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RATIONAL BEINGS WITH EMOTIONAL NEEDS: THE PATIENT-CENTERED GROUNDS OF KANT'S DUTY OF HUMANITY

Tyler Paytas

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the past several decades, Kant scholars have made significant headway in showing that emotions play a more significant role in Kant's ethics than has traditionally been assumed. Closer attention has been paid to the *Metaphysics of Morals* (*MS*)[1] where Kant provides important insights about the value of moral sentiments and the role they should play in our lives. One particularly important discussion occurs in sections 34 and 35 of the Doctrine of Virtue where Kant claims we have a duty to use sympathetic feelings "as a means of promoting active and rational benevolence" (MS 6:457). Kant labels this the "duty of humanity," and he suggests that nature has implanted sympathetic feelings in us "to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (ibid.). Commentators have rightly highlighted these remarks as prime evidence that feelings do play a positive role in Kant's ethics after all.

Yet, while we know that feelings such as sympathy have a role to play in Kant's ethics, it is not obvious exactly what this role is or in what the value of sympathy consists. Two different views on this issue have emerged in the literature. According to what we can call the *motivational account*, we have a duty to cultivate sympathetic feelings because we sometimes need them to be motivated to perform beneficent actions. On another popular interpretation, sympathy is valued for the epistemic role it plays in helping us fulfill duties of beneficence. The suggestion is that we have a duty to cultivate sympathetic feelings because they alert us to the suffering of others, and they allow us to recognize more easily the sort of help that is needed. Call this the *epistemic account*.[2]

What these views share in common is that they focus primarily on the psychology of moral agents. As a moral agent, I have a duty to cul-

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tivate sympathy because, without it, I might either fail to be motivated to help or lack important knowledge of when and how to help. Although there are reasonable grounds for holding either view, both are subject to considerable worries. In brief, while the motivational account seemingly runs counter to Kant's views about autonomy and purity of will, the epistemic account either rests on a faulty conception of sympathetic feelings, or it too stands in tension with central Kantian doctrines. Further, even if the tension between these accounts and other aspects of Kant's ethics can be resolved, neither view explains why sympathy is important even for agents who are otherwise fully virtuous—something we should expect to be accounted for by an ethical theory.

In light of these concerns, I believe that, in order to understand fully the Kantian value of sympathy, we must shift our focus away from the psychology of moral agents and toward the emotional needs of moral patients. In this paper, I argue that the Kantian duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings is grounded (at least partly) in the fact that receiving expressions of sympathy from others is an important human need. Due to our animal nature, conduct motivated by duty alone will not always be effective in promoting the happiness of others. This is because physical and financial assistance (which do not require feelings) are often insufficient for relieving human suffering. It is part of human nature to need an emotional connection with others—especially during periods of grief, loneliness, and depression. Thus, even if moral agents never need sympathetic feelings to be motivated to *try* to help others, sympathetic feelings are often necessary for *succeeding* in our attempts to help.

The discussion proceeds as follows. In sections 2 and 3, I explicate the two traditional accounts of the Kantian value of sympathy, and I argue that neither view is sufficiently compelling. Then, in section 4, I put forth what I call the *patient-centered account* of the Kantian value of sympathy. I provide textual evidence in support of the view, and I explain the advantages it has over rival accounts. In section 5, I suggest that the patient-centered account has the further merit of solving an interpretive puzzle arising from Kant's discussion of the "four moral endowments" in his introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue. A brief conclusion follows.

2. The Motivational Account

In Chapter 1 of Part 2 of the Doctrine of the Elements of Ethics, Kant distinguishes three different duties of love: beneficence, gratitude, and sympathy. In section 34, he provides a lengthy exposition of the duty of sympathy. Under the heading *Sympathetic feeling is generally a duty*, Kant writes,

> *Sympathetic joy* and *sadness* (*sympathia moralis*) are sensible feelings of pleasure or displeasure (which are therefore to be called "aesthetic") at another's state of joy or pain (shared feeling, sympathetic feeling). Nature 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. It is called the duty of *humanity* (*humanitas*) because a human being is regarded here not merely as a rational being but also as an animal endowed with reason. (MS 6:457)

This passage raises a host of important questions. Why is there a duty to use sympathetic feelings to promote active and rational benevolence? What purpose do such feelings serve? How exactly are we to use our sympathetic feelings? Why does Kant refer to the duty to use them as the duty of humanity, and why is this only a conditional duty?

To the question of the usefulness of sympathetic feelings for promoting active and rational benevolence, an initially tempting answer is that such feelings play an important motivational role. It is all too common to lack the motivation to help others despite awareness that this is what duty requires. Some commentators interpret Kant as claiming that the value of sympathy consists in its ability to motivate us to fulfill our duties when we are unmoved by representation of duty alone.[3] Although the fully virtuous agent never needs sympathetic feelings in order to be motivated to obey the moral law, Kant certainly recognizes that each individual's quest to become fully virtuous is an ongoing struggle (MS 6:409, 6:446; Rel 6:47–49). Perhaps we have a duty to use sympathetic feelings as a means of promoting beneficence precisely because our capacity *always* to be sufficiently moved by recognition of duty is not yet fully developed.

The motivational account is made tempting by remarks found in several of Kant's texts. For instance, after positing a duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings in section 35 of the Doctrine of Virtue, Kant remarks that "this [sharing painful feelings] is still one of the impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (MS 6:457). It is not unreasonable to read this as a claim that we should cultivate our natural sympathy precisely because duty is not always a sufficient incentive. Moreover, the idea that sympathetic feelings have the positive effect of motivating beneficence when duty fails to is not unique to the Doctrine of Virtue. Kant makes similar remarks in "Observations of the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime" (Obs 2:218), "The End of All Things" (ED 8:337–38), and *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (A 7:253). In *Anthropology*, Kant writes,

> Nevertheless, the wisdom of nature has planted in us the predisposition to compassion in order to handle the reins *provisionally*, until reason has achieved the necessary strength; that is to say, for the purpose of enlivening us, nature has added the incentive of pathological (sensible) impulse to the moral incentives for the good, as a temporary surrogate of reason. (A 7:253)

The fact that Kant reiterates this point about the positive motivational role played by sympathetic feelings in multiple works spanning three decades lends plausibility to the motivational account.

