

Sages, Sympathy, and Suffering in Kant's Theory of Friendship

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Abstract: Kant's theory of friendship is crucial in defending his ethics against the longstanding charge of emotional detachment. But his theory of friendship is vulnerable to this charge too: the Kantian sage can appear to reject sympathetic suffering when she cannot help a suffering friend. I argue that Kant is committed to the view that both sages and ordinary people must suffer in sympathy with friends even when they cannot help, because sympathy is necessary to fulfill the imperfect duty to adopt others' merely permissible ends (MPEs), and we ought to take friends' MPEs as our own. MPEs are individuated in terms of concepts which include marks of the first person, and no marks of law other than permissibility. To *adopt* ends of others individuated in terms of such concepts, rather than merely *promote* them as means to *different* ends, those concepts must engage with one's feelings in a way that requires sympathy.

Keywords: Kant, Ethics, Practical Reason, Moral Psychology, Sympathy, Empathy, Friendship, Sage, Pain, Suffering, Virtue, Imperfect Duty, Ends, Teleology, First Person, Feeling, Emotion

1. Introduction: The Puzzle of the Cold Sage, and Previous Commentary

Kant's theory of friendship plays a crucial role in defending his ethics against the objection that it is too emotionally detached to capture the value of feelings and particular

relationships.¹ This objection often originates in response to a famous passage in the *Groundwork* on sympathy which distresses many readers, where Kant describes a philanthropist whose benevolent actions only have “genuine moral worth” when his “sympathy with the fate of others” has been “extinguished” by “grief”, and he acts “simply from duty” (G 4:398).² Kant says that while sympathy is “amiable” and a disposition to be encouraged, it is “on the same footing with other inclinations”, and we can have a “far higher worth than what a mere good-natured temperament” confers “even if we are cold [*kalt*] and indifferent [*gleichgültig*] to the sufferings of others” (G 4:398). Kant does not suggest that we should avoid sympathy—his point is rather that in cases like that of the grieving philanthropist, “the worth of character comes out” (G 4:398-9). Nonetheless, his emphasis on the claim that dutiful yet cold and indifferent agents can have a far higher worth than sympathetic agents has prompted philosophers dating

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² Abbreviations and translations for Kant’s texts are from the following books unless otherwise noted. “^t” in passages from Kant indicates that I have altered the Cambridge translation to reflect my own translation. Pagination is by *Akademie* edition, which is included in texts cited, unless otherwise noted. “^{NA}” at the end of entries in the following list in this note indicates texts not included in the *Akademie* edition; references to these are paginated according to the volume cited. **2C**: *Critique of Practical Reason* (Kant 1996a, 137-271). **3C**: *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Kant 2000). **AP**: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Robert B. Loudon (Kant 2007, 231-429). **BE**: Brauer’s notes from Kant’s Ethics lectures, in (Kant 1924)^{NA}. **CE**: Notes from Kant’s Ethics lectures by Collins (Kant 1997a, 37-222). **FA**: Notes from Kant’s Anthropology lectures by Michael Friedländer (Kant 2012, 37-255). **G**: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 1996a, 41-108). **HE**: Notes from Kant’s Ethics lectures by J.G. Herder (Kant 1997a, 1-36). **MA**: Notes from Kant’s Anthropology lectures by Christian Coelestin Mrongovius (Kant 2012, 335-509). **ME**: Notes from Kant’s Ethics lectures by Mrongovius (Kant 1979, 1395-1581). **MM**: *The Metaphysics of Morals* (Kant 1996a, 363-602). **ML2**: L2 Metaphysics lecture notes, in *Lectures on Metaphysics* (Kant 1997b, 297-354). **OP**: *Opus Posthumum* (Kant 1993). **RR**: *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (Kant 1996b, 39-216). **VE**: Notes from Kant’s Ethics lectures by Johann Friedrich Vigilantius (Kant 1997a, 249-452).

back to his contemporary Schiller to object that Kant's moral theory is too emotionally detached to properly value sympathy.³

However, other parts of Kant's corpus provide material for a defense against this objection. Kant entitles the conclusion of the *Doctrine of Virtue* "On the most intimate union of love with respect in friendship". He proceeds to tell us that

Friendship (considered in its perfection) is the union of two persons through equal mutual love and respect...this is an ideal of each sympathizing with and communicating^t about the other's wellbeing [*Ideal der Theilnehmung und Mittheilung an dem Wohl eines jeden*] through the morally good will that unites them, and even though it does not produce the complete happiness of life, the adoption of this ideal in their disposition toward each other makes them deserving of happiness; hence human beings have a duty of friendship. (MM 6:469)

Remarks like this also appear in a number of Kant's lectures. According to Collins' Ethics notes, to "possess such a friend, of whom I know that his disposition is upright and kindly, neither malicious nor false...[t]his is the whole purpose of man, which allows him to enjoy his existence" (CE 27:427). On the basis of such passages, Christine Korsgaard writes that "[t]o become friends is to create a neighborhood where the Kingdom of Ends is real" (Korsgaard 1996, 194). We might also say that the way friendship correlates valuable dispositions of friends toward one another with their shared enjoyment of life makes friendship a fragment of the highest good which is accessible within experience. At least since Paton (Paton 1956), and increasingly in recent years,⁴ commentators have directed proponents of the detachment objection to Kant's theory of friendship, helping to diminish the objection's influence.

³ See Wood (1999, 28) for discussion. Hay (2013, 56-62) calls this the "emotions objection". Varden discusses it as a part of the "universal formalism" objection (2020a, 9-31, 165-85).

⁴ See e.g. Baron (1995; 2013), Baxley (2010), Denis (2000), Fahmy (2009; 2010), Sherman (1997), Varden (2020a; 2020b), Wood (1999; 2008).

However, the motif of cold indifference appears again in passages on friendship, in connection with the Kant's depictions of the stoic *sage* or *wise man*. The sage is not a "finite holy [being] (who could never be tempted to violate duty)", but rather a human being who has "autocracy of practical reason", that is, mastery of "one's inclinations when they rebel against the law" (MM 6:383). The sage serves as "an ideal (to which one must continually approximate)" (ibid.). The earliest passage is in Herder's Ethics notes (1762-64):

Indifference [*Gleichgültigkeit*], as a moral quality, is the opposite of human love; but even by this cold-bloodedness [*Kaltblütigkeit*] I may understand a very good trait, if it holds the love inspired by sympathy [*Sympathie*] in check, and gives it the right degree^t [*rechten Grad*]. If the sympathetic inclinations [*Theilnehmende Neigungen*] are blind and serve no purpose, the stoic must say: If you cannot be of help to others, then what business is it of yours, pray? (HE 27:54)

This passage does not explicitly address friendship, but Herder's notes go on to address friendship immediately afterwards (ibid.), suggesting an endorsement of indifference toward friends we cannot help too.

