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Feeling, cognition, and the eighteenth-century context of Kantian sympathy

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ABSTRACT

Recent Kant scholarship has argued that sympathetic feeling is necessary for the fulfilment of duty (e.g. Fahmy, Sherman, Guyer, and others). This view rests on an incorrect understanding of Kant and the historical context in which he wrote. In this paper, I compare Kant's conception of sympathy with Hume's and Smith's, arguing that Kant adapts central features of Smithian sympathy. I then examine Kant's lectures on ethics and anthropology, arguing that in them we can distinguish between two types of sympathy: one that is instinctual or pre-reflective, which we might call *empirical sympathy*, and one that is reflective and properly moral, which we might call *rational sympathy*. On these grounds I reconstruct an account of Kantian sympathy as a cognitive virtue for which feeling may be useful but not necessary, since its primary purpose is to provide information about the well-being of others, leading to action which honours their worth.

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> Thus the enormous value of a philosophy of life that weakens the feeling for our individuality by constantly referring to universal laws, that teaches us to lose our miniscule selves in the context of a larger whole, and that thereby puts us in the position of treating ourselves as we do others. This sublime spiritual disposition is the lot of strong and philosophical minds who, through assiduous work on themselves, have learned to control the selfish instinct.
>
> (Schiller, "On the Art of Tragedy", 4)

Kant scholars have recently argued that Kant holds sympathetic feeling to be necessary for the fulfilment of duty. Melissa Seymour Fahmy argues that in the *Doctrine of Virtue* "active sympathetic participation" entails an obligation to convey sympathetic feelings to those who are suffering ("Sympathetic Participation", 43). Paul Guyer argues that sympathetic feelings are the necessary immediate cause of benevolent acts, "the means that nature affords to move

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us to such acts" (*Knowledge, Reason, and Taste*, 187). Even those who do not hold sympathetic feeling to be necessary to duty assimilate Kant's idea of sympathy to the standard Humean notion, albeit qualified by features of the Kantian system. Melissa Merritt, for example, takes Kant to endorse the cultivation of "Humean-style sympathy, a natural propensity for the communication of feeling" which readies one to be moved by moral interests (*Kant on Reflection and Virtue,* 195). These interpretations intend to correct the misrepresentation of Kant as excluding positive feeling from his definition of virtue.[1] However, they overcorrect and distort his position in the process. In this paper, I argue that Kantian sympathy is a cognitive virtue that equips an agent to better understand others and the features of the world that contribute to their well-being. I suggest that sympathy does not necessarily entail the experience of sympathetic *feeling*. While feelings may at times help us to understand others' experience, I take it we may understand others without feeling something on their behalf. So, feelings have only instrumental or conditional moral value, while understanding and cognition are essential to the Kantian virtue of sympathy.[2]

In this sense, Kant's conception of sympathy is closer to that of Adam Smith, who understood sympathy to involve a projective process of imagination, than to Hume, who understood it roughly along the lines of emotional contagion. Recent work from a number of scholars shows that Kant was familiar with Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*). David Fate Norton and Manfred Kuehn argue that "Kant knew well and appreciated highly" Smith's work ("The Foundations of Morality", 978). Michael Walschots points out that "scholars have been confident that Kant read the *TMS* after the first German translation was published in 1770" ("*Achtung* in Kant and Smith", 238).[3] Since Kant admired Smith greatly and was familiar with the *TMS*, it is conceivable that he borrowed features of Smithian sympathy, transplanting them into his own system. There the virtue of sympathy took on a new form guided by Kant's distinctive understanding of the mind and morality.[4]

[1]This objection is classically represented by, for example, Bernard Williams and reaches back to Schiller. "Gladly I serve my friends, but alas I do it with pleasure. Hence I am plagued with doubt that I am not a virtuous person. Sure, your only resource is to try to despise them entirely, and then with aversion to do what your duty enjoins you" (Schiller, *Xenien*; this translation is from Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*, 48, though Paton provides a mistaken reference to another work). For Williams, see his "Persons, character, and morality".

[2]Regarding the conditional role of feeling in sympathy, we can also take a cue from Kant's discussion of the duty of love, where he says we cannot be under obligation to have feelings (6:449), and the idea that virtue presupposes apathy and a tranquil mind (6:409). Kant's works will be cited by volume and page number of the standard Academy edition (Berlin, 1900).

[3]In addition to these and Samuel Fleischaker, who I discuss in note 21, see the work of Walter Eckstein ("Einleitung"), Heiner Klemme (*Reception of the Scottish Enlightenment in Germany*), and Susan Meld Shell (*The Rights of Reason*).

[4]Benjamin Vilhauer provides an illuminating interpretation of rational sympathy grounded in voluntary productive imagination ("Reason's Sympathy"). Kant's reliance on imagination here is an obvious parallel with Smith. Regarding the moral side of sympathy, Keuhn and Norton point out that for twenty years Kant wrestled with the problem of whether feeling or reason determines the basic principles of

A comparison of Kant with Smith is illuminating because it sheds light on the cognitive features of Kantian sympathy, in contrast with incorrectly assumed Humean features. I will draw several comparisons with Smith as I reconstruct Kant's virtue of sympathy.

The first section of this paper examines Fahmy and Guyer's interpretations of the duty of sympathy from the *Doctrine of Virtue*. I argue that each interpretation overlooks important features of the text, misrepresenting Kant's account of sympathy as a result. I then briefly outline Hume and Smith's conceptions of sympathy before reconstructing Kant's own account. I argue that his lectures on ethics and anthropology enable us to better understand the place of sympathy in his moral psychology. Here we can distinguish two types of sympathy, one that is instinctual or pre-reflective, which we might call *empirical sympathy*, and one that is reflective and properly moral, or *rational sympathy*. Rational sympathy is a Kantian virtue. It (a) is reflective, (b) serves an epistemic function by providing information about the well-being of others, (c) leads to action because it is grounded in the moral law, and (d) leads to action that honours the worth of others. The first two features reflect features of Smithian sympathy while the latter two are uniquely Kantian. Approaching the *Doctrine of Virtue* with this broader base of textual evidence brings to the foreground these four features, which might otherwise remain out of focus. The first two define Kantian sympathy as primarily a cognitive skill – and a virtuous disposition – for which feeling may be useful but not necessary. This might seem an odd definition of sympathy, but Smith's precedent makes it less so. Further, by defining sympathy in this way, Kant anticipates contemporary distinctions between cognitive and affective forms or features of empathy. This definition also produces a more coherent reading of Kant by assimilating the virtue of sympathy with the conception of moral worth from the *Groundwork*. These points are obscured if we take his idea of sympathy to be closer to Hume's.

1. On Kantian sympathy as a duty to express feeling

Commentary on Kant's idea of sympathy focuses on the *Doctrine of Virtue*, where it is included alongside beneficence and gratitude as a duty of love toward others. Translation of this term is not entirely straightforward. The section heading devoted to the duty of sympathy reads: *Teilnehmende Empfindung ist überhaupt Pflicht,* which Mary Gregor translates as "Sympathetic feeling is generally a duty" (6:456). Fahmy argues that, while this might lead one to believe that Kant is describing a duty to have sympathetic

morality, and whether he should follow Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, or his German contemporaries. Of course, Kant eventually concluded that morality is grounded in rational and a priori principles of reason (Kuehn and Norton, "The Foundations of Morality", 978). This is a key feature of the new context in which his concept of sympathy is developed.

feeling, this would be incorrect because it "is too close to what Kant claims is *not* a duty (*Mitleid* and *Mitfreude*) to be a precise rendering of *Teilnehmung*" – which shares the same root as *Teilnehmende*, translated as sympathy throughout this section ("Sympathetic Participation", 33).[5] She notes that in Kant's discussion of *humanitas practica* the key verb *mitteilen* principally means to inform or communicate, rather than to share, as translated by Gregor. She argues that Kant is telling us to either "communicate our feelings directly with other persons, or alternatively, that we are to communicate with one another in a manner which is merely *informed* by our sympathetic feelings" ("Sympathetic Participation", 42). When we communicate these feelings deliberately and in accord with practical reason, we are fulfilling the duty of sympathy. When Kant says to "cultivate the compassionate [*mitleidigen*] natural (aesthetic) feelings in us" to enable us to sympathize actively in the fate of others, he means that we are to "produce cultivated sympathetic feelings" so that we may use them to participate in the lives of others ("Sympathetic Participation", 43 and 47). We do this when we communicate sympathetic feelings of joy or sorrow verbally or through body language, show an attitude of concern, and resist the temptation to isolate ourselves physically or emotionally ("Sympathetic Participation", 43).

