 (Ak. 6:457). For accounts of these passages, see esp. Paul Guyer, “Moral Feelings in the *Metaphysics of Morals*,” in *Kant’s Metaphysics of Morals: A Critical Guide*, ed. Lara Denis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130–51, at 145–49; and Frazer’s helpful discussion of how “Kant’s objection to treating sympathetic inclinations as the determining ground of one’s moral choices is not a moral objection to sympathetic inclinations as such” (*Enlightenment of Sympathy*, 118).

29 Sophie de Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy: A Critical Edition*, ed. Karin Brown (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2008), 132, 149.

have produced it! Amid the shock of so many passions that oppress the weak or marginalize the unfortunate, from the bottom of its heart humanity secretly pleads the cause of sympathy and avenges it from the injustice of fate by arousing the sentiment of natural equality.³⁰

In all these discussions two elements are particularly noteworthy. The first is the claim that the value of sympathy lies in its capacity to check the pernicious effects of self-interest. The second is the claim that sympathy leads us to assist others. This is worth emphasizing because it not only testifies to the ubiquity of the eighteenth-century conception of sympathy as action motivating, but also suggests one possible answer to our larger question concerning why sympathy came to have such broad and deep appeal for eighteenth-century thinkers. In brief: the insistence on sympathy's capacity to check self-interest and to prompt other-regarding ethical action may owe at least in part to a general fear that self-interest was on the rise and benevolence on the wane. Tracing the causes of this fear would go well beyond the scope of this chapter, but it seems at least possible that the root of this concern lies in some familiar eighteenth-century phenomena. From the urbanization that brought more strangers together as neighbors than ever before to the commercialization that brought traders into ever more contact with distant others and expanded the public sphere at home, to the imperialism and colonization that pushed Europeans across the globe: all of these phenomena can be understood to have contributed in their own

30 De Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy*, 113; see also, in this volume, Hayes's reflection, esp. 4–5. For a (slightly) more poetic rendering of the same thought, see Samuel Jackson Pratt's *Sympathy: A Poem*, 5th ed. (London, 1781):

In cities thus, though trade's tumultuous train
Spurn at the homely maxims of the plain,
Not all the pride of rank, the trick of art,
Can chase the generous passion from the heart:
Nay more, a larger circle it must take,
Where men embodying, larger int'rests make,
And each perforce round each more closely twine,
Where countless thousands form the social line.

(bk 2, lines 35–42)

different ways to the liberation of self-interest and thereby to a challenging of traditional concepts of neighbor love. These concerns, it thus seems reasonable to suggest, likely contributed to the eighteenth century's embrace of sympathy as a partial remedy for the negative externalities associated with these simultaneously progressive and dislocating phenomena.

4. SYMPATHY AND PHYSIOLOGY

To this point my primary aim has been to demonstrate that the eighteenth-century concept of sympathy had a normative purpose. Yet to say that sympathy was principally conceived as a response to a practical problem begs another more fundamental question: why was *sympathy* per se the answer to this problem? Put differently, even if sympathy is indeed best regarded as an answer to the problem of human association, exactly why did its eighteenth-century theorists think it—and not some other concept or category—the best answer to this problem?

The reasons for this would seem to be twofold. The first is that the principal extant alternative to sympathy was increasingly coming to be regarded as less viable as a solution. Love, that is, conceived as the charity that bound neighbors together, required epistemic commitments that eighteenth-century thinkers became increasingly less willing to make. The reasons for such are easily enough seen. The Gospel commandment to love thy neighbor was of course one of two commands, the first being to love God with all one's heart and all one's strength. Only after this first command was fulfilled was it possible to pursue the second. This decisively shaped the nature and function of *caritas*, as love for one's self and for one's neighbor came to be mediated and informed by the love of the divine; indeed the very reason why it is good to love self and neighbor alike and equally is the belief that both are created in God's image.³¹ This view was hardly absent in

³¹ For a helpful recent statement of the foundations of this position in the Torah, see e.g. Simon May, *Love: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 17–18.