The second passage is in Collins' Ethics notes (1784):

If I now observe such a man sitting in misery^t, and see that I have no way of altering it, and cannot come to his aid in any fashion, I may turn away coldly [*kalt*] and say, with the Stoic: What is it to me? My wishes [*Wünsche*] cannot help him. But so far as I can extend a hand to help him, I am to that extent able to promote [*befördern*] his happiness, and sympathize [*Antheil*] with his plight; but I show no sympathy whatever for his plight in harbouring ardent^t wishes for his deliverance. (CE 27:421)

Here too we have no direct reference to friendship, but once again a discussion of friendship immediately follows (CE 27:422). So here too Kant can seem to hold that if I cannot help a suffering friend, I need not experience any sympathetic pain.

The most famous remarks on this theme appear in the *Doctrine of Virtue* (1787):

It was a sublime way of thinking that the Stoic ascribed to his wise man 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*]...In fact, when another suffers and, although I cannot help him, I let myself be infected [*anstecken*] by his pain (through my imagination), then two of us suffer, though the trouble really (in nature) affects only *one*. But there cannot possibly be a duty to increase the ills in the world and so to do good *from compassion* [*Mitleid*]. (MM 6:457)

This passage can also seem to assert the view that if I cannot help my suffering friend, I need not suffer in sympathy. Though I am in the company of readers who find this view distressing, I do not wish to claim that it is obviously false. Utilitarians, for example, could endorse it. However, if it is in fact the view we should attribute to Kant, then Kant's theory of friendship offers only a partial defense against the detachment objection. This is likely to become increasingly damaging to the reception of Kant's ethics as contemporary ethics makes the value of care more central.⁵ I take it to be essential to our intuitive understanding of care that it hurts us when someone we care about suffers, and that we can only banish that suffering if we stop caring. If Kant's advice is that we may stop caring when we cannot help a suffering friend, then the detachment objection may be insurmountable. This paper offers a new argument for thinking that this is not Kant's advice.

Commentators have already made substantial progress in this endeavor. My approach builds in particular on a line of thought developed in the work of Marcia Baron and Lara Denis. Baron argues that Kant's central theme in the passages about friendship and the sage is not to advocate *absence* of sympathetic feeling, but rather the ability to *voluntarily regulate* it, emphasizing Kant's distinction between (a) sensitivity [*Empfindsamkeit*], which Kant describes as "a *faculty* and a *power* which either permits or prevents both the state of pleasure as well as

⁵Others who have discussed Kant from the perspective of care ethics include Hay (2013), Miller (2012), Paytas (2015), Varden (2020a; 2020b), and Wood (1999; 2008).

displeasure from entering the mind, and...possesses choice”, and (b) sentimentality [*Empfindelei*], which Kant describes as a “weakness by which we can be affected, even against our will, by sympathy [*Theilnehmung*] for others’ condition” (AP 7: 235-6), a weakness Baron describes as “self-inflicted” (Baron 1995: 196). She thinks Kant nonetheless attributes to the sage the ability to “turn off” sympathetic pain “if it does no good” (1995: 216), and that Kant approves of the sage's exercise of it when she cannot help. Baron thinks that if Kant is to properly value care, then Kant’s ethics must be corrected so that it values sympathetic suffering even when we cannot help, and so that it advocates sensitive moderation of sympathy in such cases rather than cessation of sympathy (1995: 221).

Denis argues that fine-grained analysis of Kant’s texts shows that Kant *already* holds the views that Baron thinks Kant must adopt, so that no correction is required. She notes that Kant says the sage exemplifies a virtue he calls *apathy* [*Apathie*], such that the “wise man [*Weise*] must never be in a state of affect [*Affect*], not even in that of compassion [*Mitleids*] with the misfortune of his best friend” (Kant AP 7:253, Denis 2000: 51-2). *Apathie* does not mean “lack of feeling [*Fühllosigkeit*]” but rather “absence of affects [*Affectlosigkeit*]” (Kant MM 6:408, Denis *ibid.*). *Affect* is a technical term in Kant’s moral psychology which refers to feeling which we allow to develop without moderation by reason, which can be sudden, overwhelming, and agency-undermining. *Affect* can prevent us from helping effectively even when we discover means to do so (MM 6:407, AP 7:253, FA 25:589), and can dispose us to violations of the law when it conflicts with duty, as in Barbara Herman’s example of a sympathetic onlooker who helps a struggling thief move his loot (Herman 1993: 4-5, also see RR 6:30 and FA 25:611). Allowing ourselves to be afflicted by affect makes us sentimental rather than sensitive. Denis proceeds to show that Kant’s treatment of the concept of *cold-bloodedness* incorporates a similar

distinction. Kant says that *frigidity* [*Kaltsinnigkeit*] is a “want of love” and a “lack of the feeling whereby the state of others affects us”, while “cold-bloodedness [*Kaltblütigkeit*] is a want of affect [*Affekts*] in love, and that “cold-bloodedness [*Kaltblütigkeit*] of love¹ provides regularity and order” (Kant CE 27:420, Denis 2000: 53). Denis argues that this shows that an apathetic, cold sage *does* have sympathy for suffering friends she cannot help—she simply ensures that it does not prompt affect (Denis 2000:53-5).

I think Denis’s response to Baron is correct, and the account presented here is an extension of her response into the intentional teleology of the duty of beneficence, that is, the duty to take others’ ends as one’s own. Denis reads Kant as holding that it may be psychologically impossible for actual human beings to completely suppress sympathy when they cannot help, once they have become sympathetically engaged with their friends in the way they have a duty to strive to be. She argues that this gives us grounds to worry that actual human beings who are able to entirely suppress sympathy for their purported friends have never really become sympathetically engaged with them in this way, and that they may never really have adopted their purported friends’ ends as their own (Denis 2000: 64-66). This paper extends this thought by arguing that sympathy is *necessary* for adopting others’ ends, and that it is necessary not only as a matter of empirical psychology, but also as a matter of practical rationality. When we properly individuate those ends of others which are valuable only because they have been set by rational agents (such as cessation of one’s pain), ends which I call *merely permissible ends* (MPEs), we see that we can only adopt them through sympathy. This implies that sages as well as ordinary human beings must sympathize to adopt others’ MPEs. This in turn implies that ceasing to sympathize with a friend entails ceasing to adopt the friend’s ends, and thereby forsaking the friend, which we ought not do. The claim that sympathy is practically necessary

for adopting others' ends may seem to imply that the will must be impure and heteronomous, because it may be thought that even if apathy allows us to *moderate* sympathy, sympathy cannot *arise voluntarily* in the way that respect for law can.⁶ However, Kant has a detailed distinction between *rational* sympathy and *natural* sympathy which shows this concern to be misplaced.

