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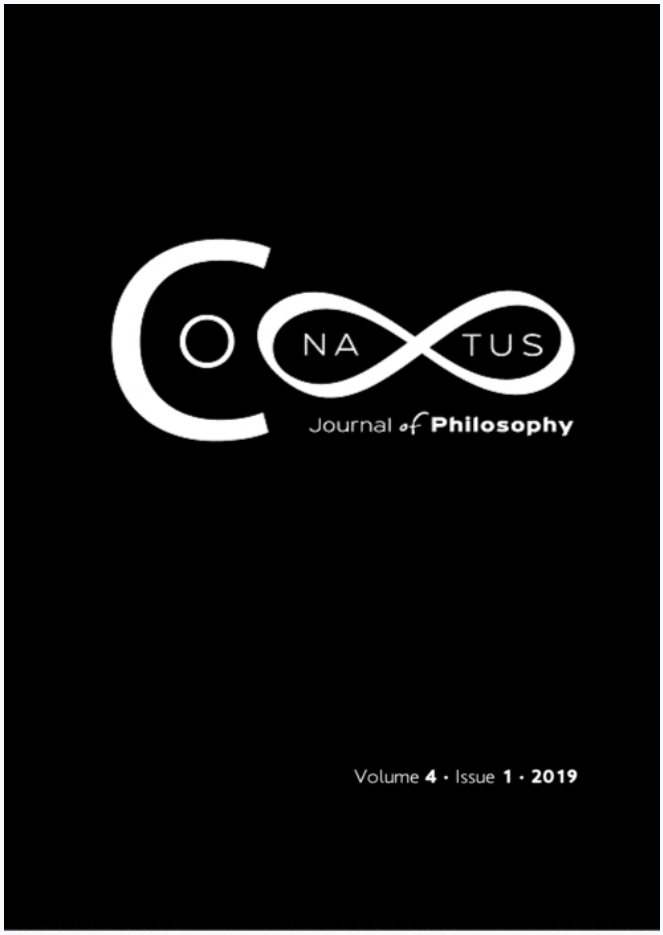


# Animating Sympathetic Feelings. An Analysis of the Nature of Sympathy in the Accounts of David Hume's Treatise

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# Animating Sympathetic Feelings. An Analysis of the Nature of Sympathy in the Accounts of David Hume's Treatise

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**Abstract**

*Sympathy is a powerful principle in human nature, which can change our passions, sentiments and ways of thinking. For the 18th-century Scottish philosopher David Hume, sympathy is a working mechanism accountable for a wide range of communication: the ways of interacting with the others' affections, emotions, sentiments, inclinations, ways of thinking and even opinions. The present paper intends to find a systematic reading of Hume's Treatise of Human Nature (1739) from the point of view of what the mechanism of sympathetic communication implies in terms of strengthening our action of understanding, of being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of others. Hume's description of the sympathetic mechanism appears to suggest that sympathetic passions come upon us purely by natural means in a passive manner, without the active use of any of our faculties. Consequently, scholarly attention is drawn to the mechanistic character of the sympathetic process; its automatic nature is emphasized to such an extent that some experts even find it to be completely void of any reflective process. The current study investigates to what extent the sympathetic process can actively be modified and in what manner sympathetic feelings can be generated as described in Hume's system of emotions. The paper identifies at which points the otherwise mechanically and passively operating process of sympathetic feelings is open to be modified by actively altering or strengthening certain skeletal points of the mechanism. I argue that the alterations can be initiated by the person who receives the sympathetic feelings and also by the person whose passions are transmitted, moreover even by a third party. In a seemingly mechanic model, there is room for altering or at least amplifying one's sympathetic feelings.*

**Key-words**: *sympathy; David Hume; imagination; mechanic; philosophy of mind; relation of impressions and ideas*

## I. Introduction

Sympathy is the common feeling of understanding others' suffering, of caring about others' trouble and grief, and of supporting others in the form of shared feelings. The origin of the word *sympathy*, however, is not comprised to the compassionate perception of the calamities of others.