While such displays are not ruled out for the Kantian agent, concern with interpersonal communication and the display of feeling is remote from Kant's central concern with properly motivated action throughout this section of the *Doctrine of Virtue.* Shortly after contrasting *humanitas practica* with *humanitas aesthetica* (he describes the latter as unfree) Kant provides the example of the Stoic to explain what sympathy is not:

> It was a sublime way of thinking that the Stoic ascribed to his wise men when he had him say 'I wish for a friend, not that he might help *me* in poverty, sickness, imprisonment, etc., but rather that I might stand by *him* and rescue a human being.' But the same wise man, when he could not rescue his friend, said to himself 'what is it to me?' In other words, he rejected compassion [*Mitleidenschaft*]. [. . . . T]here cannot be a duty to increase the ills in the world and so to do good from compassion [*aus Mitleid*].
>
> (6:457)

Being unable to act for the good of his friend, the Stoic refuses to suffer with him vicariously. The value of sympathetic feeling is conditional on its contribution to moral action, such that if one is unable to intervene and change the course of events, one ought not entertain such feelings. Compassion, defined here as sympathetic feeling without action, belongs to *humanitas aesthetica*. This weighs against Fahmy's reading on which the duty of sympathy requires an agent to convey sympathetic feeling or display concern, since these

[5]Kant: "it is not in itself a duty to share the sufferings [*Mitleid*] (as well as the joys [*Mitfreude*]) of others" (6:457).

displays do not appear to have moral value for Kant apart from their contribution to alleviate the suffering (or increase the well-being) of others.

This is more consistent with Kant's description of sympathetic feeling as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence: "[n]ature has already implanted in human beings receptivity to these feelings. But to use this as a means to promoting active and rational benevolence is still a particular, though only a conditional duty" (6:456). The duty of active and rational benevolence takes priority over the cultivation of sympathetic feeling, the purpose of which is to support it. Kant later says:

> But while it is not in itself a duty to share the sufferings (as well as the joys) of others, it is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate; and to this end it is therefore an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate [*mitleidigen*] natural (aesthetic) feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the feeling appropriate to them.
>
> (6:457)

Here, the duty to cultivate compassionate feelings is described as indirect, because these feelings are only one means to active sympathy which, for all intents and purposes, appears to be the same as benevolent action. So, the value of feeling is conditional on its promotion of benevolent action.[6] If sympathetic feeling does not promote benevolent action, there is no duty to acquire it (there is no duty to share in others' sufferings or joy). Kant seems to be saying the same thing here as one page earlier, namely that the duty to acquire sympathetic feeling is conditional on its promotion of benevolent action. I suggest that the above is what it means for the cultivation of sympathetic feeling to be a conditional (or indirect) duty. In any case, the emphasis in this passage is on active and rational benevolence, namely, being good by doing good to others. The Stoic, for example, wishes to *rescue* his friend. This implies a serious intervention, something like providing effective medical treatment or successfully advocating for the reduction of an unjust sentence. When this cannot be done, he ought not engage emotionally.

How does sympathetic feeling promote benevolent action if it cannot be a motive for action and ought to be shunned in the absence of action? It remains open that its purpose is to inform one of the states and causes of suffering and well-being in others (I will argue the lectures provide further evidence for this). If sympathy serves an epistemic function, that means it can help us to understand or perceive the plight of others, enabling us to better act for their good.[7] This explains why it is a duty "not to avoid the

[6]This accompanies the point that sympathetic feeling can mislead so cannot have unconditional moral value.

[7]This is consistent with the first feature of Nancy Sherman's reading of the cultivation of emotions in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, namely that "emotions serve as *modes of attention* that help us to track what is

places where the poor who lack the most basic necessities are to be found but rather to seek them out, and not to shun sickrooms or debtors' prisons and so forth in order to avoid sharing painful feelings one may not be able to resist" (6:457). It would be odd and possibly condescending if the purpose of such visits were merely to convey sympathetic feelings and an attitude of concern to the poor. Consolation in the face of suffering may be a meaningful way of helping others but this would not seem to be constituted by the mere demonstration of sympathetic feeling, which comes close to pity – "an insulting kind of beneficence" (6:457). Kant rather seems to be telling us to hold an unblinkered view of human suffering, being receptive to information about the lives of others, however that information is received, so we may act for their well-being. This might shed light on Kant's use of *mit-teilen* (to inform, tell, or disclose) in the passage above. Contrary to the idea that it indicates a reciprocal communication of sentiment as such, *mitteilen* might be understood to indicate a communication of information encoded in shared emotion. This emotion is morally valuable because it enables an agent to understand the morally relevant features of her environment. As *mit-teilen* may also mean to share in or take part along with, this may involve actively sharing or taking part in the feelings of another. Yet for Kant the purpose of this sharing is to understand and subsequently act for the good of the other.

Nancy Sherman similarly recognizes the epistemic function of emotion in Kant's ethics. She argues that emotions matter in moral assessment, agreeing that even "if we think of morality as having primarily to do with the rightness of action, a necessary condition for acting rightly will include recognition of the morally relevant features of situations" and emotions enable this recognition ("Emotions in Kantian Morality", 12). She also argues that affective receptivity is "more than a purely perceptual or cognitive matter" but "appears to have something to do with the moral assessment of action" ("Emotions in Kantian Morality", 12–13). She discusses the phenomenon of agent regret, the residual feeling of unease experienced when one must do something base for the sake of a higher (moral) good. The emotions it entails are important in revealing moral character and the revelation of

morally salient as morally salient in our circumstances, and thus to locate possible moments for morally permissible and required actions" (*Making a Necessity of Virtue*, 145). It is also consistent with Barbara Herman's 'rules of moral salience' which, for example, enable an agent "to recognize distress as something morally significant, so that he may judge whether his help is morally appropriate or called for" (*The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 82). Herman admits that she does not know whether this requires the development of affective capacities, but if it does, "[t]hen we will have found a Kantian argument for the development of the affective capacities, and Kantian grounds for valuing them – not, of course, valuing them for themselves but as morally necessary means" (*The Practice of Moral Judgment*, 82). I take this to be consistent with the position I develop here. I doubt that feeling is strictly necessary to imagine and understand another's experience, so it should not be a strictly necessary feature of Kantian sympathy; however, feeling often does help us to imagine and understand others – insofar as it does, it has value.

character matters ("Emotions in Kantian Morality", 12). She argues that Kant attempts to accommodate this commonsense view of the emotions – that they are not optional means for expressing duty but "central and constitutive of what we value in human morality" ("Emotions in Kantian Morality", 24). This implies that emotional tone and expression are morally significant, such that we are obligated not only to cultivate but to *manifest* feelings in beneficent action (Sherman, "Emotions in Kantian Morality", 22, emphasis mine). Elsewhere, she suggests that when we "*convey* or *communicate* moral intentions" through feelings this is one way they promote active and rational benevolence (Sherman, "Reasons and Feelings in Kantian Morality", 376).

This is a similar, though broader claim than Fahmy's since it applies beyond the duty of sympathy to feeling generally. Its emphasis on the expression of emotion elides Kant's insistence that sympathetic feeling – and there is no reason not to include other feelings here – is only of conditional moral value. Mere communication of sympathetic feeling does not constitute the fulfilment of duty. Active and rational benevolence implies taking active steps to contribute to the betterment of others. This might include the display of certain emotions, but such outward display is not internal to the duty itself. Kant's example of the Stoic is again instructive. He responds, "what is it to me?" when he cannot rescue his friend, exhibiting an affective state contrary to agent regret. Feelings of regret have no purchase on him.