2. The Distinction between Rational and Natural Sympathy

This section explains the distinction between rational and natural sympathy, which is central to this paper's account of friendship and the sage.⁷ Kant's most famous comments on sympathy are the *Groundwork* remarks discussed above, where Kant claims that people motivated by respect for law but "cold [*kalt*] and indifferent [*gleichgültig*] to the sufferings of others" can have a far higher worth than sympathetic people (G 4:398). The nuanced distinctions Denis highlights imply that this claim requires careful interpretation. To be cold is to be apathetic rather than indifferent—to love in an orderly way, not with agency-undermining affect. Denis does not discuss HE 27:54 (quoted above), where Kant claims that *Gleichgültigkeit* can be a "moral quality" and a "good trait", but her interpretation encourages attention to how it functions when it serves as a good trait: it gives the love inspired by sympathy the "right degree [*rechten Grad*]" (ibid.). Thus we can suppose we have a capacity to be indifferent (perhaps fully possessed only by sages) which allows us to dampen sympathy to zero, but its *moral* employment is to *regulate* sympathy rather than to *eliminate* it. This capacity to regulate sympathy through dampening is an aspect of a broader capacity which I call *rational sympathy*, which also includes the capacity to *voluntarily prompt* sympathy.

⁶ Baron raises this concern (1995, 218).

⁷ I explain this distinction in more detail in Vilhauer (2021a; 2021b).

The *Doctrine of Virtue*'s account of sympathy supports the view that we have this capacity. It appears both immediately before and immediately after the passages on the sage quoted above. In it, Kant writes that "Sympathetic Feeling is Generally a Duty [*Theilnehmende Empfindung ist überhaupt Pflicht*]" (MM 6:456), and goes on to specify that "it is a duty [*Pflicht*] to actively sympathize [*thätige Theilnehmung*] in [others'] fate" (MM 6:457). If it is a duty to sympathize, then sympathy cannot be merely "on the same footing with other inclinations", as we saw Kant claim in the *Groundwork* (G 4:398). It must be a capacity which we can voluntarily exercise, guided by practical reason.

The contrast between the *Groundwork* and the *Metaphysics of Morals* can seem so stark that commentators sometimes argue that Mary Gregor's translation of the *Metaphysics of Morals* (the translation used here) is wrong. Some have pointed out that *Theilnehmung* can be translated as "participation" as well as "sympathy", and have argued that this means that what the duty of *theilnehmende Empfindung* demands of us does not involve sympathetic feelings.⁸ But there is decisive support for Gregor's translation in the Friedländer Anthropology lecture notes, where Kant asks us to "consider sympathetic feeling [*sympathetische Gefühl*]", and says that

[The term] sympathy [*Sympathie*] must not be rendered (*übersetzt*) by "compassion [*Mitleid*]," but by "sympathizing [*Theilnehmung*]". Compassion [*Mitleid*] is more concerned with misfortune. However, we have sympathy [*Sympathie*] also in good fortune. We have compassion [*Mitleid*] for those who are weak, but we have sympathy [*Sympathie*] also with those who are strong. Sympathy [*Sympathie*] is thus the genus and compassion [*Mitleid*] the species.
(FA 25: 606)⁹

If we couple this passage with Kant's CA 25:51 remark that "*Empfindung* is also called [*genannt*] *Gefühl*" (CA 25:51), then we have Kant's own resolution of this controversy: he tells

⁸ See e.g. (Fahmy 2009, 32-37), (Makkreel 2012, 111).

⁹ This translation is by G. Felicitas Munzel.

us that *theilnehmende Empfindung* means the same as *sympathetische Gefühl*. This should make us confident that the *Metaphysics of Morals* tells us we have a duty to sympathize which involves sympathetic feeling.

If we look at Kant's corpus more broadly, it becomes clear that the *Groundwork* elides a distinction between two ways of sympathizing which can involve qualitatively identical sympathetic joys and pains but are differently oriented to practical reason: one is a voluntary sympathy guided by practical reason, which I refer to as "rational sympathy", and the other is a sympathy of self-inflicted passivity, which I refer to as "natural sympathy".¹⁰ Kant draws this distinction in five places over a period of 20 years. I label terms for rational sympathy "(a)", and terms for natural sympathy "(b)". MM 6:456 distinguishes (a) "*humanitas practica*", the "*capacity and the will to share in others' feelings [Gefühle mitzuteilen]*", which is "*free*", and based on "*practical reason*", and (b) "*humanitas aesthetica*"; "*the receptivity, given by nature itself, to the feeling of joy and sadness in common with others*", which "*can be called communicable...like receptivity to warmth or infectious^t [ansteckender] diseases...since it spreads naturally*". FA 25:607-11 distinguishes (a) "*reason's sympathy [Antheil der Vernunft]*" and (b) "*physical sympathy [physicalischen Sympathie]*" based on "*animality*". AP 7:235 distinguishes (a) "*sensitivity [Empfindsamkeit]*" and (b) "*sentimentality [Empfindelei]*", as we saw Baron note earlier. The same distinction appears at 25:1320-1 in Mrongovius' Anthropology notes (1784-5). Sensitivity "*possesses choice*" and "*permits or prevents both the state of pleasure as well as displeasure from entering the mind*" and gives us the "*fine feeling^t*"

¹⁰ Baron suggests that tensions between the *Groundwork* and Kant's later ethics may arise from eagerness to "distance himself" from "his earlier endorsement of a version of moral sense theory" which sometimes leads to "hyperbole" (Baron 1995, 204). While she does not argue for a distinction between rational and natural sympathy, or its elision in the *Groundwork*, her suggestion offers a plausible explanation for the elision.

[*feines Gefühl*]” necessary to “judge [others’] sensation [*Empfindung*]”, while sentimentality “is a weakness by which we can be affected, even against our will, by sympathy [*Theilnehmung*] for others’ condition” (AP 7:235). VE 27:677-8 distinguishes (a) “moral” [*moralisches*] sympathy and (b) “instinctual” [*instinctmäßiges*] sympathy. Though these discussions differ in emphasis, they all support a distinction between (a) a sympathy which is voluntary and guided by reason, and (b) a passive sympathy which disposes us to affect.