eighteenth-century debate; indeed the English philosopher David Hartley—himself a prominent contributor to debates over the nature and function of epistemic associationism—insisted in the course of his demonstration that goodwill and benevolence grow ever “weaker and weaker” as they are “extended more and more”:

Yet still the common blessings and calamities, which fall upon whole nations and communities; the general resemblance of the circumstances of all mankind to each other, in their passage through life; their common relation to God as their creator, governor, and father; their common concern in a future life, and in the religion of Christ, &c.; are capable of raising strong sympathetic actions towards all mankind, and the several larger divisions of it, in persons of religious dispositions, who duly attend to these things.³²

Yet on the whole, eighteenth-century epistemology tended to separate sympathy from theism, and indeed to present sympathy as a substitute for a *caritas* whose theistic foundations were increasingly regarded as epistemically unavailable; in this sense, sympathy sought to take us straight to neighbor love without becoming waylaid by the necessity of a lexically prior love of God.³³ It is for this reason, one suspects, that a number of the most striking and prominent explicit invocations in eighteenth-century philosophy of the biblical command to love one’s neighbor as one’s self—including those of Smith and Rousseau and Kant—are silent on the first command.³⁴ But there is also a second

32 David Hartley, *Observations on Man* (London, 1749), 485.

33 Some scholars have emphasized the “Christian underpinnings” of sympathy and other forms of “sentimental humanitarianism”; see e.g. Norman Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976): 195–218, at 214. And indeed one can find multiple eighteenth-century sermons that make this claim; see e.g. John Doughty, *Christian Sympathy* (London, 1752); and Peter Thatcher, *The Nature and Effects of Christian Sympathy* (Boston, 1794). But with regard to the philosophical literature it seems fair to say that sympathy was largely conceived as a nontheistic alternative to Christian concepts. For a helpful development of this claim, see esp. Frazer, *Enlightenment of Sympathy*, 11, 16, 30, 39.

34 Compare Mark 12:28–31, Matthew 22:36–40, and Luke 10:25–28 to Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984), 1.1.5

epistemic reason for sympathy's ascendancy. Even as eighteenth-century thinkers grew more skeptical toward the transcendent, they came ever more to embrace the immanent, and thus challenges to theism arose simultaneously with renewed interest in the nature of both human physiology and physical matter.

In physiology, the particularly important point concerned not corporeality merely, but a particular aspect of corporeality: sensation. The study of sensation stood at the forefront of several of the fields of inquiry focused on sympathy in the eighteenth century, including especially the medical and physiological researches that flourished in Edinburgh in its middle decades, and the epistemological studies being conducted in Paris during the same period. As has been noted with regard to the former, Scottish physicians regarded sympathy as "an extension of sensibility," which enabled them to generate fruitful associations of the "action of sensation, the coordination of organs in the body, and the 'social principle' that allows 'fellow-feeling' to emerge in a society."³⁵ So too in France, where the *Encyclopédistes* and their allies recognized in sympathy a type of social bond that comported well with their emphasis on the primacy of sensation in epistemic functioning. In this vein, the *Encyclopédie* itself included two substantial entries for *sympathie*, with the first (by Jean d'Alembert) dedicated to "the predilection that certain bodies have to unite or join as a result of a certain resemblance," and the second (by Louis de Jaucourt) dedicated to "communication that the parts of the body have with each other, and

(though cf. 3.6.1); Rousseau, *Emile*, 389n (which calls the second command the "summation of all morality" and also insists that it "has no true foundation other than justice and sentiment"); and Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 570–71 (Ak. 6:450–52), and *Groundwork*, 54–55 (Ak. 4:399).