It used to convey a broader concept than the feeling of pity and sorrow for someone else's misfortune. The Greek word *sympatheia* (συμπάθεια) covers the general meaning of fellow-feelings, where *pathos* (πάθος) refers to any kind of emotion or passion, including pleasure and pain.[1] In harmony with the etymological origins of the word, the 18th-century Scottish philosopher, David Hume (1711 – 1776), applied the technical term 'sympathy' in a more extended meaning than today's common usage of the word. Hume discusses sympathy in detail in his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739),[2] where he explicates that sympathy is a complex mechanism not to be confused with the feeling of compassion. In the *Treatise*, Hume bases his philosophy on the observation of facts about human nature; thus Hume's treatment of the sympathetic mechanism is fundamentally descriptive.[3] The observation-based, descriptive *Treatise* does not provide us with straightforwardly worded advice on how to use the sympathetic principle in a conscious manner if it is possible at all. The present paper intends to find a systematic reading of Hume's *Treatise* from the point of view of what the accounts of the mechanism of sympathetic communication implies in terms of strengthening our action of understanding, of being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of others. Accordingly, the current study investigates to what extent the sympathetic process can actively be affected on and in what manner sympathetic feelings can be generated as described in Hume's system of emotions. In order to apprehend the way sympathy is treated by Hume, the nature of the *Treatise* is discussed first. It is followed by the explication why sympathy plays a crucial role in Hume's description of human nature. Then

[1] Henry George Liddell, and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon with a Revised Supplement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1285 (entry: πάθος).

[2] References are to the 2007 edition David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton, and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), henceforth cited by book, part, section, and paragraph number; Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), and *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) will by cited by section, paragraph, and page number accordingly. It is only in the *Treatise* where Hume gives a comprehensive analysis of the working mechanism of sympathy. In the *Dissertation on the Passions* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principle of Morals* Hume remains reticent about the way we sympathize with others. Vitz collects several possible explanations why the explication of the mechanism of sympathy could have been dropped in the *Enquiry*. See Rico Vitz, "Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 42, no. 3 (2004): 262.

[3] Some scholars interpret the descriptive tendency of Hume's works to be a sign of the author avoiding the transgression of the is-ought gap [see Daniel J. Singer, "Mind the Is-Ought Gap," *The Journal of Philosophy* 112, no. 4 (2015): 193-210], which is a customary interpretation of Hume's famous warning against the dangers of failing to consider the is-ought distinction in moral philosophy (see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.1.1.27); while others suggest that there is still some normativity in the Humean accounts of human nature [see, for example, Tito Magri, "Natural Obligation and Normative Motivation in Hume's Treatise," *Hume Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 231-254].

the working mechanism of sympathy is clarified in the Humean framework, the points in each step are highlighted where the mechanism is less than completely automated. Finally, the view claiming that the sympathetic process is entirely automatic is rebutted by revealing the non-mechanic elements in several Humean examples accounting for the process.

## II. The nature of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*

As the subtitle of the *Treatise,* Hume's earliest philosophical work, clarifies, Hume ventures to "explain the principles of human nature"[4] by introducing the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects. Moral philosophy for Hume does not primarily mean the deliberation about what is right and wrong in our conduct, consequently it is only about a third of the *Treatise* which deals with morals in its narrower sense. However, Hume applies moral philosophy as a general term for the science of man. In the *Advertisement* of the *Treatise*, Hume uncovers his plan to complete his work about human nature with the examination of "morals, politics, and criticism."[5] The approach to treat moral philosophy as a science which includes, in modern terms, psychology, anthropology, political science and even political economy was typical in the mid-18th century.[6] In such a framework, moral philosophy for Hume is the study of moral beings in general, it is not particularly restricted to morality. Discovering the principles of human nature is essential for Hume since he treats human science as the hub of all other sciences by declaring it to be the "only solid foundation for the other sciences,"[7] of which human nature is "the capital or centre."[8] No science, including mathematics, natural philosophy and natural religion, is unconnected to human nature, argues Hume, since they all "lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties."[9] Both in human and in natural sciences, the experimental method denotes the use of experience and cautious observations in "different circumstances and situations,"[10] the application of "careful and exact" experiments in the "endeavour to render all our principles as univer-

[4] Hume, *Treatise*, Intro, 6.