Kant understands sympathy as an activity of the imagination (MM 6:321n, 6:457; AP 7:179, 7:238), and thus the difference between rational and natural sympathy is a difference between ways this activity can proceed: a voluntary, reason-guided way versus a passive way. Imagination is a fundamental power in Kant’s theory of mind, one of two “parts” of sensibility, the other of which is “sense” (AP 7:153). Kant thinks we have significant control over the imagination, which we can choose to exercise or not. Mrongovius’s Anthropology lecture notes tell us that if we do not direct the imagination, “[t]he imagination directs itself according to the inclinations” (MA 25:1258, also see FA 25:515).¹¹ Kant says that the sympathetic imagination puts us “in the other’s place” (FA 25:575, also see MM 6:321n; HE 27:58, 27:65; FA 25:575, 25:607, for similar language).¹² It is this imaginative activity which enables rational sympathy:

[T]he power to transpose the I is necessary, and to put oneself in the point of view and place of the other, so that one thinks with him, and has sympathy with him^t [*sich in ihm fühlt*]...To take a point of view is a skill [*Geschicklichkeit*] which one can acquire by practice [*Uebung*]. (FA 25:475)

Putting ourselves in others’ places is necessary but not sufficient for prompting sympathetic feelings. Kant distinguishes two ways of putting ourselves in others’ places: (i) a “logical

¹¹ In (Vilhauer 2021a) I argue that sympathy is an activity of the *a posteriori* productive imagination.

¹² Timmermann (n.d.) explores the idea that imagination puts us in the other’s place, but does not take it to be a necessary condition of adopting others’ ends.

[*logisch*], “heuristic [*hevristisch*]” way of adopting others’ perspective which helps us “arrive more easily at certain things¹³” such as understanding the reasoning of other philosophers (he gives “a follower of Crusius” as an example), which does *not* involve sympathetic feelings, and (ii) a “moral [*moralisch*]” way of adopting another’s perspective which yields “true sympathy [*wahrhaftigen Sympathie*], where we really feel [*fühlen*] ourselves to be in his place” (HE 27:58). In natural sympathy, we passively adopt others’ perspectives, while in rational sympathy, we adopt others’ perspectives in a voluntary way regulated by the duty of sympathy.¹³

The claim that we can voluntarily prompt sympathy conflicts with much of the commentary on Kant’s theory of feeling. Commentators often read Kant as holding that we can do things to cultivate sympathetic feeling over the long term, but not voluntarily prompt it in particular cases. Such commentators often emphasize Kant’s remark that we cannot will ourselves to have feelings of love: “*Love is a matter of feeling, not of willing, and I cannot love because I will to*” (MM 6:401).¹⁴ The thought that “we have no direct control over our feelings”, as Korsgaard puts it (1996: 182), seems accurate not only to Kant’s ethics but also to the everyday phenomenology of feeling. The view advanced in this paper may seem incompatible with this thought. But the view advanced here holds that the locus of volitional control in

¹³ Kant sometimes says sympathetic feeling can serve as a support system that can make up for deficits in practical reasoning. For example, at AP 7:253, Kant describes compassion [*Mitleids*] as a “temporary surrogate of reason” which can “handle the reins *provisionally*, until reason has achieved the necessary strength”. How can it be true that sympathetic feeling can be prompted by reason, but also serve as a surrogate for it? When we are fortunate, natural sympathy contingently causes us to conform to duty. This is a hazardous contingency, as natural sympathy is vulnerable not only to affect, but also to bias. Kant is especially attuned to classism (see e.g. FA 25:606-7), but biases like racism, sexism, nationalism, and gender and religious bigotry also deform natural sympathy. Rational sympathy corrects for such biases.

¹⁴ See e.g. Baxley (2010, 157), Fahmy (2010, 313), Makkreel (2012, 114), Miller (2012, 54), Varden (2020a, 53).

rational sympathy is in imagining, not in feeling. The voluntary actions which occur in rational sympathy are the mental actions involved in imaginatively stepping into the first-person perspective of the other, and furnishing it with imagined sensible content.¹⁵ Sympathetic feelings arise in *response* to these imaginings—we do not will the feelings to spontaneously arise. In this way, rational sympathy fits the description of moral feeling in *Theory and Practice*: it is “not the cause but the effect of the determination of the will” (TP 8:283). Further, Kant makes a connection between feeling and *practice* which provides a significant scope for volition in feeling. According to the *Doctrine of Virtue*, “*Beneficence* is a duty. If someone practices (*ausübt*) it often...he eventually comes actually to love the person he has helped” (MM 6:402). The Collins Ethics lectures put the point more concisely: “if I love others from obligation...by practice [*Uebung*] it becomes love from inclination (CE 27:419; also see MM 6:402). This connection makes it worth repeating Kant’s claim quoted above that “[t]o take a point of view is a skill [*Geschicklichkeit*] which one can acquire by practice [*sich durch Uebung erwerben kann*]” (FA 25:475). If we have the ability to acquire a skill through practice, then it is deontically consistent for reason to *require* us to acquire it, because there is a “can” to match the “ought”. When we have acquired a skill, we can *do* the thing we are skilled in doing with volitional control. Kant’s view is that rational sympathy is such a skill.¹⁶

¹⁵ In (Vilhauer 2021a) I explain this activity in connection with Kant’s account of the function of aesthetic ideas in communicating feeling (3C 5:313-18).

¹⁶ See Vilhauer (2021a, 2021b) for more detailed discussion of volition in rational sympathy.

3. Friendship as an Ideal of Sharing All Our Ends and All Our Feelings

This section argues that the ideal of friendship includes maximal sharing of feelings and maximal sharing of ends, and then poses a question about the nature of the correlation between these maxima, to set the stage for the argument that sympathy is necessary to take others' merely permissible ends as our own. The distinction between natural and rational sympathy is not always relevant in this section, and is thus referenced only where necessary.

It is a characteristic mark of Kantian ideals that they contain maxima (OP 21:30, also see FA 25:609, ML2 28:555, CE 27:247). Analysis of ideals in terms of the maxima they contain is therefore essential for understanding them. At MM 6:469 Kant says that we must strive for friendship "as a maximum of good disposition [*Gesinnung*] toward each other" (MM 6:469). Vigilantius' Ethics notes make clear that that this involves a maximum of shared feelings: Kant says that in the ideal of friendship, "each mutually sympathizes¹ [*teilnehmen*] with **every** situation of the other, as if it were encountered by himself" (VE 27:677, my boldface). This maximum is probably not well-understood as a maximum of *intensity* of feeling. I should feel as if I encountered my friend's situations myself, and even if I should have feelings of the same intensity as hers, she presumably rarely experiences feelings of maximal intensity. The maximum appears instead to be one of *extension*, since it extends to all my friend's situations.