35 Forget, "Evocations of Sympathy," 291–92; see also Forget's helpful discussion at 286–88 of the explicit connections between the concept of sympathy as used by the Scottish social theorists and that employed by the Edinburgh physicians. Yet some caution here is needed; clearly for some of the Scottish physicians, the concept was still associated with the occult and was a placeholder for a failure to provide a fuller and more scientific explanation: a concept that may be employed "as long as we have no idea" what connects certain phenomena, but will be "no longer proper" once "we can find out its foundation, and the means of communication" (William Cullen, *Clinical Lectures, Delivered in the Years 1765 and 1766* [London, 1795], 28–29).

which holds them in a mutual dependence,” and “transports to one part the pains and maladies which afflict another.”³⁶ In both treatments, sympathy served to replace a need for recourse to theistic foundationalism with a more immediate set of empirical criteria available to all sensing beings.

This line of thinking would be particularly developed in France in discussions of *sociabilité*, which, as Hans Aarsleff has noted, commonly played a role in French-language debates similar to that played by sympathy in English-language debates.³⁷ In this vein Claude Helvétius might proclaim, in one of his chapter headings in *De l'homme*, that “la sensibilité physique est la cause unique de nos actions, de nos pensées, de nos passions, et de notre sociabilité” and argue that it is precisely this physical sensibility that gives rise to our affective interpersonal bonds.³⁸ This claim perhaps receives its fullest development in the work of the physiologist Pierre Cabanis, who not only offers one of the century’s best developed accounts of the relationship between sympathy and immediate physical sensation but also goes on to suggest that the proper education and cultivation of such might in time engender a specifically “moral sympathy” of a type that he explicitly

36 See *Encyclopédie*, 15,735–36, available online via the ARTFL Project; see also Bernier, “Les métamorphoses de la sympathie,” 14; Forget, “Evocations of Sympathy,” 286–87; and Hayes’s reflection, 1. Jaucourt’s definition only briefly calls attention to that “rare and delicious” sympathy that promotes attachment between individuals, quickly dropping this line of inquiry and examining sympathy as a material principle. All eighteenth-century editions of the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* likewise focus exclusively on sympathy as a corporeal principle or as a means of describing the relationships of “humors and inclinations,” only adding in the sixth edition (1835) an expanded entry on sympathy as enabling participation in pains and pleasures of others: see the definition in the sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire*, as available at <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/publico?look.pl?strippedhw=sympathie>. Cf. however Patrick Dandey, “Entre *medicinalia* et *moralia*: La Double Ascendance de la ‘Sympathie,’” in *Les Discours de la sympathie: Enquête sur une notion de l’âge classique à la modernité*, ed. Thierry Belleguic, Eric Van der Schueren, and Sabrina Vervacke (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2007), 3–23, esp. 3–4, 13.

37 See Aarsleff’s introduction and editorial notes to his edition of Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xxi–xxiii and n. and 37n. In a similar vein Marshall helpfully calls attention to the ways in which English and French discussions of sympathy overlapped with those of sentiment, sensation, and sensibility; see *Surprising Effects of Sympathy*, 3.

38 Claude Adrien Helvétius, *De l’homme* (Paris: Fayard, 1989), 171–86, at 171.

associates with both Francis Hutcheson and Smith and his sister-in-law de Grouchy.³⁹ And it is in de Grouchy's work that we find one of the best-developed versions of this line of thinking. For de Grouchy, sympathy is "the disposition we have to feel as others do" ("la disposition que nous avons à sentir d'une manière semblable à celle d'autrui"). In large part this took the form of feeling their pains via an extension of our sensibility through the imagination; hence de Grouchy's explicit claim that "reproduction of the general impression of pain on our organs depends on sensibility and above all on the imagination."⁴⁰ This would be a familiar claim by the time it was published in 1798, yet de Grouchy gave it an important turn that served to connect the normative elements of sympathy to its sensationalist origins: "Of what great importance it is, therefore, to train the sensibility of children so that it may develop to its fullest capacity in them. Their sensibility needs to reach that point where it can no longer be dulled by things that in the course of life tend to lead it astray, to carry us far from nature and from ourselves, and to concentrate our sensibility in all the passions of egoism or vanity."⁴¹ De Grouchy, like other eighteenth-century sympathy theorists, would have resisted our familiar distinction today between the empirical and the normative. Owing in part to their conception of sensation, for eighteenth-century theorists, "sympathy is empirical truth of the first water."⁴² At the same time, they regarded the cultivation of sympathy as a necessary duty if bonds of fellow feeling were to be sustained in a world in which such bonds often seemed besieged. And for this, natural sentiment alone without cultivation was simply too weak; representative in this vein is Mary Wollstonecraft,

39 Pierre Jean George Cabanis, *On the Relations between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, trans Margaret Saidi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 589–601, at 598.