2.1 Autonomy and Impurity

Although it is sensible to infer from these passages that the duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings arises from our motivational needs, there are important objections to the motivational account. Marcia Baron persuasively argues that the motivational account is incompatible with Kant's theory of freedom. The worry is that deliberately cultivating feelings and inclinations because one believes the objective law is an insufficient incentive seemingly amounts to a denial of autonomy. As Baron explains,

> Once I regard the motive of duty as less than a fully sufficient incentive (or even as potentially sufficient, but as not fully compelling unless it coincides with my own interest or with some inclination), I call into question the supremacy of morality. Once I search for cooperating inclinations, I will scarcely be able to maintain the belief that moral considerations always trump any competing considerations. For insofar as I adopt a policy of seeking assistance from the inclinations, I in effect allow that moral considerations are not fully compelling, motivationally; but if they are not fully compelling motivationally, presumably they are not fully compelling, period. I will end up asking myself, "It's obligatory, and that carries some weight; but what other reasons are there for doing it?" (1995, 155)

In addition to this point about autonomy, Baron (1995, 219) raises the further (somewhat related) worry that actively seeking out the assistance of feelings and inclinations for the purpose of motivation is to advocate impurity of the will. In *Religion*, Kant remarks that impurity consists in an agent's needing other incentives besides the law to fulfill her duties (Rel 6:30). Thus, it would seem that an agent who seeks to cultivate sympathy because she does not believe representation of duty will always be a sufficient incentive is moving away from virtue and in the direction of impurity. These points suggest that Kant should not be read as claiming we ought to cultivate sympathy because we need it for motivation to fulfill our duties.

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Although these worries are serious, there is an avenue of response available for proponents of the motivational account. There does indeed seem to be something problematic about an agent seeking nonrational sources of motivation to perform a required action at a particular time. But it is not as clear that there is anything wrong with cultivating feelings as a back-up motivation due to fear that there might be times in the future when recognition of duty will fail to motivate. To suspect that I might knowingly transgress the law at some future point in time need not undermine my belief that I am free. It could just be an acknowledgment that I am not fully virtuous and that I do not expect that to change anytime soon (though I shall continue to strive). Given that Kant is explicit that no one is fully virtuous (MS 6:409) and that no rational finite being attains moral perfection in this life (KpV 5:122), it is hard to see how we could rationally believe that duty will always move us. Further, it is somewhat misleading to describe an agent who cultivates feelings to compensate for moral deficiency as "advocating" impurity of will. When we try to make ourselves more sympathetic so that we will be less tempted by self-interested inclinations, we need not view ourselves as cultivating or championing impurity. A more charitable description is that we are conscientiously responding to the fact that we are *already* impure. Indeed, Kant's discussion of impurity in *Religion* is not a warning about how we might end up, but rather a regretful description of our current state.

It is open to Baron to respond to these points by suggesting that, given our inherent impurity, we must strive that much harder to make ourselves such that duty is always a sufficient incentive and that actively seeking out feelings as a source of moral motivation might undermine this striving. Still, in light of the preceding discussion, it is uncertain whether the motivational account fails for the reasons Baron offers.

2.2 Sympathy and Full Virtue

Even if cultivating feelings as a source of motivation is compatible with autonomy and striving for purity of will, there is another worry for the motivational account. The problem is that the view fails to explain why sympathy would be valuable even for an agent who is otherwise fully virtuous. If the value of sympathetic feelings consists solely in their ability to motivate agents who fail to be moved by representation of duty, then a fully virtuous individual would have no need for them. This is a counterintuitive result. Most of us share the intuition that sympathetic feelings would be valuable even for the morally strongest among us. This might not seem like a problem given that no human being is fully virtuous. But even acknowledging this point, the motivational account has

the counterintuitive implication that the greater one's virtue, the less important it is for her to have a well-cultivated capacity for sympathy.

Proponents of the motivational account may be unmoved by this worry because there is evidence that the fully virtuous Kantian agent would have no need for sympathetic feelings. Indeed, there are passages that suggest that Kant believes the virtuous agent would be better off without feelings and inclinations. A particularly noteworthy passage is found in the second *Critique*. In discussing the relative merit of actions performed from feelings rather than duty, Kant writes,

> Inclination is blind and servile, whether it is kindly or not; and when morality is in question, reason must not play the part of mere guardian to inclination but, disregarding it altogether, must attend solely to its own interest as pure practical reason. Even this feeling of compassion and tender sympathy, if it precedes consideration of what is duty and becomes the determining ground, is itself burdensome to right-thinking persons, brings their considered maxims into confusion, and produces the wish to be freed from them and subject to lawgiving reason alone. (KpV 5:118)

Though this passage might appear to indicate that Kant rejects the notion that feelings have value even for virtuous agents, I do not believe this is the conclusion we should draw. The first thing to note about this passage is the phrase "when morality is in question" in the first sentence. A few sentences prior to these remarks Kant stresses the contrast between *legality* and *morality*. By "legality," Kant means permissibility. Thus, "morality" in this context does not refer to morally permissible actions but rather moral worth (that is, a unique type of moral value that merits esteem). In light of this, what Kant seems to be saying is that, if our actions are to have moral worth, duty must be the subjective determining ground. But this is not to say that we should never be moved by feelings of sympathy. While it is true that the virtuous agent possesses a good will that she demonstrates by fulfilling duties from the motive of duty, this does not mean that *all* of her conduct is done from duty; we do not maximize our virtue by maximizing the number of morally worthy actions we perform. Thus, the fact that actions from feeling lack moral worth does not suggest that the virtuous Kantian agent has no need for sympathy.