Kant emphasizes caution in implementing this aspect of the ideal in actual friendships. He thinks we are driven to friendship not only by duty but also by a need to "*reveal* [ourselves] to others", but friends should aim at "complete confidence...in revealing their secret judgments and feelings to each other" only insofar as such revelations are consistent with mutual respect and prudence (MM 6:469-71). Friendships in the actual world are fragile because of asymmetries of attachment: if my friend concludes that I love her more than she loves me, she

may lose respect for me, so I must constrain my sympathetic attachment. Further, if I share feelings that reflect badly upon me, for example, an unreasonable resentment for a third party, then I may not only lose her respect—I may also place myself in jeopardy if our friendship ends and she uses my feelings against me.¹⁷ In this vein, Kant comments that "[e]ven to our best friend, we must not discover ourselves as we naturally are and know ourselves to be, for that would be a nasty business" (CE 27:427). But it is clear that by "best friend" here he means the best friend he thinks we can hope to have in the world as it is, not the best friend of the ideal. Both my need and my duty compel me to search for friends with whom I can closely embody the ideal: "pure sincerity in friendship can be no less required of everyone even if up to now there may never have been a sincere friend" (G 4:408). Kant may be too skeptical in his dim view of the prospects for actual friendships that closely conform to the ideal, but even if he is correct, this view is not in conflict with the claim that the ideal of friendship is an ideal of sharing all feelings.

We should also read Kant as holding that the ideal of friendship includes a maximum of adopting all one's friend's (permissible) ends. We have a universal imperfect duty to take others' ends as our own (G 4:430, MM 6:450), but Kant acknowledges that "one human being is closer to me than another" (MM 6:451), and that our friends are our closest others, and this makes it intuitive to think that we have a special duty to adopt our friends' ends.¹⁸ It is natural to think that striving for a "maximum of good disposition toward each other"(MM 6:470) requires us to adopt more of our friends' ends as we become closer, striving toward adoption of all their

¹⁷ Varden connects the fragility of friendship to Kant's notion of *unsocial sociability* and highlights the importance of unity between friends and moderation of affect in friendship (2020a, 66-71).

¹⁸ See Hay (2013, 59-60) for a discussion of the preferential treatment of intimates.

permissible ends. Kant says this in fairly clear detail with respect to friends' *needs* [*Bedürfnisse*]. In Collins' Ethics notes, Kant says that "[t]he friendship of need is that whereby the participants may entrust each other with a reciprocal concern in regard to their needs in life", and that "we must presuppose" this kind of friendship "in every friendship".¹⁹ He says that "I must...have confidence in each of my true friends, that he would be able and willing to look after my affairs, and promote my interests"—"my friend is ... ready to aid me **in any difficulty**" (CE 27:424-6, my boldface). According to Vigilantius' Ethics notes, "[f]riends...undertake to support one another in their needs with **all their powers and means**" (VE 27:684; my boldface). It might seem that our needs are only a subset of our ends, while happiness includes all our ends, but in fact Kant understands happiness as a need (2C 5:110, also see MM 6:393). So these passages provide strong support for the thesis we ought to adopt all our friend's permissible ends as our own. Here too the sort of maximum we find is one of extension.

Kant sees this aspect of the ideal of friendship as constrained by actuality for reasons like those for constraining sympathy. Power and wealth are often asymmetrical between friends, so accepting "a favor from the other" can lead favor-givers to take on the status of benefactors, and can lead beneficiaries to lose respect in the eyes of the benefactors and in the eyes of the beneficiaries themselves (MM 6:471). Even in this discussion, however, Kant acknowledges "the help that each may count on from the other in case of need" (MM 6:471). But actual constraints on maximal end-taking do not conflict with the claim that the ideal includes maximal end-taking. Thus, the most plausible view to attribute to Kant is as follows. I must strive to adopt all my friend's ends, but it is rational for me to prioritize our shared end of preserving our friendship, since this my friend's only end in which I am essentially involved. If my friend can

¹⁹ Paton (1956, 55) and Baron (2013, 374) emphasize this point.

achieve her other ends without my help, and my help would threaten our friendship, I do not help her achieve her other ends. On the other hand, if she cannot achieve her other ends without my help, and those ends are more important to her than our friendship, then I help, despite the threat. Kant's point about the hazards of favors is thereby made compatible with his view that we ought to adopt all our friends' permissible ends as our own.²⁰

When we see correlated maxima, as we do between sharing ends and sharing feelings in the ideal of friendship, it is helpful to inquire about the nature of the correlation. Is Kant making a normative claim that we *should* share more feelings as we share more ends, or claiming that, as a matter of fact, we actually *do*? If the latter, is the correlation (1) a correlation with exceptions, such that we will sometimes find cases of sharing ends without sharing feelings?²¹ Or is the correlation (2) the consequence of laws of empirical psychology which govern all actual human beings and make it psychologically impossible for actual people to adopt others' ends without sharing their feelings?²² Or could the correlation be (3) a conceptual necessity of Kant's practical philosophy, so that looking for people who adopt others' ends without sympathizing turns out to be a complicated analogue of looking for married bachelors? If (1), then actual human beings could adopt suffering friends' ends without suffering in sympathy. If (2), then perhaps we can imagine that a sage, as an unactualized ideal with perfect rational control of her

²⁰ There may be other constraints—I may not see inconsistencies among my ends that my friend sees, so that rationality prohibits her from adopting all of them, and I may have ends which I do not want my friend to adopt, for example, my end of sometimes eating fast food, which I may take to be permissible, but still unfit for adoption by a friend.

²¹ Recent advocates of views which I take to entail this include Paytas (2015), Thomason (2017), and Timmermann (n.d.).

²² This view is suggested by Denis (2000, 64-66), though she does not claim that there is no conceptual necessity at work. Guyer may hold the view that there is an empirical necessity but no conceptual necessity: he claims that “the role and indeed the number and kinds of moral feelings involved in the phenomenal etiology of moral action can be decided on empirical grounds **and only such**” (2010, 132, my boldface).

feelings, could accomplish this feat, even though actual human beings cannot. If (3), then neither actual human beings nor sages can adopt suffering friends' ends without suffering in sympathy. It will be argued that (3) is the right way to understand the correlation, at least with respect to those ends of others which are valuable only because they have been set by rational agents, that is, their merely permissible ends (MPEs).

4. Others' Ends and Rational Sympathy

This section argues that rational sympathy is necessary to voluntarily adopt others' MPEs as our own.²³ Though Kant does not discuss this point in detail, one's ends are individuated in terms of one's own concepts of one's ends. Kant implicitly acknowledges this at 3C 5:220, where he states that "an end is the object of a concept insofar as the latter is regarded as the cause of the former". Concepts individuating ends cannot plausibly be supposed to belong to anyone other than the agents with the ends. This implies that *others'* ends are individuated by *their own* concepts of their ends. If there were no motivationally significant variances among agents in their concepts of their ends, then this point might be trivial. But there are motivationally significant variances, and they create two puzzles we must resolve to understand how we might take others' ends as our own, one having to do with *marks of the first person* in their concepts of their ends, and another having to do with *marks of law* in those concepts.