40 De Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy*, 108–9; for the original see *Lettres sur la sympathie*, 31. On de Grouchy's debts to and differences from Adam Smith's account of sympathy with which she extensively engaged, see esp. Eric Schliesser, "Sophie de Grouchy, Marquise de Condorcet: Wisdom and Reform between Reason and Feeling," in *Feminist History of Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill and Marcy P. Lascano (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014).

41 De Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy*, 111–12.

42 Lamb, *Evolution of Sympathy*, 6.

who argued in her discussion of the family that “natural affection, as it is termed, I believe to be a very weak tie, affections must grow out of the habitual exercise of a mutual sympathy.”⁴³ In making such claims, both Wollstonecraft and de Grouchy reveal the influence of their careful engagements with Rousseau, who gave in his *Emile* perhaps the eighteenth century’s best and fullest account of how natural sensation might be cultivated in a manner that best promotes the spread of “the joyfulness of loving humanity and serving it.”⁴⁴

Sympathy thus not only offered a normative response to a pressing problem but did so in a manner congenial to and commensurate with certain movements in eighteenth-century natural philosophy and epistemology. In an age obsessed with the investigation of the connections that bound together seemingly discrete entities sympathy struck a chord insofar as it presented the connections between discrete human individuals in a manner analogous to and already familiar from numerous prominent accounts of attractions between nonhuman entities across the natural and physical sciences. Bishop George Berkeley in this vein thus describes “that sympathy in our nature whereby we feel the pains and joys of our fellow-creatures” precisely by means of such an analogy:

As the attractive power in bodies is the most universal principle which produceth innumerable effects, and is the key to explain the various phenomena of nature; so the corresponding social appetite

43 Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Deidre Shauna Lynch, 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 2009), 161. A helpful treatment of the significance of natural affection as developed in this passage in Wollstonecraft’s political theory is provided in Eileen Hunt Botting, *Family Feuds: Wollstonecraft, Burke and Rousseau on the Transformation of the Family* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 203–9; for the ways in which Wollstonecraft sought to distance herself from Burke on this front, see Daniel I. O’Neill, *The Burke-Wollstonecraft Debate: Savagery, Civilization, and Democracy* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), 164–65.

44 De Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy*, 112. For a very helpful account of the stages of this education in de Grouchy, see Daniel Dumouchel, “Une Education sentimentale: Sympathie et construction de la morale dans les *Lettres sur la sympathie* de Sophie de Grouchy,” in de Grouchy, *Lettres sur la sympathie*, 139–50. I explore the stages of Rousseau’s moral-epistemic education at length in “Rousseau’s Virtue Epistemology,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50 (2012): 239–63.

in human souls is the great spring and source of moral actions. This it is that inclines each individual to an intercourse with his species, and models everyone to that behavior which best suits with common well-being.⁴⁵

So too the great Aberdeen philosopher George Turnbull:

A careful examiner will find, that all our affections and passions are not only well-suited to our external circumstances; but that they themselves, and all the laws or methods of exercising them, with their different consequences, have a very exact correspondence with, and analogy to the sensible world, and its laws. Is there not an obvious similarity between the principle of gravitation toward a common center, and universal benevolence, in their operation? . . . Homogeneous bodies more easily coalesce than others: and so is it with minds. For is not friendship a particular sympathy of minds analogous to that particular tendency we may observe in certain bodies to run together and mix or adhere? Compassion, or a disposition to relieve the distressed, is it not similar to that tendency we observe in nutritious particles of several kinds, to run to the supply of wants in bodies which they are respectively proper to supply.⁴⁶