What of Kant's claim that sympathy "is itself burdensome to right-thinking persons, brings their considered maxims into confusion, and produces the wish to be freed from them and subject to lawgiving reason alone"? Kant is certainly right that sympathy can be burdensome. For one thing, it leaves us vulnerable to pain and suffering that we would otherwise avoid. Moreover, sympathy can sometimes make it difficult to

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recognize our duty such as in situations in which people who stand in different relations to us have different types of needs. When deliberating in such cases, we may indeed wish to be rid of our feelings so that we could more easily recognize our duty and be confident that we are doing the right thing.

Despite the fact that we sometimes wish to be rid of feelings and inclinations, Kant does not believe the fulfillment of such wishes would be a good thing. In *Religion*, he warns against trying to eliminate inclinations: "*Considered in themselves* natural inclinations are *good*, i.e. not reprehensible, and to want to extirpate them would not only be futile but harmful and blameworthy as well; we must rather only curb them, so that they will not wear each other out but will instead be harmonized into a whole called happiness" (Rel 6:58). Moreover, as we have seen, Kant explicitly advocates the cultivation and utilization of sympathetic feelings in the Doctrine of Virtue (MS 6:457). These remarks tell against the suggestion that the ideal Kantian agent is altogether devoid of feelings such as sympathy. In light of this point and the fact that common moral consciousness suggests that a virtuous agent should not be lacking in sympathy, it is worth considering alternative accounts of the Kantian value of sympathy that, unlike the motivational account, might be able to accommodate this idea.[4]

2.3 Motivation and Imperfect Duties

Before turning to alternative proposals, there is a variant of the motivational account that merits our attention. Although Baron rejects the motivational account in its common guise, she advocates a variation of the view that could potentially explain why even the virtuous Kantian agent needs sympathy. Baron claims that, while sympathetic feelings should not play a motivational role in the fulfillment of perfect duties, they are necessary for motivating us to fulfill imperfect duties. Helping others is an imperfect duty because, although we are required to help, we are not required to try to help everyone who needs it at all times.[5] Baron believes that the nature of imperfect duties makes it impossible to fulfill them from duty alone: "Insofar as we are not required to help this person rather than that person, or on this occasion rather than another, my choice to help this person will be based on considerations other than, or in addition to, duty" (1995, 163). Thus, sympathetic feelings play an important role for Kant because they prompt us to help others even when doing so is not strictly required.[6] This could explain why even an otherwise fully virtuous agent would need a well-cultivated capacity for sympathy.

The problem with this alternative version of the motivational account is that it is far from obvious that we are unable to fulfill imperfect duties

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from duty as primary motive. Baron provides an example of an agent who has an opportunity to help an elderly and ailing neighbor with her laundry (1995, 120). I believe that actions of this kind, though imperfect duties, can be done from the motive of duty. Consider Kant's example from the *Groundwork* of a man who is cold and indifferent to the suffering of others, yet has a high degree of reverence for the moral law (G 4:398). Despite his lack of sympathy, this man could still be motivated to do his elderly neighbor's laundry, even though he is not strictly required to do so. When the man sees his neighbor carrying her laundry, he realizes that it has been some time since he has fulfilled his imperfect duty to help others. Although he feels no sympathy for his neighbor and he knows that it would be permissible to skip this opportunity to help, he senses that he has skipped too many opportunities to help lately and that to skip this one too could potentially lead to an immoral habit of always putting off his imperfect duties. Thus, purely out of respect for the moral law, the man offers to assist his neighbor.

I thus believe that the motivational account (in either of its guises) is a less than compelling explanation for the Kantian value of sympathy. What the account gets right is that sympathy often does motivate us when duty fails to and, all things considered, we should be glad that we are endowed with this motivational backup. But the suggestion that we should try to cultivate our capacity for sympathy because of our inherent lack of moral strength remains controversial. Further, the view also suffers from the weakness of being unable to explain why sympathy would be valuable even for an otherwise fully virtuous agent. Insofar as this suggestion runs counter to widely shared judgments about the importance of sympathy, it is worth considering alternative accounts to see if they can render Kant's ethics more compatible with common intuition without deviating from core Kantian doctrine.

3. The Epistemic Account

Some commentators read Kant as claiming that the value of sympathy is epistemic. The idea is that sympathetic feelings are important because they alert agents to the suffering of others and help them see what type of support is needed. Unlike the motivational account, the epistemic account does not gain its plausibility from direct textual evidence. Kant never claims (at least not explicitly) that sympathetic feelings are a means of acquiring information. Rather, the epistemic account is an inference to the best explanation for why a philosopher who so often downplays the importance of sentiments—especially as a source of moral motivation—would posit a duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings. The suggestion offered by proponents of the epistemic account is that

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Kant sees these feelings as an effective means of acquiring practically useful information. As Nancy Sherman remarks, "If we have a practical interest in the moral law and its spheres of justice and virtue, we still require the pathological emotions to know when and where these ends are appropriate" (1990, 159).[7] Importantly, the claim that sympathetic feelings are valuable for epistemic purposes does not in any way conflict with Kant's vigorous rejection of sentimentalism.