No doubt most of us would prefer a warmer and more troubled response from our own friends. But we may read Kant here as suggesting that the duty of sympathy is not primarily about feeling but a kind of understanding. Feelings have moral value for Kant insofar as they communicate morally relevant information about the well-being and suffering of others. It is therefore conceivable that the function the duty of sympathy is meant to perform could be fulfilled without feeling, at least of the more direct kind advocated by Sherman and Fahmy. As I argue below, Kant's discussion of sympathy beyond the *Doctrine of Virtue* clarifies that properly moral, rational sympathy (as distinct from what I call empirical sympathy) is grounded in cognition. Because feelings are subjective, we cannot have a duty to acquire them, but we can have a duty to use them for moral purposes if and when we experience them, and we do have a duty to develop our understanding of what contributes to and detracts from the well-being of others.[8]

[8]I follow Wiebke Deimling in holding that while feelings do not embody judgements on Kant's account, they may communicate information, including information about the lives of others (Deimling, "Two Kinds of Value?", 40). That information requires cognition to be operationalized for moral action. So, where sympathetic feelings are concerned, those feelings alone cannot constitute the sort of virtuous disposition Kant has in mind; cognition is the necessary element, so virtuous Kantian sympathy (rational sympathy) is cognitive.

2. On Kantian sympathy as cause of moral action

Guyer approaches the matter from a different angle, arguing that sympathetic feeling is a proximate cause of moral action. He argues for a strong reading of the unknowability of the noumenal self which affords no detectable distinction between empirical and rational motivation in the sensible world. Consequently, "the effect of one's noumenally free and rational choice can be manifest *everywhere* or *anywhere* in one's phenomenal inclinations, dispositions, and character", leaving "entirely open where this influence occurs or what form it takes (*Knowledge, Reason, and Taste*, 183)". He therefore sees "strong substantive similarities" between Kant's empirical theory of motivation and Hume's (*Knowledge, Reason, and Taste*, 197). We have an indirect duty to cultivate sympathetic feelings, because they are "the means that nature affords us to move us to such acts, or their immediate causes" (*Knowledge, Reason, and Taste*, 187). This tacitly assimilates sympathy to the "conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" from the introduction to the *Doctrine of Virtue* (6:399), undermining its cognitive nature and epistemic function. It also makes Kant's discussion of moral worth and apparent support of reasons internalism in the *Groundwork* appear more puzzling than it should. Despite superficial differences of emphasis, Kant's position in the first section of the *Groundwork* is at depth consistent with his position in the *Doctrine of Virtue,* and there is not sufficient reason to believe his view changed radically during this time.

Guyer includes sympathy among the "moral endowments" that Kant holds "lie at the basis of morality, as *subjective* conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" (6:399). They include moral feeling, conscience, love of human beings, and respect. He argues that moral feeling "is the first stage in making the moral law effective in the phenomenal etiology of action" ("Moral Feelings", 138). By cultivating moral feeling first, other endowments like conscience, sympathy, and respect are strengthened, which then serve as proximate causes of moral action ("Moral Feelings", 138). However, because Kant describes the moral endowments as "subjective conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" (6:399), they are better read as preconditions for moral consciousness and responsibility than descriptions of motivation. A being that is empirical as well as noumenal must be capable of becoming conscious of the moral law to be held responsible according to it. It appears Kant wants to explain how this happens, arguing that moral feeling and conscience provide the empirical means for this.[9] Moral feeling

[9]Kant is not clear on whether they are, for example, individually necessary and jointly sufficient, or independently sufficient conditions etc. And he is less clear on why love of human beings and respect are meant to be conditions of moral responsibility, or "conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty" (6:399). It would be better to understand them as signs or markers of consciousness of the moral law on empirical nature. Whereas moral feeling and conscience enable us to be aware of the moral law, love of human beings and respect show that we are aware of the moral law.

is "the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty". Further, "any consciousness of obligation depends upon moral feeling to make us aware of the constraint present in the thought of duty" (6:399). Similarly with conscience. "For, conscience is practical reason holding the human being's duty before him" (6:400). The moral endowments therefore perform an epistemic and practical rather than causal function in moral agency. They are conditions on moral responsibility rather than action, in the absence of which "humanity would dissolve […] into mere animality and be mixed with the mass of other beings" (6:400). If sympathy were among these moral feelings (and it is not clear that it is), it would not follow that it is a proximate cause of moral action.

It is worth highlighting that Kant does not mention sympathy among the moral endowments. General moral feelings (*moralische Gefühle*) is mentioned, while sympathy (*teilnehmende Empfindung*) has a section of its own later in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. This omission may suggest that sympathy has a more specialized use than generic moral feeling as discussed at this point in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Direct evidence for counting it as another one of many moral feelings and a moral endowment appears slim.

Guyer further argues that sympathy is a proximate cause of moral action in his reading of the duties of love.[10] He suggests it is a conditional duty because sympathetic feelings may prompt us to do things that are morally impermissible so must be checked by reflection; the duty to cultivate these feelings, on the other hand, is unconditional, since "it is only by means of them [the feelings] that we are ever capable of performing the beneficent actions that are called for by the maxim of beneficence in appropriate circumstances" ("Moral Feelings", 148). This overstates the importance of feeling in the duty of sympathy. Guyer's strong view on this point may stem from his reading of moral feeling, with which he associates sympathy, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:72–6). Though there is not space here to discuss Kant's accounts of moral feeling and motivation in detail, I take the view that Kant believed rational principles can motivate without assistance from empirical feelings.[11] Kant does not state that sympathetic feeling is a necessary cause for action, which we might expect him to do if he held this view. The likeliest reason it is a duty is that it can inform the moral agent about the needs of others, enabling them to intervene on their behalf. One might object to this reading, citing that sympathy is "one of the impulses [*Antriebe*] that nature

[10]"Kant's statement that these feelings are the means that nature has implanted in us to the performance of beneficent actions suggests that these feelings, when sufficiently strong, are the proximate causes of beneficent actions, and thus are the penultimate stage in the phenomenal etiology of (these) particular moral actions" ("Moral Feelings", 147).

[11]See the entry in *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon,* "Incentive", by Andrews Reath, whose reading I follow here.

has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (6:457). While Kant's use of *Antriebe* here does suggest an urge or drive to movement, this does not mean that feelings are necessary to motivate beneficent action. There is also a difference between the representation of duty alone and action based on the representation of duty in the absence of feeling. The former is a cognition and does not involve a maxim, while the latter does involve a maxim. Kant may be saying we need more than cognition of the moral law to act with benevolence – we need cognition of the world and an understanding of how to apply the moral law to it. It makes sense that the representation of duty alone would be futile in helping us to understand the well-being of others. In any case, he does not seem to be making a point against rational motivation.

Regarding moral worth, *Groundwork* I assumes that it is possible to form reasonable beliefs about the kind of maxims on which we act. While we may be unable to know our true motives with certainty, we may nevertheless make legitimate assumptions about our disposition and maxims through, for example, inference and the comparison of our actions over the course of our life (Owen Ware "Self-Knowledge").[12] It is also reasonable to assume that Kant's examples in the *Groundwork*, which draw a contrast between action based on inclination versus duty, take the appearance of each at face value. The philanthropist whose mind is "overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others […] nevertheless tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the [good] action without any inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth" (4:398). Morally worthy action must proceed from moral maxims and acting from moral maxims requires acting from rational principles rather than feeling. Since sympathy does not contain a rational principle, it does not provide a moral maxim, so a good will cannot be one that acts from sympathy. It is not *entirely* open as to where in an agent's empirical character free choice and moral action may be located.[13]

Kant similarly assumes that we may form reasonable beliefs about the noumenal self when he speaks of the grounding of character as a specific and discernible moment in a person's life when one resolves to act on moral principles:

> The human being who is conscious of having character in his way of thinking does not have it by nature; he must always have *acquired* it. One may also assume that the grounding of character is like a kind of rebirth, a certain

[12] See Anastasia Berg, "Kant on Moral Self-Opacity", for the stronger thesis that we can obtain moral self-knowledge (because we need not attribute what Ware calls the Self-Opacity thesis to Kant).

[13] See Guyer's discussion of this in *Kant and the Experience of Freedom*, 350. A detailed discussion of moral worth is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is worth noting that it need not exclude participating inclinations. Two classic papers include Herman, "Acting from the Motive of Duty" and Baron, "Alleged Moral Repugnance".

> solemnity of making a vow to oneself; which makes the resolution and the moment when this transformation took place unforgettable to him, like the beginning of a new epoch. […] Perhaps there are only a few who have attempted this revolution before the age of thirty.
>
> (7:294)

Such an event is memorable, having a strong effect on one's conscious identity. He goes so far as to say that we can expect it to happen after a certain age, when it does happen (though it may be the case that it will never happen for many). This assumes that we may form well-grounded beliefs about the noumenal ground of our character and the deeper reasons for which we act. Absent this, it would be difficult to speak of this event. This form of character does not appear to include sympathetic feeling, since it consists in making a solemn vow based on practical principles, being described as a "rigid, inflexible disposition which accompanies a formed resolution" (7:293).