Sympathy, conceived as the moral connection that binds one individual to another founded on the recognition of their mutual sameness, was thus deeply indebted for its rise to the ubiquitous discourse on attraction and action at a distance that dominated eighteenth-century

45 Bishop George Berkeley, *Guardian* 49, as quoted in Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion," 203–4. I am grateful to Eric Schliesser for calling to my attention Berkeley's specific claim that "God is a pure spirit, disengaged from all such sympathy or natural ties," which he rightly notes further suggests a conscious secularizing or distancing of sympathy from theological foundations; see Berkeley, "Three Dialogues," in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Desmond Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 221.

46 George Turnbull, *The Principles of Moral and Christian Philosophy*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2005), 654.

philosophy across several branches—ranging from treatments of both planetary movement and gravitation in astronomy to discussions of electricity, magnetism, and elective affinities in physics and chemistry, to discussions of process coordination in the body in medicine and physiology, to discussions of the association of ideas in epistemology.⁴⁷ And very often these discussions took place in a genuinely interdisciplinary fashion; thus Goethe, in his celebrated novel *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, used the laws of chemical elective affinities to describe the process of human romantic coupling, and the well-regarded American physician and statesman Benjamin Rush used the laws of corporeal sympathy to argue for the system of international free trade.⁴⁸ In these and many other cases, eighteenth-century ideas of human sympathy represented the extension into the moral realm of a principle already central to several other branches of philosophy.⁴⁹

5. THE END AND THE MEANS

Thus far we have seen that eighteenth-century sympathy was developed as a normative philosophical response to a pressing practical problem and that this response took the particular form it did in the eighteenth century because of certain movements and tendencies on the rise in several branches of contemporary philosophy. Yet for all

47 In addition to Forget's above-cited study, see, e.g., the discussion of the ways in which English and Scottish discourses on sympathy intertwined with discussions of magnetism and animal magnetism (and even mesmerism) in Patricia Fara, *Sympathetic Attractions: Magnetic Practices, Beliefs, and Symbolism in Eighteenth-Century England* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 147–51, 189–91, 199, 208; on elective affinity in eighteenth-century Scottish chemistry, see A. L. Donovan, *Philosophical Chemistry in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1975), 129–31, 155–56.

48 For helpful illuminations of these connections, see esp. Monique Moser-Verrey, “Le Discours de la sympathie dans *Les affinités électives*,” in *Les discours de la sympathie: Enquête sur une notion de l'âge classique à la modernité*, ed. Thierry Belleguic, Eric Van der Schueren, and Sabrina Vervacke (Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007), 343–55; and Sari Altschuler, “From Blood Vessels to Global Networks of Exchange: The Physiology of Benjamin Rush's Early Republic,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 32 (2012): 207–31.

49 On this point, see especially the useful development of this claim in Bernier, “Les Métamorphoses de la sympathie,” 2.

this, a third question remain unanswered: namely, granting that sympathy offered a fitting answer to a specific question, and indeed a timely answer to this question, to what degree ought it be regarded as a *good* answer? In particular, was sympathy in fact capable of providing the check on self-interest and concomitant encouragement of other-directed feeling that it promised?

This question brings us to what might be regarded as a tension between the end of sympathy and the means of sympathy. The first section of the chapter argues that the primary aim of sympathy was to check the potentially pernicious effects of self-interest. The subsequent section goes on to argue that the sympathy theorists of the eighteenth century envisioned a means toward this end not simply equivalent to positing the sort of selfless other-directedness we today associate with altruism. On the contrary, sympathy's eighteenth-century appeal lay in the fact that far from requiring transcendence of all concern for the self, its means of sensitizing its possessor to the pains and pleasures of others was precisely the pleasures and pains experienced by the self. Yet this move may lead us to wonder whether in fact a system predicated on such a mechanism is likely to (so to speak) get us where it wants to go.