Not only does the epistemic account explain the Kantian value of sympathy in a way that is consistent with Kant's rationalist account of moral motivation, the thought that sympathetic agents possess epistemic advantages vis-à-vis individuals lacking in fellow feeling is plausible in itself. Sympathetic agents are more likely to appreciate the emotional needs of others, and they also seem to recognize more of the morally salient features of a given situation. As Anne Margaret Baxley observes, the agent with properly cultivated sympathy "sees certain features and circumstances of the lives of others to which he might otherwise remain blind or ignorant. He sees, for instance, that people can be harmed in countless ways, large and small, often undeservedly, and in ways they cannot prevent or control" (2010, 165). The thought that sympathetic feelings are a useful source of information seems especially plausible when we consider cases in which another person is distressed by some event that would not cause similar pain if it happened to the agent in position to help. For instance, even if you are not the type of person who is upset by biting criticism of your work, if you have well-cultivated sympathetic feelings, you will likely recognize that your colleague needs emotional support when she receives harsh feedback.[8]

These considerations illustrate the attractiveness of the epistemic account. But, to assess its merit properly, we must explore the specifics of the view. There are at least two different ways we might understand the proposal that the value of sympathetic feelings is epistemic. One possibility is that the feelings themselves are a type of perceptual capacity. The suggestion would be that the sympathetic feelings I have for an individual at a given time can alert me to the fact that he needs my help and also make me aware of how I can help. Though I believe this idea is implied in some of the discussions from proponents of the epistemic account, I do not believe it withstands critical scrutiny.

While there does seem to be a correlation between experiencing sympathetic feelings and recognizing the emotional pain of others, it would be a mistake to infer that these feelings are the cause of the recognition. It is much more plausible that we feel sympathy for others only after we become aware of their pain. The "perceptual faculty" version of the epistemic account implies that sympathetic feelings must somehow arise

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in an agent prior to any cognitive awareness of that person's pain. But it is hard to see how this might be true. How could I feel sympathy for a person in pain prior to coming to believe that she is in pain? Further, the notion that sympathetic feelings are a direct source of knowledge of *how* to help is also implausible. When we feel pain for others, we do not literally have the same experience they are having. I can certainly feel sympathy for a friend who is undergoing a painful divorce. But the pain I feel when I witness his distress does not by itself give me any special insight into the type of support needed by someone in his circumstances.

In addition to these conceptual points, there is also textual evidence that Kant does not view sympathetic feelings as a faculty of perception. In the Doctrine of Virtue, Kant defines the sympathetic feelings we have a duty to use as "sensible feelings of pleasure or displeasure (which are therefore to be called 'aesthetic') at another's state of joy or pain (shared feeling, sympathetic feeling)" (MS 6:456). In an earlier discussion from the same text, Kant makes it clear that feelings of pleasure and displeasure should not be confused for a means of perceiving. Remarking on the susceptibility to feel pleasure from awareness that our actions are consistent with duty (which he calls "moral feeling") Kant writes, "It is inappropriate to call this feeling a moral *sense*, for by the word 'sense' is usually understood a theoretical capacity for perception directed toward an object, whereas moral feeling (like pleasure and displeasure in general) is something merely subjective, which yields no cognition" (MS 6:400). Although the moral feeling Kant refers to here is something distinct from sympathy, we can assume that he would object to thinking of sympathetic feelings as a capacity for perception for the same reason (that is, that subjective feelings of pleasure and displeasure do not yield cognition).

Though these considerations undermine the plausibility of the "perceptual faculty" version of the epistemic account, there is a way of specifying the view so that it is not vulnerable to these worries. On this alternative formulation, sympathetic feelings provide practically useful knowledge *indirectly*. The suggestion is that such feelings motivate us to engage in conversations with suffering individuals, and, through these conversations, we gain valuable insights about their experience. This not only facilitates beneficence toward the individual with whom we are presently conversing, but it also helps us more easily recognize the needs of others facing similar circumstances in the future.[9]

While this suggestion is certainly reasonable, it runs into a familiar problem. The idea that communicating with a suffering individual provides valuable knowledge about her experience that can be useful for helping her as well as others facing similar circumstances is highly

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plausible in itself. But in light of this point, we presumably have a *duty* to communicate with individuals who are suffering as a means of fulfilling our duties of beneficence. And insofar as we are obligated to communicate with those who are in pain so that we can help them, we should be able to fulfill this duty from the motive of duty—without the assistance of sympathetic feelings. If the suggestion is that we have a duty to cultivate sympathy because we need feelings to be motivated to take the necessary means to fulfill an objectively given end, the epistemic account runs into the same worries about impurity and autonomy that threaten to undermine the plausibility of the motivational account.

Proponents of the indirect version of the epistemic account could appeal to the responses I suggested on behalf of the motivational account. Perhaps we have a duty to cultivate sympathetic feelings because, although we have a duty to communicate with those in need, we will sometimes lack the requisite moral strength due to our inherent impurity. But the suggestion that Kant advocates cultivating feelings as a source of motivational backup remains highly controversial. Moreover, this indirect version of the epistemic account is also vulnerable to the second objection raised against the motivational account—that it fails to explain why sympathy is valuable even for fully virtuous agents. Virtuous agents would not need sympathetic feelings to motivate them to communicate with suffering individuals. They would be moved by awareness of their duty to help and the fact that communication is typically an important means to effective help. Thus, the indirect version of the epistemic account implies that the value of sympathy diminishes as an agent's virtue increases. Insofar as we judge this to be an unwelcome implication, we have reason to search for an alternative explanation of the Kantian value of sympathy.

4. The Patient-centered Account

4.1 The Duty of Humanity

We have seen that, when we begin our inquiry into the Kantian value of sympathetic feelings by asking why they are useful, two answers that immediately suggest themselves turn out to be problematic. Perhaps we can find a better answer if we turn to the question of why the duty to use sympathy is labeled the duty of humanity. Kant says the duty is given this name "because a human being is regarded here not merely as a rational being but also as an animal endowed with reason" (MS 6:456). Unfortunately, he does not clarify his intended meaning in the rest of this section. However, I believe we can gain some insight if we focus on the contrast between mere rational beings and "animals endowed with reason."