It might be objected that a straightforward inference like this to the noumenal ground of character is absent from the discussion of character in the *Religion*. While it is true that Kant more scrupulously draws the line between noumenal and empirical character here than in his lectures, he nevertheless permits that we may form reasonable beliefs about noumenal character. Referencing the Christian doctrine of justification by divine grace, he says that with this change of heart our fundamental maxim changes to the moral law and we become good or justified in the eyes of God (6:67). We are therefore assured of a "blessed" eternity (6:69). Given assurance of eternal blessedness, human beings may become morally lazy, neglecting their duties to themselves and others. While on the other hand, absent of reassurance, they might come to believe their actions are futile and give up on their duties in dismay. Addressing this problem, Kant says that:

> a human being who, from the time of his adoption of the principles of the good and throughout a sufficiently long life henceforth, has perceived the efficacy of these principles on what he does, i.e. on the conduct of his life as it steadily improves, […] on the basis of what he has perceived in himself so far, he can legitimately assume that his disposition is fundamentally improved.
>
> (6:68)

Stephen Palmquist argues that moral progress in one's phenomenal life provides a rational ground for belief in divine justification – a noumenal change of heart – empowering one to live more ethically ("Kant's Ethics of Grace", 541). If one may believe that what appear to be moral choices are in fact moral choices – that is, good actions grounded in the moral law – it will help them to track their moral progress. Seeing positive moral progress is empowering, it encourages one to continue on the path of moral

improvement. Denying that it is possible to see progress is disempowering and may discourage one from trying to live a good life. So, Kant says that one must "assess the eternal status of their disposition by appealing to life conduct", for this is the only means we have available for assessing whether we have undergone the change of heart (Palmquist, "Kant's Ethics of Grace", 541). This means that we may form reasonable beliefs about our noumenal character based on empirical evidence. Though we may be unable to know our true motives with certainty, this does not imply that the effects of noumenal choice may be located anywhere or everywhere in empirical character.[14] Though we should not be naïve, it appears we may be as liberal as judicious common sense permits.

3. Two interlocuters in the eighteenth-century conversation: Hume and Smith on sympathy

Considering the above, we can infer that Kant's conception of sympathy is quite different from Hume's. Looking more closely at the conversation on sympathy in the eighteenth century confirms this. Sympathy emerged as an important moral concept at this time due to both the Industrial Revolution and increasingly secular discourse surrounding the philosophy of mind. The former brought about new forms of social life that needed to be maintained for the common good. Urbanization required strangers to live in close proximity to one another and form relationships of interdependence. At the same time, the increasing secularization of academic discourse prevented appeal to the principle of Christian charity as a broadly persuasive means of maintaining these bonds. The neutral and naturalistic concept of sympathy provided a creative solution to this problem and was endorsed by theists and non-theists alike (Hanley, "Eighteenth-Century Sympathy"). It features prominently in Hume's naturalized moral philosophy. There, sympathy has both an epistemic and motivational function.[15] I will describe the mechanism of sympathy, the process by which it communicates an affection from one person to another. Following that, I will explain these two functions.

It is difficult to know the exact extent of Kant's familiarity with Hume's published work. He would have read the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (*EPM*), which was included in a four-volume German translation of

[14] In a similar vein, Patrick Frierson suggests that while we cannot have direct insight into our fundamental maxim, we may judge our disposition to be good if we engage in a consistent struggle against evil. This "self-evaluation must be based on *actions*, not on mere feelings or any supposed sense of oneself" (Frierson, *Freedom and Anthropology*, 130). While we may not be certain of our fundamental maxims, maxims are a part of action on the Kantian picture, so we are permitted to form beliefs about them. So, the *Religion* indicates that we may form well-grounded beliefs about the nature of our noumenal character.

[15] This is consistent with Rico Vitz's interpretation of Hume on sympathy. See Vitz, "The Nature and Functions of Sympathy in Hume's Philosophy" and "Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology".

Hume's essays which he owned (published in 1752–4). The *Treatise* was only fully translated much later, in 1790, so it is doubtful he knew it in detail.[16] Nevertheless, in his announcement of lectures for the winter semester of 1765–6, Kant claims he will make more precise and complete the "attempts of *Shaftesbury*, *Hutcheson*, and *Hume*, [which,] although incomplete and defective, have nonetheless penetrated furthest in the search for the fundamental principles of morality" (2:311). Kant obviously believed he had sufficient knowledge of Hume's moral theory to do this, and it would have been difficult for him to miss the role of sympathy within it. The *EPM*, which Kant read, tells us, for example, that sympathy is what enlivens our hearts to virtue "by our acquaintance or connexion" with persons, though "to the eye of reason" it is "infinitely removed" (*EPM,* V). While his formal knowledge of Hume's account of sympathy may not have gone far, we can reasonably believe that he understood its contagion-like operation and wanted to correct what he saw as its mistakes.[17] To present a clear outline of Hume's conception of sympathy I will reconstruct it based on what Hume says in the *Treatise*.

In a passage from the *Treatise,* Hume writes:

> When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection.
>
> (SB 317)[18]

The process begins when an affection in one person produces observable effects, which make an impression on an observer, leading them to form an idea of what that person is feeling. This idea arouses an affection in the observer that is equal to or approximates the affection of the observed. Hume uses the "principle of sympathy" as a shorthand to describe this process (SB 316). There is a necessary role for cognition here: the mind produces a copy of the other's affection in the form of an idea, which then brings about that affection in oneself. However, the contents remain non-cognitive: the sympathy transferred is an affection. For this reason, for Hume, sympathetic communication depends on both the observed and

[16]Karl Groos' speculations aside, the dominant view is that Kant did not read English. Copies of Hume's essays in translation, which include the two *Enquiries,* appear among Arthur von Warda's lists of Kant's books (*Kants Bücher*, 50). While it is unlikely that Kant was familiar with the *Treatise* in detail, it is likely he read the Conclusion of Part I after the German translation of this excerpt was published in 1771. For more on this, see Karin de Boer, "Kant's Response to Hume's Critique", 376–406. For Groos' argument, see his "Hat Kant Hume's *Treatise* Gelesen?". I thank an anonymous reviewer at this journal for bringing these details to my attention.

[17]Kant is likely to have been familiar with the *Treatise's* main arguments through conversation with associates like Hamann (a close friend) and Jacobi, both of whom read English and published translations of some of Hume's work (Wolff, "Kant's Debt to Hume", 117).

[18]Hume's *Treatise* is cited using the Selby-Bigge pagination.

observer's capacity to experience the affection in question. The epistemic function of sympathy is performed when the observer experiences the same affection as the observed and is thereby made aware of the other's situation as they experience it. The motivational function is performed when that awareness (communicated through affection) triggers the passion of benevolence in the observer, motivating the observer to act, for example, to ameliorate the other's situation.[19]

Hume's account depends both on the observer forming the idea that the one observed is experiencing a particular feeling and their ability to experience that feeling for themselves. If the observer does not form the idea that the other is experiencing a given feeling, the observer cannot sympathize with them.[20] As a result, the morally relevant information, for example, about the other's suffering, will not be communicated. One might view this as a problem insofar as it appears that sympathetic feeling is necessary to motivate prosocial behaviour in at least some cases. If there is no feeling to observe, the observer's evaluation will be incomplete and possible acts of benevolence will be left unmotivated, hence unperformed. For example, say someone's partner has withdrawn their collective savings and deserted them without justification, leaving this person in dire financial need. These events, compounded by a pre-existing condition of depression, leave this person despondent, absent of emotion. It might be objected that on Hume's account, sympathy for this person is impossible because they do not experience affection in the first place (or do not experience an affection available to another). Sympathy on this account remains fellow feeling in a strict sense, with counterintuitive results. This does not prevent an observer from acting on other motives to ameliorate this person's situation, but it suggests that sympathy as fellow feeling is an unreliable guide to performing this action. To conceive of sympathy in this way would therefore mark a deficiency in it qua moral concept.