[5] See the advertisment that preceeds the Introduction.

[6] James A. Harris, *Hume. An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

[7] Hume, *Treatise*, Intro. 7.

[8] Ibid., 6.

[9] Ibid., 4.

[10] Ibid., 8.

sal as possible."[11] Hume undertakes to find universal explanatory principles; however, avoids going beyond experience by pursuing demonstrative, a priori reasoning in his venture. Rather than relying on abstract deductive reasoning, Hume intends to discover human nature through collecting experience and conducting experiments in the form of attentive observations and reflections on them.[12] Hume's non-teleological study of human nature expressly rejects uncovering final causes or the end of man through the application of metaphysical reasoning since they cannot be clearly investigated and supported by the experimental approach;[13] Hume also asserts that the natural principles of human life are not to be observed in man in isolation but moral experiments need the reflective observation of "men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures."[14] Since Hume reveals the principles of human nature as witnessed in society, his descriptive system of emotions does not depict the abstract idea of individuals or of abstract subjects in their singularity either. The *Treatise* sheds light on the principles of the interaction of the affects among people in a social context.

## III. The indispensable importance of sympathy in the Humean moral framework

Using the experimental method, the three books of the *Treatise* discuss the following three wide-ranging topics: human understanding, the passions, and morals. The notion of sympathy has a pivotal role in the last two books, where Book II covers matters that nowadays would be termed as the philosophy of psychology.[15] Hume describes sympathy as a "very powerful principle in human nature,"[16] which can change our sentiments and ways of thinking, or at least "disturb the easy course"[17] of our thought. His treatment of sympathy as the most remarkable quality in human nature expresses admiration of our propensity to "receive by communication their [the others'] inclinations and sentiments."[18] In the Humean account of human nature, sympathy is the mechanism through which we have the ability to "enter so deep into the opin-

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 3.

[14] Ibid., 41.

[15] H. O. Mounce, *Hume's Naturalism* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[16] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.0.

[17] Ibid., 3.3.2.2.

[18] Ibid., 2.1.11.2.

ions and affections of others."[19] Sympathy is clearly not a feeling of sorrow; moreover, it is not even a simple fellow-feeling in the Humean framework. Pitson defines the term as a mechanism by which "mental states are communicated from one person to another."[20] Sympathy is a working mechanism, a technical term for the way of communicating with the others' affections, emotions, sentiments, inclinations, ways of thinking, and even opinions.

Hume recognizes the significance of our ability of transmitting affections by underlining that "the force of sympathy must necessarily be acknowledged."[21] The mechanism of sympathy as a means of communicating one's sentiments is fundamental in the Humean philosophy for several reasons. Considering its scope, sympathy is of paramount importance since it works as a universal principle affecting all human beings irrespective of age and education. Not only children "embrace every opinion proposed to them,"[22] and feel the passions which arise in their fellows through sympathy, but "men of the greatest judgement and understanding"[23] are also under the effect of sympathizing with others' inclinations and sentiments. Observing man in society, Hume finds that no one is immune to the passions which arise in others; feelings have a tendency to spread among members of a group through sympathy. Using the medical adjective 'contagious,' Hume describes the passions as easily transmissible, similar to infections, which "pass with the greatest facility from one person to another, and produce correspondent movements in all human breasts."[24] The metaphor of contagiousness depicts how powerful the communication of the passions is: the passing of emotions happens instantaneously and involuntarily, it does not seem to be possible for anyone to stay unaffected by sympathetic feelings. In revealing the principles of human nature, Hume finds that indifference cannot be attached to the mechanism of the communication of the passions. It is no less than our happiness for which sympathetic feelings are crucial. Hume observes that no true contentment is conceivable without them. The explanation for this observation relies on the social nature of man: Hume stresses how fervently human beings wish

[19] Ibid., 2.1.11.7.

[20] Tony Pitson, "Sympathy and Other Selves," *Hume Studies* 22, no. 2 (1996): 255.

[21] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.6.2.