Kant often mentions our animal nature to highlight the moral hindrances generated by our sensible inclinations (Rel 6:26; MS 6:387). However, in the present context, I do not believe he is referring to the difficulties faced by moral *agents*, but rather the particular needs of moral *patients*. By referring to humans as animals endowed with reason, Kant is stressing the fact that human beings have an animal nature that gives rise to certain physical and emotional needs. Support for this reading is found in his discussion of the first duty of love (beneficence), located only a few pages prior to his discussion of the duty of humanity. Here Kant writes, "Consequently the maxim of common interest, of beneficence toward those in need, is a universal duty of human beings, just because they are to be considered fellow human beings, that is, *rational beings with needs*, united by nature in one dwelling place so that they can help one another" (MS 6:453; emphasis added).

A particularly important human need is the need to receive genuine expressions of sympathetic concern from others. Although the cold philanthropist of *Groundwork* I demonstrates a good will that is most estimable, if he truly does not feel any sympathy for others, many of his efforts at promoting happiness will be unsuccessful. This is especially true when those in need of help are friends and family members. When faced with difficult circumstances, we often need something beyond physical aid and financial support. We need the emotional consolation that comes from knowing that there are others disposed to share our pain. This need does not arise from our rational nature but rather from our human nature. My suggestion is that this is why using sympathetic feelings is labeled the duty of *humanity*. It is not a duty that all conceivable rational beings have to each other. Rather, it is a duty that human beings have to one another due to contingent facts about human nature.

I take it that the above claims about the general human need to receive sympathy are relatively uncontroversial. Still, some might be skeptical that Kant took this to be an essential human need. Fortunately, there is textual evidence that mitigates such skepticism. Consider, for instance, Kant's discussion of the law of nature formula of the categorical imperative in *Groundwork* II. To illustrate this formula, Kant considers four specific duties, including the duty to promote the happiness of others. What is noteworthy for present purposes is that, when Kant claims that an agent could not consistently will a principle of nonbeneficence, he does not mention the need for physical or financial assistance but rather the need for love and sympathy: "For, a will that decided this would conflict with itself, since many cases could occur in which one would need the love and sympathy of others and in which, by such a law of nature arisen from his own will, he would rob himself of all hope of the assistance he wishes for himself" (G 4:423). That Kant chooses

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to mention sympathy rather than general beneficence is evidence that he appreciates the importance of sympathy for human well-being.[10]

The strongest evidence that Kant recognizes the importance of receiving sympathy comes from section 35 of the Doctrine of Virtue. On the topic of the suffering of others he writes,

> [I]t is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate; and to this end it is therefore an indirect duty to cultivate the compassionate natural (aesthetic) feelings in us, and to make use of them as so many means to sympathy based on moral principles and the feelings appropriate to them.

Further,

> [f]or this [sharing painful feelings] is still one of the impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (MS 6:457).

Though these remarks make it clear that Kant recognizes the importance of human emotional needs, interpretive questions arise here as well. For instance, what exactly is it that duty alone might not accomplish but the sharing of painful feelings would? As before, it is tempting to understand Kant to be saying that we sometimes need sympathy to be motivated to help others. But we have seen that this reading is problematic. Thus, I do not believe Kant is claiming that we need sympathetic feelings to be motivated to *try* to help others. Rather, his point is that it is sometimes necessary that we be motivated by sympathetic feelings so that our attempt to help will be *successful*. Even if representation of duty alone is always a sufficient incentive to try to help, when duty is the sole incentive, this is often much less *effective* than help primarily motivated by sympathetic feelings. As Kant notes in the second *Critique*, though feelings and inclinations cannot be the sole ground of morally worthy conduct, they "can indeed greatly facilitate the *effectiveness* of moral maxims" (KpV 5:118; emphasis added and removed).[11] Feelings make moral maxims more effective in part because human beings are constituted such that we sometimes need those around us to share our pain.

To appreciate fully the motivation for the patient-centered account, it may help to consider an example. Suppose your neighbor is grieving the loss of her spouse following a tragic accident. You could certainly recognize her distress and aim to alleviate her suffering without experiencing feelings of sympathy. Even if you are not saddened by her pain, duty can serve as your incentive as you visit her home to deliver a warm meal and express your condolences. Although your neighbor will appreciate your generosity and thoughtfulness, it will not be difficult for her to tell that

you lack the sympathetic feelings for her that others have expressed. This, of course, would not be problematic in itself because she does not need *everyone* around her to feel and express genuine sympathy. She might even have a special appreciation for your gesture precisely because you were moved to offer support from respect for the moral law. But imagine if *everyone* who sought to help her through the grieving process did so strictly from duty in the absence of genuine sympathetic feelings. This would presumably make it exponentially more difficult for her to recover because the feelings of loneliness and isolation that accompany severe grief would not be alleviated. Grief is an example of an emotional ailment that even an entire army of cold philanthropists—however good their wills—would be unable to assuage. This explains why sympathy is valuable even for agents who are otherwise fully virtuous—something that the motivational and epistemic accounts are unable to explain.

One might object that the suggestion that we have a duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings to meet the emotional needs of others is vulnerable to the objection Baron raises against the motivational account—that it is incompatible with genuine autonomy and purity of will. After all, I have claimed that feelings are sometimes a necessary condition for successful moral action. In responding to this worry, it is important to note the reasons that feelings are deemed necessary on the respective accounts. On the motivational account, feelings are necessary because recognition of duty will not always be a strong enough incentive for the agent to try to help. In contrast, on the patient-centered account, recognition of duty is always a sufficient incentive to try to help—it is just that the absence of feelings will sometimes make this help less effective. Thus, our cultivation of sympathy as a source of motivation does not preclude our viewing ourselves as autonomous. Nor does it impede our striving for purity of will. On the contrary, we aim to cultivate sympathetic feelings precisely because, given the needs of those around us, this is what the objective practical law commands.