That it also depends on the observer's own feeling could present a further difficulty, since when the observer is incapable of experiencing the affection of the observed, the sympathetic process breaks down. It might be objected that this is just what it means to sympathize, and no more fitting a conception can be had. If one is incapable of feeling, one is incapable of sympathy. This is consistent with Hume's naturalistic vision of morality yet demonstrates its limitations. Sympathy does a great deal of work on the Humean picture, "it produces our sentiment of morals in all the artificial virtues" and gives rise

[19]See Vitz for further detail on the sympathy as a source of prosocial motivation ("The Nature and Functions of Sympathy in Hume's Philosophy", 320–2).

[20]For example, as pointed out by Alexander Broadie: "[i]f the spectator does not believe the agent to have a given passion, then he does not sympathize with the agent because Humean sympathy is essentially a principle of communication by which the spectator comes to have a passion that he believes the agent to have and he comes to have it because of this belief" (Broadie, "Sympathy and the Impartial Spectator", 162–3).

to our tendency to praise some actions as good insofar as they benefit humankind and disapprove of others insofar as they cause harm (SB 577–8). It is also a source of moral (prosocial) motivation and while it may not be the only source of such motivation, insofar as it is a significant motivating factor Hume's moral psychology suffers a deficit. For if moral motivation and understanding depend upon affections that may easily be lacking in either the observer or the observed, moral action may too easily be made impossible.[21] This is Kant's classic objection levelled against sentiment-based accounts of moral character and action in *Groundwork* I.[22]

These objections do not come exclusively from the rationalist (Kantian) camp. Adam Smith saw these problems in Hume's conception of sympathy and developed his account in response to it.[23] To sympathize with someone, according to Smith, involves imagining the situation the other is in prior to any affective response on their behalf: "[b]y the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments […]. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us (*TMS*, I.i.I.2)". Smith's account of sympathy could be described as cognitive first and affective second. An agent who is disposed to this form of sympathy will have the capacity to understand others' situations, the state of their suffering or well-being, and the factors that contribute to this state. This form of sympathy entails knowledge of the other and an underlying epistemic capacity on the part of the virtuously sympathetic agent. This sympathetic agent can obtain information about the other's situation to inform moral judgement and action. It does not concern the communication of *sentiment*, as it does with Hume. Sympathy is not entirely epistemic for Smith but traces a movement away from a predominantly affective version of sympathy to something more cognitive, anticipating more sophisticated definitions of empathy we see today.[24]

[21] Samuel Fleischacker notes a further problem in the relation between the observer and the observed. Namely, that Hume's epistemic stance toward causality leaves the causal inference between the observable effects of an agent's affection (i.e., bodily events) and the affection itself unclear. Because he holds that one cannot observe the internal workings of another's mind, one cannot observe the conjunction between a particular feeling and the external effects of that feeling (e.g., "between your feeling happy and your smiling") (Fleischacker, "Sympathy in Hume and Smith", 285–6). Since causation is iterated conjunction for Hume, one cannot draw the inference from another's behavior to the feeling they are experiencing. As a result, the sympathetic process breaks down.

[22] Kant is exceptionally clear on this when he stipulates that the philanthropist whose mind is "overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy [*Theilnehmung*] with the fate of others […] nevertheless tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth" (4:398).

[23] I follow Fleischacker ("Sympathy in Hume and Smith") and Broadie ("Sympathy and the Impartial Spectator") on this point.

[24] See, for example, Martin Hoffman's multi-stage developmental account of empathy (*Empathy and Moral Development*), Michael Slote's account of empathy and the ethics of care (*The Ethics of Care and Empathy*), or Stephanie Preston and Frans de Waal's account of diverse forms of empathy across species ("Empathy: Its Ultimate and Proximate Bases"). For an excellent collection on the role

Cognition and imagination are central to Smith's account of sympathy. In this passage, one observes another's situation and imagines what it would be like to be in that situation:

> Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it. We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality.
>
> (*TMS*, I.i.I.10)

This act of imagination produces certain feelings in the observer that the one being observed may or may not themselves feel.[25] Though these feelings are imagined, they communicate something about what it is like to be in that person's situation (insofar as one has an adequate grasp of it). Smith even suggests that fear of death is a result of sympathizing with the dead, insofar as we imagine it would be miserable to "be deprived of the light of the sun [and] to be shut out from life and conversation; to be laid in the cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth" (*TMS*, I.i.I.13.). This shows that sympathy does not consist in the communication of affection, because we may sympathize with others where it is impossible for affection to be communicated. Affection is expected to contribute to sympathy, but the agent creates these affections on another's behalf. The process that enables one to experience these affections – which we might call the process of *sympathizing* – implies an understanding of what another is experiencing. These feelings can then inform one of what it would (or should) be like to be in another's situation, which does not require the transmission of affection from one person to another. Instead, it requires attentiveness to another's situation and a capacity to imagine oneself inhabiting it. For these reasons, cognition is crucial to Smith's conception of sympathy. Sympathy implies an epistemic capacity and performs a partly epistemic function in his moral psychology. This is a significant break from Hume, Smith's target in writing this (Sayre-McCord, "Hume and Smith on Sympathy", 217).

of empathy in morality generally, see Maibom, *Empathy and Morality*. The definition of empathy and the degree to which it involves cognition, as opposed to affection exclusively, is highly contested. For example, Hoffman and Preston and De Waal include elements of cognition prominently within the definition of empathy, whereas Paul Bloom and Jesse Prinz distinguish between empathy as an affective process and the cognitive processes involved in moral reasoning, sometimes referring to the latter as cognitive empathy (Bloom, *Against Empathy*; Prinz, "Against Empathy"). Cognitive empathy is understood to involve perspective taking, much like Smith's sympathy (see, for example, Maibom, *Empathy*, 10). For an overview of empathy in contemporary philosophy, see Karsten Steuber's detailed entry ("Empathy") in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

[25] Except perhaps insofar as the other's affective state is a part of their situation (perhaps it figures into an evaluation of their suffering or well-being). For example, as the affective experience of someone in great anxiety is a feature of what it means to be anxious.

Smith's sympathetic disposition and the process underlying it therefore imply a demanding cognitive task. When one imagines another's situation, this includes that person's character and commitments – we might say those conditions which make life meaningful to them:

> But though sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situations with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathize. When I console with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I should suffer, if I was really you, and I do not only change circumstances with you, but I change persons and characters.
>
> (*TMS*, VII.iii.1.4)[26]

He suggests that a man may even sympathize with a woman in childbirth, though it is impossible for him to conceive of *himself* as experiencing her pain (*TMS*, VII.iii.1.4).[27] It is difficult to know the degree to which one can (and perhaps should) enter imaginatively into the experience of another, but Smith is confident we can do this with some degree of accuracy. Smithian sympathy aims to understand by accounting for the facts about other people and their situation, rather than depending more narrowly on a capacity to share their feelings.

4. Kantian sympathy

These features may have made Smith's conception of sympathy attractive to Kant. The philosophical community in Germany at the time was fascinated by the work of British philosophers, including Smith, and sought to integrate their observations about moral sense (and sensation generally) into a comprehensive rational framework (Kuehn, *Kant*, 184).[28] On Kant's settled view,

[26]See also *TMS*, I.i.I.2: "By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are thus brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels".

[27]Bence Nanay takes this to show that Smith's conception of sympathy is closer to identification, often described as cognitive empathy, than empathy of a more standard kind ("Adam Smith's Concept of Sympathy and Its Contemporary Interpretations", 97).