This tension between ends and means seems particularly pronounced in those theorists most concerned to defend sympathy as a counter to familiar forms of psychological and ethical egoism. This project was of course a central component of eighteenth-century ethics, especially in Britain, with partisans of natural human sociability and the existence of a genuine capacity for benevolent concern for others ranged against those who reduced all ethical action to manifestations of self-interest or self-love.⁵⁰ In the former camp were figures such as the Earl of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson, who saw themselves as the vanguard of an offensive against the egoism of the latter camp. Hobbes and Mandeville in particular had done much to spur the defenders of other-directedness

⁵⁰ For an excellent introduction to eighteenth-century British moral philosophy and the centrality of the "Human Nature Question" to it, see Michael Gill, *The British Moralists on Human Nature and the Birth of Secular Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

to action, specifically by insisting that even the most engaging of the other-directed passions has self-interest at its core; thus Hobbes equated pity with “compassion” and “fellow-feeling,” and notoriously argued that “grief, for the calamity of another, is pity; and ariseth from the imagination that the like calamity may befall himself.”⁵¹ Mandeville, in a similar vein, reduced charity to a means of mitigating anxiety: “Thus thousands give money to beggars from the same motive as they pay their corn-cutter, to walk easy.”⁵² Writ large in both Hobbes and Mandeville is thus the psychological egoism that we saw in Spinoza. And it was of course precisely this that the defenders of other-directedness sought to counter in developing their idea of sympathy. But exactly how successful were they?

In truth the defenders of sympathy conceded a remarkable amount of ground to their opponents, and these concessions nearly proved fatal to their project. Their principal concession to the egoists came in the form of their acceptance of the claim that the proper frame for evaluating and defending sympathy is in fact the self and its pleasures and pains. Indeed it was this claim more than any other that bound the defenders of other-directedness to partisans of the selfish system. This is evident in their accounts of the relationship of sympathy to happiness. The indispensability of sympathy to genuine individual happiness is one of the keynotes of these accounts; thus Shaftesbury claims that “to have the natural affections (such as are founded in love, complacency, good-will, and in a sympathy with the kind or species) is to have the chief means and power of self-enjoyment,” and indeed “to want them is certain misery and ill.”⁵³ Here and in what follows it is difficult not to be struck by the claim that sympathy ought to be placed among man’s “mental enjoyments,” which prove to be “the only means which

⁵¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 43.

⁵² Bernard Mandeville, “An Essay on Charity, and Charity-Schools,” in *Fable of the Bees*, ed. F. B. Kaye (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1988), 1.259.

⁵³ Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, “An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and Merit,” in *Characteristicks*, ed. Douglas J. Den Uyl (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 2.57.

can procure him a certain and solid happiness.”⁵⁴ Now in saying this, it is of course hardly Shaftesbury’s intention to encourage egoism; the entire *Inquiry* is at its core a critique of such. But the particular route it takes to this end—a defense of sympathy as happiness promoting—poses a potential challenge, for even if it should be true that “exerting whatever we have of social affection, and human sympathy, is of the highest delight” and that with regard to “the pleasures of sympathy” there “is hardly such a thing as satisfaction or contentment, of which they make not an essential part,” by insisting that sympathy is indispensable to the happiness of the individual, Shaftesbury takes an important step away from the traditional understanding of love’s value, which privileged the well-being of the beloved over that of the lover, toward an other-directedness that privileges the subjective well-being of the self.⁵⁵

Shaftesbury, moreover, was hardly alone on this front. Hutcheson likewise rejected the claim that sympathy is to be accounted for by a mere “conjunction of interest” where “the happiness of others becomes the means of private pleasure to the observer; and for this reason, or with a view to this private pleasure, he desires the happiness of another.”⁵⁶ Hutcheson thought this far too reductionist. Yet when he came to speak in his own name, he articulated a position that comes close to this, insisting that “our sympathy or social feelings with others, by which we derive joys or sorrows from their prosperity or adversity,” constitute an important “source of happiness or misery”: “While there’s any life or vigour in the natural affections of the social kind, scarce any thing can more affect our happiness and misery than the fortunes of others. What powerful relief under our own misfortunes arises from seeing the prosperity of such as are dear to us! And how is all our enjoyment of life destroyed and beat to pieces by seeing their