A second objection is that not everyone needs to receive sympathy in order to be happy. It is certainly possible that some people are constituted such that, given certain circumstances, they can experience complete satisfaction without ever being on the receiving end of genuine sympathetic concern. However, the possibility of these rare cases could not undermine the patient-centered account because many duties take their form in light of general facts about the type of beings we are. And it is a general fact about human beings that we often need the sympathy of others. As Barbara Herman notes in discussing the claim that human beings need emotional intimacy, "That someone might choose a solitary life or live well without intimate connection to others no more undermines this fact about human beings than extreme physical stoicism or a

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high pain threshold undermines the fact that physical assault interferes with successful human activity" (1993, 189n9).

Of course, it would be far from ideal for an agent to be surrounded by people who will be moved to help her only when they experience sympathetic feelings. Even the most kindhearted of agents will sometimes fail to feel the appropriate level of sympathy for a friend in distress. Our capacity to experience these feelings can easily be diminished by factors such as stress, exhaustion, illness, and so forth. Thus, we should hope that we have reliable friends who will be moved to help us from duty when their natural sympathy is lagging. But this does not undermine the claim that we need other people to be such that they are typically moved to help us from sympathetic feelings. It would be highly problematic from the standpoint of our well-being if those around us could only ever be moved to help us solely from respect for the moral law.[12]

4.2 Cultivation and Utilization

Two questions naturally arise at this point: (1) how does one cultivate sympathy? (2) how exactly are we supposed to use our sympathy? Kant provides a rough sketch of an answer to the first question. After claiming that we have a duty to cultivate and use sympathy he writes, "It is therefore a duty not to avoid 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" (MS 6:457). The suggestion seems to be that we must resist the temptation to avoid situations that might arouse our sympathy. Presumably this is because consistently avoiding such situations could eventually lead to emotional atrophy. Putting oneself in these situations is, therefore, the first step of the cultivation process. Kant does not say much beyond this, but we can make reasonable conjectures about what else is required for the cultivation of sympathy. Melissa Seymour Fahmy plausibly suggests that we must also seek to eradicate impediments to our natural receptivity to sympathy, including envy, resentment, indifference, and malice. This can be accomplished through practices of self-examination and self-reproach (Fahmy 2009, 38, 43).

As for the second question, one obvious way in which we can use feelings to help others is to verbally communicate our sympathetic concern. Simply telling another person that you share his pain can often go a long way toward easing it. Genuine sympathy can also be communicated in nonverbal ways. The look on a friend's face and the warmth of his embrace are often every bit as revealing and comforting as the words that are spoken (Fahmy 2009, 43).

The remaining interpretive question is why Kant calls the duty of humanity a conditional duty. I believe the best explanation is that we

can have a duty to utilize our sympathetic feelings only if we have them. Because it is not possible to have a duty to experience sympathetic feelings (G 4:400; MS 6:402), our duty is only to cultivate them and use them on the condition that we have them.[13]

One might wonder how we can have a duty to *use* our sympathy rather than simply having a duty to cultivate it. It would seem that, if we have fulfilled our duty to cultivate sympathy, there would not be a further duty to express it because the feeling itself would naturally move us to do so. While this is often the case, there are circumstances in which we feel sympathy for someone without being immediately inclined to show it. An agent might be reluctant to express her sympathy because she is generally uncomfortable sharing her feelings and opening up to others. Or perhaps she knows that communicating her pain in a given situation will be emotionally taxing. The fact that we may feel anxious about expressing our emotions under difficult circumstances is what makes it possible for us to share our feelings from duty—something that might initially seem paradoxical.

4.3 Summary

In this section, I have presented the case for thinking that Kant's duty of humanity is grounded in the fact that receiving sympathy from others is an important human need. The patient-centered account avoids the major worries that afflict the motivational and epistemic accounts. Not only is the patient-centered account free from tension with Kant's claims about autonomy and purity of will, but it also explains why sympathy is valuable even for agents who are otherwise fully virtuous. That being said, it is important to note that the patient-centered account is compatible (in principle) with the motivational and epistemic accounts. It could be that the Kantian value of sympathy is threefold: to motivate beneficent actions, to prompt communication that leads to useful information, and to directly relieve emotional suffering. At the very least, though, I hope to have shown that any account of Kantian sympathy that leaves out the third item on this list is incomplete.

5. Moral Endowments

In addition to avoiding problems faced by the alternative accounts, the patient-centered account has the further advantage of giving rise to a solution to an interpretive puzzle about the Doctrine of Virtue. In section XII of the Introduction, Kant discusses four moral endowments that are "*subjective* conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty." The four endowments are *moral feeling*, *conscience*, *love* of one's neighbor, and *respect* for oneself (*self-esteem*). Kant claims that these endowments

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are antecedent predispositions on the side of *feeling* and that it is in virtue of these feelings that human beings can be put under obligation (MS 6:399). The puzzle that arises is how feelings can be necessary for obligation, given that the essential feature of genuinely moral conduct is that it is performed independently of inclination.

Kant's subsequent discussion clarifies this issue for three of the four endowments. The explication of moral feeling and conscience is relatively straightforward. Kant tells us that moral feeling is the susceptibility to feel constraint from recognition of moral obligation (MS 6:399). This feeling does not precede consideration of duty but is rather a consequence of it. Conscience is the ability to arrive at a judgment about whether a possible action is permissible or impermissible (MS 6:400). The moral feeling is experienced after one's conscience makes a judgment. In light of all this, it is obvious why the moral feeling and conscience are preconditions for moral obligation. A being unable to assess the permissibility of an action and lacking the capacity to feel constrained by that judgment would not be a free moral agent.

Respect for oneself (the third moral endowment) is a precondition of moral obligation because the moral law has its source within oneself. Thus, respecting the moral law is not possible in the absence of respect for oneself. If we did not respect ourselves, we could not respect the moral law, and we could not recognize duties. Importantly, we do not have a choice whether to respect ourselves; rather, the law within us unavoidably forces us to. When we violate duties to ourselves, this is not a result of lack of self-respect. Our conscience judges that such action is impermissible precisely because we necessarily have respect for ourselves. Violations of duties to oneself result from ignoring the judgment of conscience, not a failure to recognize such duties.