[28]As Kuehn points out, though unwilling to give up on it, the Germans saw the traditional Wolffian framework as incomplete because it neglected sensation. The observations of the British were, for this reason, taken to be insightful, though they lacked grounding in a comprehensive rational system. Because of the puzzles that existed in both traditions, the work of the British philosophers was quickly translated into German and extensively reviewed in German journals (Kuehn, *Kant*, 183–4). Further, Kant had great admiration for Smith. In a 1771 letter to Kant from Markus Herz, Herz mentions that he heard from Friedländer that the "Englishmen" Smith is Kant's darling (*Liebling*). Of course, this is a mistake on Herz's part – Smith was Scottish (see Fleischacker, "Kant and Smith", 250). This was five years prior to the publication of *The Wealth of Nations*, so Kant would have been familiar with Smith through the *TMS*, where the central role of sympathy is hard to miss (Fleischacker, "Kant and Smith", 250).

once sympathy is grounded in the moral law (as both a rational moral norm and motivation) it can become a moral virtue. While the *Doctrine of Virtue* makes important distinctions concerning the moral value of sympathy, these distinctions could be made clearer. By turning to Kant's lectures on ethics and anthropology we get a more complete view of sympathy's place in his moral psychology. The notes taken by his students and friends distinguish between two kinds of sympathy, one we might call *empirical sympathy* and another we might call *rational sympathy*.[29] The former is instinctual or pre-reflective, while the latter is reflective and the proper domain of virtue. This distinction emerged early in Kant's thought, prior to the development of his mature moral theory, which is not surprising given his early admiration for Smith. The *Anthropology Friedländer* notes (1772–3) date to more than ten years prior to the presentation of his mature theory in the *Groundwork* (1785), and the *Ethics Collins* notes, while dated 1784, represent lectures Kant gave during the 1770s. The *Ethics Herder* notes (1762–4) are older still. It is possible at these earlier times that Kant saw sympathy as an admissible backup motive since he had not yet established the concept of respect as a privileged moral incentive.[30] He would have been wrestling with the question of the ultimate role of feeling in morality during this time. By the time of his mature theory the function of sympathy as motive would have fallen away (consistent with my argument above), and the moral law would emerge as primary moral motive. I argue that the distinction between empirical and rational sympathy nevertheless remained and that it helps to clarify the duty of sympathy in the *Doctrine of Virtue* – that is, a duty to cultivate rational sympathy, a cognitive disposition and virtue grounded in the moral law. This form of rational sympathy may involve feeling because feelings can convey information about the experience of others, helping us to understand them. However, feeling is not strictly necessary for rational sympathy because we may understand others in the absence of sympathetic feeling. Sympathetic feeling therefore has only conditional moral value for Kant, while cognition – knowledge of others and the world alongside knowledge of the moral law – is necessary to the Kantian virtue of sympathy (rational sympathy). This form of Kantian sympathy contains interesting parallels with Smith, which further distinguish his account from Hume's.

That sympathy is a naturally occurring feature of human nature is recognized throughout the lectures on ethics and anthropology. The later *Ethics Vigilantius* notes (1793) describe love of persons as the love of humankind in the totality of its properties qua intelligent being, in contrast to its merely animal properties.[31] Further:

[29] I take inspiration from Kant's descriptions of "instinctual fellow-feeling (sympathy) [*instinctmäßiges Mitgefühl (Sympathie)*]" (27:677) and "reason's sympathy [*Antheil der Vernunft*]" (25:610), though strictly the latter means 'share of reason'.

[30] I thank an anonymous reviewer at this journal for bringing this point to my attention.

> Were we to understand by this [love of persons] a mere pity or sharing in the well-being of others, and to that extent love for them, supposing this concept to be applied to the fulfillment of duty, then this would be mere humaneness, and would say too little, since such a feeling is not only characteristic of man, but also of animals as well; e.g. when one is in danger, the others display uneasiness and an impulse to protect.
>
> (27:671)

The concern here is that a mere propensity to share feelings with others and to care for them does not exercise the higher order cognitive features unique to humanity. Because this propensity is shared with animals, it is understood as a pre-reflective instinct. What is unique to humanity is the capacity for higher order thought, which Kant holds is necessary for the communication of properly moral feelings:

> Of these two kinds of communication, the mutual disclosure of thoughts is the best, and is truly the ground for communication of feeling. For feelings can be disclosed no otherwise, than by the imparting of thoughts; thus we must have an idea of the feeling in advance, and must hence have employed reason, in order to have known it accurately before we share it, so that the feeling thereafter may be correct and not instinctual; without thoughts, therefore, we would have no feelings, at least none of the moral kind; the other would be able to evince, not moral, but only instinctual fellow-feeling (sympathy) [*instinctmäßiges Mitgefühl (Sympathie)*].
>
> (27:677)

A similar thought is echoed in *Ethics Collins*, where sympathy is described as useful, though it "does not constitute moral dispositions; it is pathological, and also to be found in animals" (29:626). These passages describe sympathy as a feature of sensible, rather than rational nature. While it may lead to prosocial action, if it is not guided by reflection, it is better described as an instinct than a virtue.

Anthropology Friedländer makes a similar argument, describing an instinctual form of sympathy that occurs without reflection. When kind-heartedness is grounded in this sympathy, it leads to exhaustion, or compassion fatigue.

> Kind-heartedness also takes place without concepts. It arises solely from sympathy [*Sympathie*], yet such a kind-hearted person also often becomes exhausted. Therefore, this kind-heartedness lacks a concept, that indeed in all cases which one encounters, one nevertheless be kind-hearted, and this is uprightness.
>
> (25:552)

With the addition of a concept, kind-heartedness becomes uprightness. The concept Kant has in mind here could eventually be the moral law since it

[31] Love of persons "consists in the totality of all the properties of man, considered as an intelligent being, and whereby he is set in contrast to the *homo brutus* in his animality" (27:671).

commands respect for persons in all circumstances. This would include respect for oneself, which rules out kind-heartedness to the point of exhaustion.

Kant again describes a form of instinctual, or empirical sympathy when he discusses the vicarious representation of feelings in a theatre: "yet to have sensation in the place of another and under his name, is different from immediately having a sensation with him. The latter is sympathy [*Sympathie*], it is not due to us, but is involuntary and also proper to animals" (25:575). The actor engages in a form of cognitive sympathy different from emotional contagion, or pre-reflective sympathy. Further:

> when a pig is butchered, then the others scream, but with the human being it exists to a still higher degree. Thus a human being trembles when he sees someone else go under in the water, or fall through on the ice. That is not a play of sensation as [in the case of] the borrowed ones, but it is a true sensation, which is indeed ideal, since we step into his place and have a sensation with him. (25:575)

The sympathy described here and in the case of the actor involves the cognitive act of imagining oneself in another's place, much like Smith describes in the *TMS*. In this case, the agent experiences sensation on the other's behalf. The sensation is described as true or ideal insofar as it is based on ideas one forms about the other's situation. As Ben Vilhauer argues, Kantian sympathy may be connected to the subjective synthesis of the imagination:

> The reproductive imagination is what provides the subjective unity which puts me in my own place, so it is reasonable to suppose that it is the reproductive imagination's capacities placed in the harness of productive imagination which allow me to put myself in another's place. Kant claims that it is this imaginative projection which allows *Theilnehmung*, the sympathy/participation in others' […] through which we share their feelings. (Vilhauer, "Reason's Sympathy", 466)

This psychological process is different from what we would find in Smith. Though the psychological structure of Kantian sympathy is grounded in his distinctive account of the mind, the general idea is parallel: the agent forms feelings vicariously based on what they imagine another to be experiencing, as, for example, one might feel another's grief on imagining the loss of an only son (*TMS*, VII.iii.1.4). While this may involve feeling, because feelings may communicate information about others, it does not necessitate feeling, because we may understand others without experiencing feelings on their behalf. Imagination, however, is essential, so this form of sympathy goes beyond instinct.

Further instances of strictly instinctual sympathy include sympathizing with another's joy, pain, or burdens, and even the motion of inanimate objects, as "when one is bowling, and the bowling ball goes crooked on the one side, one also leans over to the other side with the foot" (25:606).

Sympathy toward animals is also described as physical sympathy, in contrast with sympathy in accordance with ideas:

> The animalistic [aspect] of sympathy [*thierische der Sympathie*] is when we are only sensible of what produces physical pain. Sympathy in accordance with ideas [*Sympathie nach Ideen*] is superior, the physical only serves to substitute for the ideal [in the case of] one who is incapable of the latter. It is based not on deliberation, but on animality, if we do not sympathize as much with what we do not see, as when we see it […]. Pity for animals comes from physical sympathy [*physicalischen Sympathie*].
>
> (25:607)

These comments indicate that Kant recognizes both an instinctual and an intellectual form of sympathy. The latter is superior to the former because it is grounded in higher order intellectual capacities unique to humanity. It also appears to be directed toward other rational beings that possess these capacities, since pity for animals proceeds exclusively from instinctual sympathy. While they rank lower than intellectual sympathy, Kant argues that these empirical sympathies should be preserved, "because they are a means of strengthening the principles of sympathizing [*weil sie Mittel sind, die Grundsätze der Theilnehmung zu stärken*]" (25:607). The reason to strengthen these principles appears to be moral: if we observe the causes and effects of pain in animals, we will better observe it in humans. This information enhances our awareness of the needs of others, indirectly increasing our capacity for benevolent action, which is why sympathy is a duty in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Despite subtle variations of language, these descriptions of a lower form of sympathy may be placed under the general category of empirical sympathy, because they proceed from our lower nature only, which is shared with other species of animals.