[22] Ibid., 2.1.11.2.

[23] Ibid., 2.1.11.2.

[24] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.3.5; Waldow distinguishes two forms of sympathy in Hume's works: 1) Sympathy which proceeds by pre-sensation impressions, the pure contagion cases; 2) Sympathy which first forms ideas, then converts them into impressions [see Anik Waldow, "Mirroring Minds: Hume on Sympathy," *The European Legacy* 18, no. 5 (2013): 72]. Vitz on the other hand categorizes Humean sympathy along three aspects: 1) a cognitive mechanism; 2) the sympathetic sentiment; 3) the sympathetic conversion of an idea into an impression (see Vitz, 263).

to be in society and avoid complete isolation. Our inclination for aspiring to social partaking makes perfect solitude "the greatest punishment we can suffer."[25] One would feel deeply despondent without the chance to share the passions, thus Hume describes even happiness as a miserable state when there is no company to share it with. With a paradoxically powerful image, Harris assesses Hume's description of human nature as intensely social and in passionate need of the society of others as an account which is "almost claustrophobically social."[26] Besides its animating nature and all-embracing power, the mechanism of sympathy is essential in the Humean explanatory schema in the process of approbation, too. In his moral experiments, Hume discovers that one would not approve of the character of the other if it was not for sympathetic feelings. The mechanism of sympathy, the "intercourse of sentiments [...] in society and conversation,"[27] makes us capable of forming the foundation on which we base our approval and disapproval of characters and manners. Thus, the sentiment of moral approbation rests on the communication of emotions. Hume notes that even if "self-interest is the original motive to the establishment of justice, but a sympathy with public interest is the source of moral approbation."[28] In this sense, the mechanism of sympathy, which acts as the basis of our moral approbation, is indispensable in the Humean moral framework. Without sympathy one is indifferent to the public good on which justice rests. Thus, sympathy is the "chief source of moral distinction,"[29] and one would become a "monster" without its active use.[30] Additionally, Hume attributes an even wider range of applicability to the importance of the process of forming sympathetic feelings by maintaining that it is "the source of the esteem, which we pay to all the artificial virtues."[31] Besides sympathy producing our sentiment of morals in all artificial virtues, it "also gives rise to many of the other virtues."[32] In consequence, sympathy is utterly influential in the judging of morals. In general terms, sympathy is the basis of sociability, as Hume argues: we have "extensive concern for society from sympathy."[33]

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[25] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.2.5.15.

[26] Harris, 115.

[27] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.3.2.

[28] Ibid., 3.2.2.24.

[29] Ibid., 3.3.6.1.

[30] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 6.1.

[31] *Artificial virtues* denote human qualities which serve the interest of society and are beneficial for the good of mankind; they include virtues such as justice, allegiance, modesty, good-manners; see Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.9.

[32] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.1.10.

[33] Ibid., 3.3.1.11.

## IV. The mechanism of sympathy

In order to comprehend Hume's specific conception of the mechanism of sympathy, the nature of passions and that of ideas need to be clarified. The very first sentence of the *Treatise* elucidates that "all the perceptions of the human mind"[34] separate into two distinct types: impressions and ideas. Hume observes that everyone can distinguish the two without hesitation and "readily perceive the difference betwixt *feeling* and *thinking*."[35] Although Hume refers to feeling and thinking when explaining how laypeople differentiate between impressions and ideas, his own science of mind does not separate the two on an emotional vs. mental basis. The distinguishing feature in the Humean system between impressions and ideas does not even lie in their disparate nature, but in their different "degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness."[36] By maintaining "force and violence"[37] to be the most prominent differentiating characteristics between impressions and ideas, Hume brings thinking and reasoning to passions and emotions as close as possible, leaving no room for a clear-cut functional, ontological or epistemological separation between our cognitive and emotional perceptions in the consciousness. Thus, regardless of the difference in their intensity, all sensations, affections, passions, external and internal impressions "are originally on the same footing."[38] Concerning force, impressions are substantially more violent than ideas. Hume points out that "we cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pine-apple, without having actually tasted it,"[39] and thus he emphasises that "our impressions are the causes of our ideas, not our ideas of our impressions."[40] The principle of the priority of impressions to ideas, or more precisely the fact that simple[41] impressions are the causes of simple ideas, entails a copy

[34] Ibid., 1.1.1.1.