First, consider marks of the first person. Our concepts of our ends often (perhaps always) include a first-person indexical. For example, my end of repaying a debt is typically individuated in terms of the concept *repaying my debt*. There is no motivational puzzle about having an end which is individuated by a concept containing a first-person indexical when the

²³ (Vilhauer 2021b) explains this argument in greater detail. I recapitulate it here to apply it to the role of sympathetic pain in friendship.

end is unproblematically my own and the first-person indexical is unproblematically indexed to me. But my friend is likely to have the end of stopping her pain in terms of the concept *stopping my pain*. Since her end is individuated by her concept, I can only truly adopt her end if I do so *in terms of her concept*. But in doing so, I must keep the indexical indexed to *her*, or I form a desire to stop *my* pain rather than hers, and I fail in my goal of adopting *her* end. I can succeed if I step into an imaginary version of her first-person perspective. It is not clear how else I might succeed. As we have seen, rational sympathy gives us the capacity to voluntarily step into such a perspective.

It may be objected that the inference to a need for rational sympathy is too quick—as we have seen, Kant thinks we can step into others’ perspectives in a merely logical, heuristic way which does not involve sympathetic feeling, and it might seem that such unsympathetic perspective-taking would suffice for acquiring others’ concepts of their ends, and using those concepts to set their ends as our own. The reason that unsympathetic perspective-taking does *not* suffice has to do with the second motivational puzzle, which has to do with *marks of law* included in concepts which individuate ends. Consider again the concept of *repaying my debt*. If I am practically rational, this concept includes a mark of *obligation*, since this is something I have a perfect duty to do. If I am motivated by respect for law, there is no puzzle about how I can have an end individuated by this concept—this concept engages with my motivation because of feelings made up of pleasures and pains which I necessarily have as a rational agent (G 4:460-1, 2C 5:9n, MM 6:211-2). Next consider the concept of *caffeinating myself*. If this is a concept of an end for me, then insofar as I am a rational agent, the only mark of law it can contain for me is *permissibility*, because caffeination is a constituent of my happiness which is contingent from the perspective of rationality. Such concepts individuate ends for us because they engage our

inclinations (G 4:427). That is, they engage those aspects of our feelings made up of pleasures and pains which are contingent from the perspective of rationality (2C 5:21-6), though we must judge them permissible before incorporating them into our wills. Such ends are *merely permissible ends* (MPEs).

There is no puzzle about how *I* can be motivated by *my* MPEs. My concept of *caffeinating myself* contains no marks of law apart from permissibility, and I have innumerable permissible things I can do, so permissibility alone cannot give me a reason to caffeinate myself. But I experience the pleasures of being caffeinated and the pains of not being caffeinated despite their contingency, and it is because of them (and their incorporation) that caffeinating myself is an end for me.

However, the ends of others which I have an imperfect duty to adopt are often MPEs, and there is a puzzle about how *their* concepts of their MPEs can engage with *my* pleasures and pains so that their MPEs become ends for me. My friend's end of *stopping my pain* is an MPE. She is vulnerable to pain because she has a sensible nature which is contingent from the perspective of moral law, and so her pain is not in itself morally bad (2C 5:60). If her pain is intense, then this end will be weighty and constant in her mind, but for all that it is an MPE. There is no puzzle about how *she* can be motivated by it—the fact that it is her pain, and that she takes pleasure in the thought of its cessation, makes it an end for her.

The puzzle is about how *I* can adopt *her* MPE. If I am to adopt her end as my own, I must do so in terms of her concept. The fact that it has no mark of law apart from permissibility, and that I have innumerable permissible things I can do, means that permissibility cannot be a sufficient reason for me to set an end in terms of this concept—and crucially, it means that I cannot intelligibly set an end in terms of this concept *out of respect for law*, since there is (as it

were) simply *not enough law in the concept* for that to be possible. Since I have an imperfect duty to adopt her end, it is meritorious for me to adopt her end, and so we might suppose that I can *add* a mark of merit to her concept in order to set her end for myself out of respect for law. But this is not possible. Her end is individuated by her concept, and since it is an MPE, she cannot rationally include a mark of merit in it. This means that a concept which includes a mark of merit would be a *different* concept, and would therefore individuate a *different end*.²⁴ Since I cannot set her end as my own out of respect for law, I must look to the only other motivational source available in Kantian moral psychology, that is, my contingent pains and pleasures. I must have the capacity to voluntarily prompt pains and pleasures in myself which correspond to hers, so that her concept engages with my feelings in the way necessary for it to individuate an end for me. To do this, I must voluntarily step into an imagined version of her perspective in a way that is rationally sympathetic, not merely logical and heuristic. It must be emphasized that this voluntary step into her perspective is motivated by respect for law, so respect for law is a necessary part of rational sympathy, but the contingent feelings which arise in response to my voluntary imaginings are necessary too.

While Kant thinks we can know *a priori* that feelings about the moral law, beauty, and sublimity are universally communicable, he thinks we cannot know this about our other feelings (3C 5:213, 24), including the feelings that motivate us to pursue our MPEs. But the passages discussed above show that he thinks these feelings are in fact communicable on a frequent

²⁴ Kant's texts support this claim. G 4:399 states that "[t]o assure one's own happiness is a duty [because] unsatisfied needs...could easily become a great *temptation to transgression of duty*". MM 6:388 expands on this point by clarifying that it does not imply that "my natural and merely subjective end is thus made a duty", and that when we pursue happiness for the sake of avoiding "temptations to violate one's duty", then "the end is not the subject's happiness but his morality, and happiness is merely a means for removing obstacles". That is, the end one has if one pursues happiness for moral reasons is a *different* end than one's MPEs.

basis.²⁵ As Alix Cohen notes, Kant thinks feelings which are not about morality, beauty, or sublimity can be *comparatively universal* (Cohen 2008: 316, AP 7:242, 3C 5:213). The fact that we can share feelings about MPEs with only comparative universality is compatible with the claim that sympathy is necessary to adopt others' MPEs. The duty to adopt others' ends is imperfect, so it accommodates imperfections in our abilities, including imperfections in our abilities to share the feelings required for its fulfillment. We do enough when we make a sincere effort to sympathize.

It may be objected that Kant says the duty of beneficence requires us to *promote* [*befördern*] the ends of others (G 4:430, also see 2C 5:34, MM 6:453, VE 27:544), and we can do things to promote others' ends without sympathizing with them.²⁶ This point is important, but not in conflict with the account presented here. Promoting and adopting others' ends are distinct activities, and while the duty of beneficence makes both activities valuable, adoption requires sympathy and is necessary to truly make others' ends our own. I may do things to alleviate my friend's pain because (I) I adopt her end through rational sympathy, (II) I want to sleep soundly and her groans wake me, or (III) it is a way of fulfilling my duty of beneficence. I promote her end in all these ways. There may be no differences in the consequences I produce in cases (I), (II), and (III). But in cases (II) and (III), I promote her end as a *means to different ends*, neither of which are *her* end. Case (II) is different from case (III) since in case (III) I promote her end as a means to a distinct but nonetheless morally valuable end. We can recognize the activity in case (III) as morally valuable but still hold that there is an independent value in adopting her end, and

²⁵ See Vilhauer (2021a) for a more detailed discussion of sympathetic communication.