The lectures on ethics and anthropology have a lot to say about the higher form of sympathy I suggest we call rational sympathy. This form of sympathy has four features: it is (a) reflective, (b) provides information about the well-being of others, (c) leads to action, and (d) this action honours the worth of others. Proper rational sympathy is in this way properly moral sympathy.

It is (a) reflective insofar as it is grounded in deliberation, as the above passage on sympathy in accordance with ideas suggests. This may involve thinking a situation through, understanding the suffering that another experiences, and understanding what would increase their well-being. It also involves taking pleasure – or 'rational joy' – in the increase of their well-being. For example:

> If one person has won the lottery, and the other one says, I am happier than if I had won it myself, then the question is, in what sense is this true? We have two kinds of joy: a rational and a sensible satisfaction. Rational satisfaction arises from reason's sympathy [*Antheil der Vernunft*] and the sensible from the judgment of the senses. If I see a human being in misery, who is suffering misfortune [and] watches his family going to ruin, then if I were in a position to do so, I

> would sooner bestow good fortune on him than on me. If now by chance he does become fortunate, then I am happier than if I had myself been so fortunate, for if I think it over rationally, then I find it agreeable that the purpose was here so fitting, since this miserable man needs it sooner than I do.
>
> (25:610)

Like the process underlying Smithian sympathy, Kant's rational sympathy includes the cognitive task of striving to *understand* another's situation, suffering, and well-being. *Ethics Herder* seems to suggest that moral sympathy just is this cognitive act: "since *moral sympathy* [*Moralische Sympathie*] is imprinted on all, he has to put himself in the other's place" and "[t]here exists in man a moral *sympathy* [*moralische Sympathie*], to put oneself in the other's place; it is the basis of a righteous love, and holds it to be an obligation" (27:65 and 27:66). Herder's notes predate the *Groundwork* by more than twenty years, revealing that Kant regarded sympathy at least in part as a cognitive skill from early on. This reflective component is necessary to the form of moral, properly rational, sympathy we later observe in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Rational sympathy may be considered a moral application of the three maxims of healthy understanding which appear several times throughout Kant's writings. They are: "1. To think for oneself; 2. To think in the position of everyone else; 3. Always to think in accord with oneself" (5:294).[32] While it does not rule out a role for feeling, as argued above, it is grounded in reflection rather than feeling. So, an agent who does not experience sympathetic feeling but has a highly developed capacity to understand others' well-being (and is motivated to act for the sake of it) may possess this disposition.

Rational sympathy is also a tool to (b) acquire information about the well-being of others. *Anthropology Friedländer* states that it helps to make up for the fact that others' mental states and experiences are not immediately accessible to us:

> If we were beings who had a greater degree of reason, then we would not need any sympathy [*Sympathie*], for we could have insight into the other's well-being or misfortune from the principles. Sympathy [*Sympathie*] is therefore only a means of supplementing the lack in principles; to this extent it is also permitted, but if it becomes an affect then it conflicts with the principles
>
> (25:611)

While this shies away from identifying sympathy with a cognitive act, it indicates that the value of sympathetic feeling is conditional on its ability to make information about the well-being of others available for reflection. Insofar as this information can be had another way, sympathy is unnecessary: so, the provision of information is essential to this kind of sympathy in a way that feeling is not. To share this information through thought, speech, or feeling

[32]This is from the *Critique of Judgment*.

is a unique feature of rational beings, whereas the capacity to share in feeling exists in other animals:

> we have to build upon the characteristic feature peculiar to the human race, namely the inclination of men to impart their feelings and sensations to one another, as they do their information; and this is the inclination which determines the practical in human nature, and demands unceasing cultivation for that purpose.
>
> (27:671–2)[33]

This supports the distinction between empirical and rational sympathy and affirms that the latter is superior to the former. Here, love of persons requires the engagement of humanity's unique properties as an intelligent being. This echoes the priority of cognition and practical information that one sees in Smith, as Smithian sympathy may occur in observing another's situation even when the other experiences no feeling (as in the extreme example, we may sympathize with the dead) (*TMS*, I.i.I.10 and I.i.I.13).

The information that sympathy provides should also (c) lead to action. After citing Kant's favourite example of the Stoic who indulges no compassionate feeling when unable to help his friend, *Ethics Collins* states that substantive intervention must be a part of sympathy proper. This approaches Kant's mature position in the *Doctrine of Virtue*:

> My wishes cannot help him. But so far as I can extend a hand to help him, I am to that extent able to promote his happiness, and sympathize with his plight [*Antheil an seinem Unglück nehmen*]; but I show no sympathy [*keinen Antheil*] whatever for his plight in harbouring passionate wishes for his deliverance. […] The only one to have a kind heart is he who contributes something to that happiness.
>
> (27:421)

The same is stated in *Anthropology Friedländer*:

> if you see a human being in misfortune, sympathize with his ill to the extent that you can help him [*nimm am seinem Uebel so viel Antheil als du ihm helfen kannst*]. However, if you cannot help him at all, if this does not at all lie in your powers, then go away unperturbed. […] The wise man should not sympathize [*sympathesiren*], but act from principles.
>
> (25:612)

The distinction between instinctual and rational sympathy is implied in both, as is the idea that proper (rational) sympathy must lead to action that benefits another.

This point is less salient for a comparison of Kant with Smith and Hume. Though sympathy's overtly moral purpose may be more apparent in Smith,

[33]This might provide evidence for Fahmy's view that we have a duty to convey feelings to one another, though I suggest that Kant's comparison of feelings to information indicates that the value of imparting these feelings lies in the information they convey.

Hume equally harnesses the naturally occurring phenomenon of sympathy for moral purposes. So, Kant's emphasis on action does not itself show that he favours one over another account. The difference is that he holds that proper, rational sympathy leads to action because it is grounded in the moral law, which the Kantian virtuous agent possesses as the ground for all subsequent motivations. So, if one possesses virtue on the Kantian understanding, one is motivated to act morally, which means one is motivated to remediate the suffering and increase the well-being of others. Sympathy not grounded in the moral law is merely sensation-based and, while it may lead to beneficial results from time to time, does not qualify as a virtue.

Finally, rational sympathy (d) honours the worth others. Sympathizing with others when their rights have been violated is described as noble. This form of sympathy demonstrates that one understands what circumstances do and do not honour the worth of others. Kant appears to have formed these ideas as early as the *Anthropology Friedländer* lectures:

> We sympathize [*nehmen … Antheil*] with another's annoyance and offence. This sympathizing [*Theilnehmung*] is noble. If someone has become unhappy, then I may well feel sorry for him, but if someone is offended, if his right has been violated, then I sympathize [*sympathesire*] with anger toward the other. Those who do not have such sympathy [*Sympathie*], do not highly value the right of other human beings.
>
> (25:606)

Offence represents a violation of a person's rights. This is more serious than mere displeasure because it goes against one's worth as a rational being. Sympathy that recognizes this violation recognizes the value that has been neglected in these cases, namely another's status as a being with dignity and not a mere thing. *Ethics Vigilantius* describes the vices of envy, ingratitude, and schadenfreude – "the *monstra* of inhumanity" – in contrast to moral sympathy and the value of humanity:

> Such vices are contrary to humanity; for just as the latter involves a participation in the person and state of the other, and is evinced in well-wishing, so these three vices involve a lack of participation, such that they evince an aversion, a dislike for the worth of the person, and for the other's merits and happiness, a contentment with his misfortune. Hence, they also, and *Schadenfreude* especially, are directly opposed to moral sympathy [*moralischen Sympathie*], and indicate *inhumanity*.
>
> (27:692)

Dislike for the worth of the person, aversion to their happiness, and a lack of participation in their fate are qualities inherent to these vices by which they oppose moral sympathy. Moral sympathy therefore recognizes these qualities, including respect for the worth of others.