Unfortunately, Kant's discussion of love of others in section XII is not as helpful in explaining why this moral endowment is a precondition for moral obligation. He notes that the feeling itself cannot be a duty but that benevolence is a duty (MS 6:402). He notes further that successful completion of beneficent actions will result in experiencing feelings of love (MS 6:402). But none of this explains why the capacity for the feeling is a precondition for moral obligation. It seems obvious that we are capable of performing beneficent actions without having feelings for the person we are helping, and elsewhere Kant goes to great lengths to stress that moral worth is garnered precisely when feelings like love do not serve as an incentive to action.

Paul Guyer attempts to solve this puzzle by arguing that Kant's aim in this part of the *Metaphysics of Morals* is to offer an entirely empirical account of the etiology of moral action. Guyer interprets Kant as

claiming that love (as sympathetic feeling) is a precondition for being obligated to help others because such feelings are the "final impulses" prompting us to fulfill our duties to help others (2010, 151). In other words, sympathetic feelings are necessary to move us to perform beneficent actions.[14] An obvious concern about this interpretation is that, like the motivational account, it appears at odds with Kant's claims about impurity and autonomy. Guyer avoids this worry because, on his view, feelings that play a causal role in the performance of moral actions are not to be thought of as *causing* the noumenal determination of the will but rather as the *effects* of that determination. They are not a safeguard in case the representation of duty fails to motivate us; rather, they are "the means *through* which the general representation of duty naturally and ordinarily works to move us to beneficent actions" (Guyer 2010, 147). On this interpretation, agents make the choice to obey the law (regarding beneficence) at the noumenal level, and sympathetic feelings are merely the phenomenal result of this choice. Thus, feelings are necessary in the sense that, without them, the noumenal determination of the will could not be manifested at the phenomenal level. This is apparently because of the empirical fact that human beings cannot be moved to fulfill duties of beneficence without sympathetic feelings.

There are three distinct grounds for concern about Guyer's interpretation. The first is that there is little motivation for the empirical claim that we cannot be moved to help others from mere recognition of an obligation and a desire to act in accordance with our obligations. We do not need to feel displeasure when we see others suffering in order to be motivated to help them. Suppose one of your co-workers has earned a coveted promotion by lying and cheating. If you see this co-worker unable to start his car as you are leaving work late one night, it is unlikely that his suffering will cause you any displeasure. Yet you can still be moved to help him strictly because you recognize an obligation. Your decision to fulfill your obligation to help need not (and probably will not) manifest itself in the form of sympathetic feelings.

Not only is there little reason to accept the empirical claim that we cannot be moved to fulfill our duties to help others without experiencing sympathetic feelings, but this claim also conflicts with some of Kant's examples in the *Groundwork* such as the cold philanthropist in whom all feelings of sympathy have been extinguished due to grief and depression (G 4:398). Despite his lack of feeling, this individual is still moved to help others solely from respect for the moral law. Guyer acknowledges the tension between this example and his account of sympathy. He suggests that the cold philanthropist is not to be seen as an example of the way a person might actually be motivated; rather, he is simply an instructive thought-experiment that is meant to illustrate dutiful action. While

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this is a possible way of understanding the example, doing so requires a complicated story about actual agents under similar circumstances. On Guyer's account, an agent who has grown unsympathetic due to grief or depression can still be moved to help by duty at the noumenal level, but this will always manifest itself by his regaining sympathetic feelings as the final impulse to action at the phenomenal level. Kant's view appears more plausible and is certainly less convoluted if we take the *Groundwork* example at face value.

A second problem with Guyer's account is that it is in tension with Kant's discussion of love in section XII. Kant claims that, when we succeed in helping others, we eventually come to love the person we have helped:

> So the saying "you ought to *love* your neighbor as yourself" does not mean that you ought immediately (first) to love him and (afterwards) by means of this love do good to him. It means, rather, *do good* to your fellow human beings, and your beneficence will produce love of them in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general). (MS 6:402)

Here Kant is indicating that feelings of love toward a particular person are a *consequence* of dutiful beneficence toward that person. This is hard to reconcile with the claim that one must already feel love for a person to dutifully help that person.

Guyer does not attempt to resolve this tension. Instead, he suggests that we set aside Kant's discussion in the Introduction and turn to the discussion of sympathy as the third duty of love in sections 34 and 35. Guyer interprets Kant's claim that sympathetic feelings are "impulses that nature has implanted in us to do what the representation of duty alone might not accomplish" (MS 6:457) as suggesting that these feelings are "the proximate causes of beneficent actions, and thus are the penultimate stage in the phenomenal etiology of (these) particular moral actions" (Guyer 2010, 147). As mentioned above, Guyer believes that sympathetic feelings are not the cause of one's choosing to fulfill her duty of beneficence but rather the means *through* which this noumenal commitment to duty is manifested in action at the phenomenal level. This leads to a third problem with Guyer's account. If sympathetic feelings are the phenomenal effect of our noumenal commitment to duty, why do we have a duty to cultivate these feelings? It is clear that virtually all human beings have the bare capacity to feel sympathy. It would appear then that an agent who is much less sympathetic than most (while still having the minimal capacity for sympathy) but high in the other moral endowments (moral feeling, conscience, self-respect) will always be capable of being moved to help those in need because she will necessarily

come to feel sympathy as a result of the noumenal determination of her will. But if this is true, there is no reason for this agent to cultivate her sympathy—her time would be better spent continuing to cultivate her moral feeling, conscience, and self-respect.