²⁶ Fahmy (2010, 314-27) also discusses the distinction between adopting and promoting others' ends, but the end upon which she focuses is the (as it were) global end of others' happiness in general, rather than others' particular MPEs, and she argues that sympathy is *not* required to adopt this global end.

thereby *making her end my own*. Kant uses this very language at MM 6:450, where he says the duty of beneficence can be expressed as the duty to make others' ends my own [*Anderer ihre Zwecke zu den meinen zu machen*]. At G 4:430, Kant he writes that

[T]he ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also *my* ends [*dessen Zwecke müssen...auch, so viel möglich, meine Zwecke sein*], if that representation is to have its *full* effect [*Wirkung*] in me.

Commentators have puzzled over what Kant means by “as far as possible” in this passage, in light of the latitude granted by the imperfect duty of beneficence (MM 6:393), and the interpretation offered here provides an explanation. That is, adopting another’s end as my own through rational sympathy, rather than merely promoting it in the service of some other end, is a plausible way to understand *making it my own as far as possible*, as well as ensuring “its *full* effect in me”.

Why does it matter whether we adopt others’ ends or merely promote them when both may yield the same consequences? The answer is that Kantians should attend to the quality of our wills when we adopt others’ ends, not just the consequences of our willing. This is a place where the value of care emerges in Kantian ethics, and though Kant does not emphasize this point, contemporary defenders of Kant should. Adopting others’ ends creates an immediate and intimate connection not only between our wills, but also between our perspectives and our feelings, and it makes good moral sense to embrace the idea that all this flows from the aspect of the duty to treat others as ends which is the duty to take their ends as our own.

The upshot of this section for the question of suffering in sympathy with friends we cannot help is as follows. Since sympathy is a necessary condition of adopting others’ MPEs, we can only cease suffering in sympathy with our friends if we cease to adopt some of the ends they care about most, and we thereby forsake our friends in an important sense. Though we do not

withhold help, since there is no help we could provide, we nonetheless withhold care. We might say that we forsake our friends in our hearts. Since we ought not forsake our friends, we ought to suffer in sympathy even when we cannot help. This holds not only for ordinary people but also for sages. Sages are different from ordinary people in that they are able to exercise perfect rational control over their feelings. But as idealized human beings, they too must sympathetically step into others' perspectives to adopt others' MPEs.²⁷ It would seem that even God cannot adopt others' MPEs without sympathy, so if God lacks sympathy (as 2C 5:34 suggests), then only beings like us can adopt others' MPEs. This casts light on a special role we play in the moral world.

5. Responses to Objections

This section responds to three objections to the interpretation presented above. First, in Friedländer's Anthropology lecture notes, Kant can appear to suggest that we should not sympathize with suffering friends we cannot help because it makes things more difficult for them: “[I]f you cannot help him at all...then go away unperturbed. Weeping, mourning,

²⁷ Kant depicts the sage as “raising himself above the animal nature of the human being” (2C 5:127), and if the sage is an ideal for us, then we should strive to raise ourselves above animality too. But what this raising consists in is a matter of debate. The greater the distance from animality we take it to demand, the greater the tension becomes between this ideal and an ideal which Varden shows is suggested by RR 6:26-8. Since animality, humanity, and personality all have predispositions to the good, it seems ideal to embody a synthesis of all three (Varden 2020a, 29-38, 66, 171). Kant thinks sympathy is something we share with animals, and gives as an example that “when a pig is butchered...the others scream” (FA 25:576, also see VE 27:671, 29:626). And as noted earlier, he associates the human experience of natural sympathy with our animality (FA 25: 607). According to the interpretation offered here, rational sympathy does not involve feelings which are qualitatively different from those of natural sympathy—it involves rational regulation of those feelings. We might say that the threads of feeling out of which rational sympathy is woven are no different from the threads of our natural, animal sympathy. This suggests that when sages rationally sympathize, they raise themselves above animal sympathy only in the sense of rationally transforming it. This helps to diminish the tension between the ideal of the sage and the ideal suggested by RR 6:26-8.

lamenting...make the other's misfortune more acute and unbearable for him" (FA 25:612).²⁸ It is clear that someone rationally sympathizing would not experience or express her sympathetic pain in the unmoderated ways depicted in this remark. The interpretation presented here thus makes it reasonable to suppose that Kant's concern in this passage is just that affect-driven excesses of *natural* sympathy can distress the suffering friend. Admittedly, even moderated expressions of rational sympathy could probably be distressing sometimes. In some cases this problem could be resolved by sympathizing without communicating one's sympathy.²⁹ But suppose my friend wishes to communicate to confirm that I am not sympathizing. She may say that she will rest easier if she knows I have stopped thinking of her pain with sorrow—that she cares more about my living a joyful life than she does about my sympathy. This now appears to be a case where there *is* something I can do to help—I can help her pursue one of her ends, that I live a joyous life—but according to the interpretation defended here, I can only do this by relinquishing her end of stopping her pain, in the sense of ceasing to adopt it (though I should still search for ways to promote it). In such a case, the best I can do is to adopt some but not all of her ends. The world constrains actualization of ideals.

The second objection is as follows. As noted near the outset, Kant says that “when another suffers and, although I cannot help him, I let myself be infected [*anstecken lasse*] by his pain, then two of us suffer, though the trouble really (in nature) affects only *one*”, and proceeds to say that “there cannot possibly be a duty to increase the ills in the world” (MM 6:457, also see a similar argument at MA 25:1321). He can appear to be invoking the consequentialist argument that there is no moral reason to experience pain unless that pain is outweighed by its diminution

²⁸ See Hurter et al. (2014) for empirical evidence that this phenomenon sometimes occurs.

²⁹ Fahmy (2009) correctly emphasizes the role of sympathy in communication for Kant, but this kind of case shows that the value of sympathy cannot lie exclusively in communication.

of some other pain. But Kant is typically understood to be an opponent of consequentialism, and while this sometimes leads to oversimplifications, we should be cautious about attributing consequentialist arguments to him. So it is important to carefully consider the particular terms Kant uses to explain what I do not have a duty to do in this case. He says I have no duty to *let his pain infect* [*anstecken lasse*] me. As mentioned above, Kant uses an adjectival form of *anstecken* earlier on the very same page of the *Doctrine of Virtue* to characterize what he calls “*humanitas aesthetica*”, which was shown to be a term for natural sympathy rather than rational sympathy: he explains the sense in which *humanitas aesthetica* is “communicable” by saying that it is “like receptivity to...infectious^t diseases [*ansteckender Krankheiten*]” (MM 6:457). *Ansteckung* and its derivatives appear rarely in Kant’s corpus, so this connection between passages in close proximity means we should read Kant as claiming that we have no duty to sympathize *naturally* with a suffering friend who we cannot help, but *not* claiming that we have no duty to sympathize *rationally*.