54 Shaftesbury, “Inquiry Concerning Virtue,” 58.

55 Shaftesbury, “Inquiry Concerning Virtue,” 62.

56 Francis Hutcheson, *An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, with Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, ed. Aaron Garrett (1742; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 23.

misery!”⁵⁷ It is not a far step from here to the claim, urged by the egoists, that our beneficence is the fruit of a solicitude for our individual pleasures.⁵⁸ This would be particularly urged by Butler, who in arguing against Hobbes’s definition of pity, insists that the self is the proper sphere of reference: “When we rejoice in the prosperity of others, and compassionate their distresses, we, as it were, substitute them for ourselves, their interest for our own; and have the same kind of pleasure in their prosperity, and sorrow in their distress, as we have from reflection upon our own.”⁵⁹ And so too Fordyce: “a man of an enlarged benevolent mind, who thinks, feels, and acts for others, is not subject to half the disquietudes of the contracted selfish soul; finds a thousand alleviations to soften his disappointments, which the other wants; and has a fair chance for double his enjoyments.”⁶⁰ As in the previous cases, Fordyce takes an explicitly eudaemonistic perspective, but one that raises the question of whether and how it can be distanced from the reductionism of his antagonists. The original line of demarcation separating the two camps was clearly defined. Where Hobbes and Spinoza insisted that good and bad were to be judged by the standard afforded by the passions, their opponents, such as the Cambridge Platonist Henry More, argued that “no man’s private inclinations are the measures of good and evil,” for “the inclinations themselves are to be circumscribed by some principle which is superior to them.”⁶¹ Yet it is not clear that this can be achieved if eudaemonism is substituted for theism. Put differently, we might wonder on such grounds whether the broader tradition of eighteenth-century sympathy might not be susceptible to the

57 Francis Hutcheson, *Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy*, ed. Luigi Turco (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2007), 60.

58 As Turco has helpfully demonstrated, precisely this charge was levied against Hutcheson by John Clarke of Hull and Archibald Campbell, who “used the doctrine of sympathy to criticize his doctrines from an hedonistic point of view” (“Sympathy and Moral Sense, 1725–1740,” 100–101).

59 Butler, “Upon Compassion” (sermon #5), 45.

60 Fordyce, *Elements*, 137, and see also 138–39.

61 Henry More, *An Account of Virtue* (London, 1690), 81; cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 39; Spinoza, *Ethics*, sch.pr.9, III.

challenge that Thomas Reid raised with particular reference to the sympathy theory of Adam Smith: namely that it was “only a refinement of the selfish system.”⁶² Whether Reid’s critique of Smith is a fair one would require a separate study. At the same time, it helps to clarify that much of the issue hinges on how one ought to read the “necessary” in Smith’s striking opening of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which announces that “how selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him.”⁶³

6. THE LEGACY OF SYMPATHY

The foregoing account has covered a great deal of ground: too much perhaps for one brief survey, but not nearly enough, it must be said, to do justice to the full complexity of eighteenth-century sympathy. In particular, next to nothing has been said about one of its most important contexts, namely that of the literary and visual and performing arts. Indeed doing full justice would require detailed investigation of how the philosophical treatment of sympathy traced here maps onto the ways in which sympathy was conceived of and operationalized in sources as diverse as the novels of Henry Fielding, the engravings of William Hogarth, and the dramatic works of Rousseau—to say nothing of its central place in the erotic literature of the eighteenth century, and the role of sympathy on the French stage more generally.⁶⁴ So too almost nothing has been said about how this story maps on to the two greatest eighteenth-century theories of sympathy, those of David Hume and Adam Smith, which are the specific focus of Geoffrey

62 Thomas Reid to Lord Kames, 30 October 1778, in John Reeder, ed., *On Moral Sentiments* (London: Thommes, 1997), 66.

63 Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I.I.I.I.