In light of these concerns about Guyer's account, the puzzle about how the capacity to feel love can be a precondition to moral obligation remains. I believe the patient-centered account of the Kantian value of sympathy generates a solution to this puzzle. We begin with the fact that it is part of human nature to need emotional support from time to time. Because we need emotional support from others (this is one of the ways in which we make ourselves an end for others), we recognize an obligation to provide emotional support (because others' ends become our ends through universal law). But it would not be possible to provide the emotional support needed in the absence of sympathetic feelings. We cannot be obligated to do things of which we are incapable. Thus, the capacity to feel sympathy is a necessary precondition for being under the obligation to provide emotional support for others, which is one of the most important duties of beneficence. The reason we have a duty to cultivate our sympathetic feelings is that the more often we experience them, the more frequently we will be able to successfully promote the happiness of others.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that traditional accounts of the Kantian value of sympathy are not entirely compelling. I have suggested an alternative account according to which the duty to cultivate and use sympathetic feelings is grounded in the fact that one of the most fundamental human needs is the need for emotional support in times of trouble. Three advantages of the patient-centered account have been outlined. The account (1) avoids tension with Kant's views on autonomy and impurity, (2) explains why sympathy is valuable even for agents who are otherwise fully virtuous, and (3) generates a solution to an interpretive puzzle concerning the "moral endowments."

If our contingently given animal nature were such that our happiness never depended on receiving sympathy from others, it is doubtful that there would be a duty to cultivate and use our sympathetic feelings. Indeed, there might be other finite rational beings out there who can achieve all their moral aims without the employment of feelings. But, although the objective practical law applies to all rational beings as such, an agent's specific moral obligations are determined in part by the circumstances she finds herself in. The condition we find ourselves in is one in which those around us are constituted such that they are vulner-

able to emotional and psychological distress (in addition to physical and material ailments). The most effective way of alleviating the pains that run deepest is to share in them. This is why we have a duty to cultivate our capacity to feel genuine sympathy along with the resolve to utilize it when necessary.[15]

University of Washington, St. Louis

Keywords: Kant, sympathy, feelings, duty, autonomy

NOTES

1. I use the following abbreviations for Kant's works: MS = *The Metaphysics of Morals*, KpV = *Critique of Practical Reason*, G = *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Rel = *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, A = *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ED = "The End of All Things," and Obs = "Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime."

2. The two views I have described are not mutually exclusive. One might hold that the Kantian value of sympathy is motivational *and* epistemic.

3. Arguments in support of the motivational account can be found in Jensen 1989, Allison 1990, Sherman 1990, Papish 2007, and De Lourdes Bourges 2012.

4. I am not suggesting that a successful account of the Kantian value of sympathy must fully agree with natural consciousness. The suggestion is rather that, other things being equal, an account that brings Kant's ethics closer to common moral judgment is to be preferred over one that does not. And we must keep in mind that, in addition to being unable to explain why a virtuous agent would need sympathy, the motivational account is also threatened by Baron's worries about autonomy and purity of will.

5. For extended treatment of perfect and imperfect duties and their relation to virtue, see Banham 2003, chap. 7.

6. See also Allison 1996, 121–23.

7. The epistemic account is also advanced in Herman 1985, Denis 2000, Baxley 2010, and Fahmy 2009. Fahmy also suggests a reading according to which there is a duty to *express* one's sympathetic feelings, which implies that the value of these feelings transcends whatever epistemic role they play. Though I have reservations about Fahmy's claims about the epistemic value of sympathy (for reasons I shall offer presently), many of her other suggestions are plausible and instructive. I incorporate and expound upon some of them in section 4 below.

8. A similar example is offered in Fahmy 2009, 41.

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9. Cf. ibid.

10. For extended treatment of the difference between the general duty of beneficence and duties of love and sympathy as outlined in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, see Fahmy 2010.

11. Though Kant adds to this that feelings such as sympathy cannot *produce* moral maxims, this is not in tension with my proposed reading of the Kantian value of sympathy. Though one of the advantages of the patient-centered account is its ability to explain why even a fully virtuous agent would need sympathy, the view does not imply that sympathy is a genuinely moral motive. The suggestion is merely that we have a duty to cultivate and utilize sympathetic feelings because our fellow human beings often need to receive sympathy from us. This is consistent with denying that action from the motive of sympathy ever has proper moral worth (though conscientious cultivation of these feelings presumably does).

12. This thought underlies the objection that Kantian ethics is "alienating" and inimical to genuine friendship. For influential formulations of this objection, see Stocker 1976 and Annas 1984. Although much progress has been made in responding to this line of objection, the upshot of many discussions of this issue is that Kant's ethics allows that actions done from sympathy as primary motive with duty regulating can be *just as good* as actions done from duty as primary motive. I believe the patient-centered account enables us to take the further step of explaining why it is *preferable* for agents to sometimes act from feelings as *primary* motive. Being disposed to act from feelings on occasion is vital because this allows us to meet the needs of our fellow human beings. Further, the patient-centered account reveals that it is not just weak-willed individuals who have a duty to cultivate and use sympathy—even the most virtuous of agents have reasons to make themselves such that they are sometimes moved by sympathetic feelings. This constitutes further progress in blunting the force of the alienation worry. Though my proposal will not satisfy those who believe sympathy is valuable for its own sake, in explaining why even fully virtuous agents should be moved by sympathy on some occasions, the patient-centered account shows that Kantian ethics is closer to common moral consciousness than is often claimed.

13. An alternative reading is that we have a duty to use our sympathetic feelings only on the condition that the actions they prompt are morally permissible. This reading is suggested by Guyer 2012, 424–25.

14. For an alternative proposal, see Geiger 2011. Geiger suggests that feelings of love for others are necessary for perceiving their happiness as placing moral demands on us.

15. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2012 meeting of the North American Kant Society Pacific Study Group and the 2012 Rocky Mountain Ethics Congress. I thank audiences at those events for helpful feedback. I also thank Andrews Reath, Geraldine Ng, Mavis Biss, and two anonymous reviewers for useful suggestions. I am especially grateful to Nich Baima, Jeff Dauer, and Anne Margaret Baxley for many helpful and instructive conversations about these issues.

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