These four features of rational sympathy are present in the account of sympathy in Kant's mature moral thought in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. That sympathy is (a) a reflective virtue follows from the definition of moral aptitude in the remark on section 16, on the doctrine of virtue in accordance with the principle of inner freedom, where free, moral aptitude is contrasted with unreflective habit. Whereas duties of right require only the absence of external constraint, duties of virtue call for action that proceeds from inner freedom, or choice (6:406–7). Kantian virtues can therefore be described as moral aptitudes: skills for the performance of moral action grounded in reflection on the moral law and decision to act on it:

> An *aptitude* [*Fertigkeit*] (*habitus*) is a facility in acting and a subjective perfection of choice. – But not every such *facility* is a *free* aptitude (*habitus libertatis*); for if it is a *habit* [*Angewohnheit*] (*assuetudo*), that is, a uniformity in action that has become a *necessity* through frequent repetition, it is not one that proceeds from freedom, and therefore not a moral aptitude [*moralische Fertigkeit*]. Hence virtue cannot be *defined* as an aptitude for free actions in conformity with law unless there is added 'to determine oneself to act through the thought of the law,' and then this aptitude is not a property of choice but of the *will*, which is a faculty of desire that, in adopting a rule, also gives it a universal law. Only such an aptitude can be counted as virtue.
>
> (6:407)

Kantian virtue is in this way a reflective skill. As a duty of love, sympathy is grounded in the duty to contribute to the happiness of others, one of the two ends that are also duties (the other being self-perfection).[34] Insofar as it requires cultivation of one's faculties, when this duty is successfully fulfilled it results in the formation of a virtuous character trait. This virtuous character trait is rational sympathy.

That sympathy is concerned with (b) providing information about the well-being of others is contrary to at least one established reading. In her account of Kantian cognitive virtue, Merritt suggests that Kantian sympathy is a natural inclination and readiness to be appropriately moved by the communication of sentiment. She argues that in cultivating sympathy "*[w]hat* gets cultivated seems to be Humean-style sympathy, a natural propensity for the communication of feeling" (*Kant on Reflection and Virtue,* 195). This natural inclination becomes increasingly skilled as it becomes more responsive to the particulars of others' situations (*Kant on Reflection and Virtue,* 196). This is consistent with Merritt's otherwise persuasive argument that Kantian moral virtue is a species of general cognitive virtue, which consists in healthy understanding (*Kant on Reflection and Virtue,* 176).[35] However, it is

[34]"The duty of love for one's neighbour can accordingly, also be expressed as the duty to make others' *ends* my own" (6:450). For the two ends that are also duties, see 6:385–8.

[35]Healthy understanding is developed in response to a normative requirement to reflect, evident in the three maxims above. It requires that one be "the source of one's own thoughts", integrating them into

an incorrect reading of Kantian sympathy insofar as it conflates the instinctual and rational forms of sympathy that Kant takes to be distinct. As a result, it assimilates too much of Kant's account to Hume's when the two are in fact very different.

For Kant, what gets cultivated is not the natural inclination to sympathy as such, but an understanding of what contributes to the well-being of others, alongside the will to act for their betterment. This may not be obvious if one approaches the *Doctrine of Virtue* with Hume's idea of sympathy already in mind as a template for sympathy, as most readers seem to do. Kant's discussion of sensible feelings, receptivity to feelings, and sharing in others' feelings might appear to confirm the Humean notion on which feeling is primary, whether that feeling serves to motivate prosocial behaviour or is in some way valuable independent of action. For Kant, however, the purpose for sharing in these feelings is primarily epistemic and their value is conditional as argued above.

Further, the capacity to share in these feelings is (c) consistently coupled with action and will. The fact that the duty of sympathy is a conjunction of will and sympathetic sensation (*teilnehmende Empfindung*) means that it is not feelings that move the virtuous agent to action. Feelings cooperate with the good will, providing information to the properly motivated agent concerning how to act for the well-being of others in particular circumstances. The emphasis on action and will is evident when Kant locates humanity in the *will* to share in others' feelings, rather than the passive reception of them, and again when he states that "while it is not in itself a duty to share the sufferings (as well as the joys) of others, it is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate" (6:456 and 6:457). The epistemic function of sympathy comes to the fore in the duty to not avoid sickrooms and debtors' prisons because of the painful feelings they invoke, since these feelings enable us to do what the representation of duty alone cannot (6:457). They present us with actionable intelligence, particular facts about the suffering and well-being of others that enable us to act for their well-being. This is also evident in Kant's praise of the Stoic who rejects feelings of compassion when unable to rescue his friend (6:457). Here, feeling is of no value in the absence of the possibility for substantive intervention.[36]

a "coherent view of how things are" and that one be "committed to the independence of objects from any particular point of view on them" (Merritt, *Kant on Reflection and Virtue*, 72).

[36]Vilhauer argues for a similar distinction between empirical and rational sympathy in Kant; however, he interprets "the ability to rationally sympathize as a skill in performing mental actions which *prompt* feelings" that are then "incorporated as a motivational ground" for moral action ("Reason's Sympathy", 460–1, emphasis mine). This runs counter to Kant's commitment to reasons internalism as explained above and evident in the philanthropist of *Groundwork* I and the recurring example of the Stoic. In *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon,* Walschots describes moral sympathy as "the active participation

Feeling is secondary in Kant's virtue of sympathy. Sympathetic feelings may provide useful information but are not strictly necessary nor the primary target for cultivation. Because sympathy is primarily about acquiring and understanding moral information, cognition takes priority. The link to feeling might be seen as a concession to our empirical nature for epistemic purposes since feelings often communicate important information about the well-being of others. The concession is not absolute in the way that Guyer, for example, envisions. Nor is it direct in the way that Fahmy and Sherman suggest, requiring that we produce and express feelings. Of primary importance is the information that feelings communicate, and it is possible for information to be obtained in the absence feelings, by an act of imagination or cognition in an exercise of rational sympathy. That information is meant to be acted on, since sympathy is a disposition cultivated to fulfil the duty of love, which is "not to be understood as *feeling*" but "must rather be thought as the maxim to of *benevolence*" and "the duty to make others' *ends* my own" (6:449–50). This is a way of (d) honouring the worth of others, by taking their ends on as my own, demonstrating respect for their capacity and decisions as autonomous agents.

5. Conclusion

Kant's duty of sympathy is a duty to develop a cognitive disposition grounded in the moral law. When properly cultivated, this disposition involves a reflective skill for obtaining information about the well-being of others and features of the world that contribute to (or hinder) it. An agent who possesses this disposition is motivated to act in a way that honours the worth of others. While these features are present in the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant does not do a good job of making them clear in this text. Material from the lectures on ethics and anthropology make up for this, providing a broader and more complete picture of his position. On this picture, Kant distinguishes between two forms of sympathy, one that is instinctual and pre-reflective – *empirical sympathy* – which is not the proper domain of virtue. This form of sympathy reflects the Humean conception. Contrary to the common view, this is not what Kant has in mind in the *Doctrine of Virtue*. Instead, he has in mind a second type of sympathy – *rational sympathy* – which is reflective, informative, leads to action, and honours others' worth in the above ways. While it is distinctly Kantian, rational sympathy's cognitive and epistemic features reflect important features of Smith's conception. Sympathy of this kind is a Kantian virtue.

(*Theilnehmung*) in the feelings of others by means of thought, specifically the imagination but also reason" ("Sympathy", 428).

This virtue is primarily cognitive. Though feeling, emotion, and sensibility can provide valuable information about the well-being of others, enabling us to fulfil our duties of love toward them, its value as far as the virtue of sympathy is concerned is conditional on the provision of this information. This is more consistent with Kant's definition of moral worth and action in the *Groundwork* and elsewhere. It also anticipates more sophisticated accounts of empathy we see today.[37] Rational Kantian sympathy may be taken to embody an intellectual virtue, that is, an intelligent awareness about others and things that contribute to their good, or in a word, wisdom.

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[37] See note 25 above. More sophisticated accounts correct for the biases that simpler forms of empathy fall prey to, and therefore do a better job of promoting moral action. In the literature there appear to be two general strategies for dealing with these problems. The first is to argue that empathy encompasses features (a reflective process of some sort would be one example) that makes biases visible, allowing them to be corrected (see Hoffman, Slote, or Preston and De Waal). Because the correction here is internal to the concept of empathy, empathy is rescued as a valuable moral concept. The second strategy argues that some external reflective moral process or principle is required to correct these biases (see Bloom and Prinz). In the latter case, empathy's moral value is diminished because it is not taken to have the internal resources necessary to guide moral action. As I have argued, Kant distinguishes between two types of sympathy, empirical and rational, and holds that rational sympathy can effectively guide moral action. I take this to put him in the first category. He saw both the value and dangers inherent in sympathetic feeling, or what is now often called empathy, and sought to ground them in the higher order value of the moral law and one's understanding of it.

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