64 On these last fronts, see esp. Gaëtan Brulotte, “La Sympathie et la littérature érotique dans la France du XVIIIe siècle,” in *Les Discours de la sympathie: Enquête sur une notion de l’âge classique à la modernité*, ed. Thierry Belleguic, Eric Van der Schueren, and Sabrina Vervacke (Quebec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2007), 199–218; and Hayes’s reflection in this volume.

Sayre-McCord's contribution to this volume. Readers of our pieces wishing to pursue this connection might do well to begin by considering what implications might follow from appreciation of the eighteenth-century context described here for our understanding of Hume's and Smith's theories. In particular, one might ask what implications there might be for the received understanding of Hume's and Smith's conceptions of sympathy as primarily valuable as elements of a phenomenological project to account for the mechanisms of judgment rather than as elements of a normative account of the sources of moral motivation.⁶⁵ Clearly there are grounds for such; that Hume and Smith thought sympathy central to judgment is beyond dispute and has been well demonstrated.⁶⁶ Yet in continuing to investigate the way in which Hume's and Smith's theories of sympathy undergird and illuminate their (and our) conceptions of judgment, we should take care to remind ourselves of the breadth and depth of those theories, and particularly their embrace of a vision of sympathy in ethical action. Attending to the contextual history of sympathy in the eighteenth century thus may prove especially valuable for the light that it can shed on Hume's and Smith's self-conscious participation in a long tradition of seeing sympathy as a principle (indeed a central principle) of agent motivation.⁶⁷

Yet independent of Smith and Hume, the eighteenth-century understanding of sympathy remains of crucial import in its own right. The transition of sympathy into the human sphere made possible a new way of conceiving human relations. As several contributions to this

65 Sayre-McCord helpfully calls attention to both of these senses of sympathy in Hume and Smith, though he primarily focuses on the latter; see chapter 7.

66 See e.g. D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith's Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 116–17 (which likewise calls attention to sympathy's significance as a "motive"); and Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 152–60.

67 For the beginnings of this debate, see esp. Leonidas Montes, "Das Adam Smith Problem," 82–85, and *Adam Smith in Context* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 45–55 (which offer the clearest and most important statements of this position to date); Eric Schliesser's review of Montes and Raphael in *Ethics* 118 (2008): 569–75; and the responses to be found in Raphael, *Impartial Spectator*, 119–20; and in Ian S. Ross, *The Life of Adam Smith*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 478 n.

volume have demonstrated, sympathy provided many premodern thinkers with a means of accounting for the affinity between seemingly distant and unrelated bodies. The insight of the eighteenth-century theorists was not merely to translate this principle into the moral sphere, but indeed to recognize the ways in which the particular moral sphere into which their principle was being translated resembled the very conditions of the physical world in which the earliest theories of sympathy had been forged. For just as the premodern theorists sought to account for connections between the different and diverse, so too the eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy sought to employ the concept to account for the sorts of connections necessary to maintain bonds between individuals in an increasingly less homogenized and more fluid world of diversity and differences. In this sense, sympathy provided eighteenth-century social theorists with a means of accounting for the minimal level of fellow-feeling needed to sustain their emerging pluralistic social order. This is of course not to say that sympathy provided an instant panacea; as many have noted, even amidst its many public campaigns against racism and the subordination of women, prominent vestiges of such persisted in the Enlightenment and indeed were sometimes given voice by such prominent theorists of sympathy as Hume and Kant. Clearly the work sympathy needed to do was both greater than a single day and greater than a single individual. At the same time, in articulating an account not only of how like and like might be combined but more crucially how like and unlike might establish that minimal degree of commonality necessary to sustain peaceful and harmonious coexistence—and perhaps even establish some degree of mutual recognition and respect—the eighteenth-century theorists of sympathy took a crucial step toward defining the key task of sympathy in the modern world.