The third objection is based on a passage in Collins’ Ethics notes which appears in close proximity to the story of the sage, part of which we saw earlier, in which Kant can seem to be criticizing sympathy for friends we cannot help because it is a *mere wish*:

I show no sympathy whatever for his plight in harbouring ardent^t wishes [*sehnliche Wünsche*] for his deliverance. The heart...is only a good heart insofar as it is able to contribute something to the other's happiness, and not when it merely wishes [*nur...wünscht*] for that...People think here that sympathy [*Theilnehmung*] for another's fate^t [*Schicksaal*], and kindness of heart, consist merely in feelings [*Gefühl*] and wishes. Yet he who pays no heed at all to the wretchedness of others, where he can be of no help, and who is indifferent [*gleichgültig*] to all misfortune that cannot be altered, but takes trouble only where he can do something and be of help, is in fact a practical man.

(CE 27:421-2)

The first thing to note in interpreting this passage is Kant’s specification in the first sentence that he is criticizing “*sehnliche*” (“ardent”)³⁰ wishes. The word *sehnliche* seems to appear exclusively as a modifier for *Wünsche* (“wishes”) in Kant’s corpus, in three different versions of students’ lecture notes from Kant’s Ethics classes (the other instances appear at ME 27:1543 and BE 253). “Ardent” suggests that Kant is specifically criticizing the affect-driven wishes which occur in natural sympathy. Additional support for this reading comes from a point we saw earlier in Herder’s Ethics notes: that *Gleichgültigkeit* is a “good trait” only insofar as it “holds sympathy in check and gives it the right degree” (HE 27:54). In light of the interpretation advanced here, we can say that *Gleichgültigkeit* is a good trait only insofar as we draw on it to experience rational sympathy rather than natural sympathy. As we also saw earlier, Herder’s Ethics notes identify the good sort of *Gleichgültigkeit* with *Kaltblütigkeit* (“coldbloodedness”). We should also recall the Collins Ethics distinction between *Kaltsinnigkeit* (“frigidity”) and *Kaltblütigkeit*, which defines the former as a “want of love”, and the latter as a “want of *Affekts* in love” which “provides regularity and order” in love. That distinction appears at CE 27:420, in the paragraph immediately prior to the CE 27:421-2 critique of mere wishing currently under discussion. Together these points provide evidence that the *Gleichgültigkeit* Kant recommends at CE 27:422 as an alternative to the sympathy of mere wish is not a state devoid of sympathetic feeling, but rather a *kaltblütig* state of *regular, orderly sympathy in the right degree*. We should hold that he is criticizing *natural* sympathy as mere wish, but *endorsing* something like wishing which involves rational sympathy.

It may seem puzzling to claim that there is room for a distinction between natural and rational sympathy with respect to the concept of *wish* in cases where we cannot help, such that

³⁰ The Cambridge translation renders *sehnliche* as “passionate”, but given that “passion” is typically used as a translation for Kant’s technical term *Leidenschaft*, “ardent” is used instead.

the former is mere wish which ought to be eradicated, and the latter is a different and valuable mental activity. That is, in such cases, we cannot help, so it is common to both natural and rational sympathy that they cannot prompt useful action, and so they are both *like* wishing in an obvious way. Can Kantian ethics accommodate a distinction between (i) mere wish, which is morally empty and should be eradicated, (ii) a kind of conative state which is *like* wishing in that it can produce no useful action but is nonetheless morally valuable, and (iii) the kind of conative state that produces useful action?

The answer is yes—Kant quite unequivocally relies on such a threefold distinction in the famous “useless jewel” passage, in which he argues that goodness of will does not entail good actions:

Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune...this [good] will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose—if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and only the good will were left (not, of course, as a mere wish [*bloßer Wunsch*] but as the summoning of all means insofar as they are in our control)—then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to this worth nor take anything away from it. (G 4:394)

This pivotal passage entails a threefold distinction between (i) mere wish, (ii) a kind of conative state which “achieve[s] nothing” but is nonetheless morally valuable because it is an activity of practical reason, and involves the “summoning all of all means insofar as they are in our control”, and (iii) a kind of conative state which is based on practical rationality and leads to useful action. Kant implies that both (ii) and (iii) are sources of moral worth, though (i) is not. Kant’s assertion that there is moral value in (ii)-type cases is fundamental for understanding the sense in which his ethics is non-consequentialist. That is, to recognize the value in (ii)-type cases is to recognize that the value of the *activity of good willing* is independent of the value of the *states of affairs* it sometimes brings into being. We can draw a distinction between (i)- and

(ii)-type cases of sympathizing when one cannot help which corresponds to the distinction between rational and natural sympathy. When, in rational sympathy, we wrack our brains to try to find ways to help, sifting through our knowledge of empirical laws to find relevant hypothetical imperatives we might follow, we are clearly summoning means. When we voluntarily and sympathetically put ourselves in the other's place to understand the help they need, we are summoning means here too, and the text supports this claim. In §34 of the *Doctrine of Virtue*, Kant tells us that "*humanitas practica*", which was shown above to be rational sympathy, involves using our "receptivity" to "[s]ympathetic joy and sadness...**as a means** to promoting active and rational benevolence" (MM 6:456), and repeats the point in §35: we should "cultivate the compassionate...feelings" and "make use of them **as so many means** to sympathy based on moral principles" (MM 6:457, my boldface). Rational sympathy is not the passive feeling-state which Kant criticizes as mere wish—it is *action* of the mind and will which has as much claim to being a (ii)-type case as anything in Kant's ethics, and thus has the Kantian credential we need to recognize it as an aspect of good will.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, let me address a final objection. Readers may wonder whether the claim that we ought to adopt friends' ends even when we cannot help runs afoul of the "ought implies can" principle: how can I have a duty to adopt an end which I cannot promote? The earlier discussion of the distinction between adoption and promotion, and the distinction between (ii)- and (iii)-type cases just above, demonstrates that there is more to adopting an end through rational sympathy than just promoting it. It is mental action which can be recognized as having moral worth even when it does not lead to useful consequences. Adopting an end is something

we can *do* even when we cannot promote the end, and it creates a connection of care which Kantians should acknowledge to be intrinsically valuable in the same way that rational agency itself is intrinsically valuable.

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