[35] Ibid., italics added by the author.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.,1.4.2.7; some scholars draw attention to the presence of a *qualitative* difference between ideas and impressions by arguing that their quantitative difference is a mere first approximation. For further details see John P. Wright, *Hume's Treatise 'A Treatise of Human Nature.' An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), and Tamás Demeter, *David Hume and the Culture of Scottish Newtonianism. Methodology and Ideology in Enlightenment Inquiry* (Boston: Brill, 2016).

[39] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.1.9.

[40] Ibid., 1.1.1.8.

[41] For Hume, simple perception, as the opposite of complex perception, denotes the notion

principle: our ideas are copied images or representations of our impressions.[42] That is, ideas are merely faint images or reflections of our feelings derived from sensations. In Hume's theory of passions, impressions are categorized as either of sensation or of reflection. The first type, impressions of sensations, the feelings we get from the five senses, such as the perception of pleasure or pain, is of no real interest to Hume, as they "arise in the soul originally and from unknown causes"[43] and "their ultimate cause is perfectly inexplicable by human reason."[44] Since determining their ultimate cause is impossible by the use of the experimental method, Hume claims the discussion of the impressions of sensations to belong to the topics of anatomists rather than to those of moral philosophers. Based on Hume's observations, an original impression of sensation is copied by the mind and becomes a less vivid perception, an idea, which does not cease when the sensation itself terminates. The copy principle applies further on and the idea of pleasure or pain and produces a secondary impression, a "new impression of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be call'd impressions of reflection because deriv'd from it."[45] What ordinary language calls passions, desires and emotions are these secondary impressions, which "arise mostly from ideas" in a reflective manner.[46] In Hume's system of the passions, secondary impressions are further copied to become ideas by two faculties of the mind: the memory and the imagination. These ideas then can give rise to other impressions (as long as they become forceful enough) or to other ideas. Collier warns that the distinction between ideas and impressions completely collapses once ideas are sufficiently enlivened to become impressions.[47]

The Humean principle of sympathy, which converts an individual emotion into a social feeling, involves the interplay of violent passions and less vivid ideas. The first step in the mechanism is when we perceive others' affections through the effects of their passions, e.g. in their voice and gestures.[48] Then, these external signs "convey an idea"[49] to us, that is, our "mind immediately

that these impressions and ideas "admit of no distinction nor separation" (see Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.1.2).

[42] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.1.11-12.

[43] Ibid., 1.1.2.1.

[44] Ibid., 1.3.5.2.

[45] Ibid., 1.1.2.1.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Mark Collier, "Hume's Theory of Moral Imagination," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2010): 255-273.

[48] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11; 3.3.1.7.

[49] Ibid., 2.1.11.3.

passes from these effects to their causes."[50] The passions of others appear in our mind as ideas, which we first conceive to belong to another person. In a short time, however, these ideas appear as if they were completely ours, as if they originally sprung in our mind. Finally, the idea of the passion gets enlivened and reaches such a degree of vivacity that it is transformed into an impression, or in other words, it is "presently converted into the passion itself."[51] The ideas are converted into the very impressions they represent and "produce an equal emotion as any original affection" in us.[52]

In the Humean account one cannot directly and instantaneously feel the passions of other people. After recognizing the external signs of the other person's sentiments, the first move in Hume's description of the process of forming sympathetic feelings is the passing from these effects to their causes. According to Hume's definition, a cause and effect relation relies on experience, which "informs us that such particular objects in all past instances have been constantly conjoined with each other"[53] and "found inseparable."[54] Based on his observations, Hume stresses that "from the constant conjunction the objects acquire a union in the imagination."[55] In the account of the sympathetic process, Hume clarifies that "no passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind. We are only sensible of its cause and effects. From *these* we infer the passion."[56] That is, sympathy is grounded in inference rather than in mechanic mirroring. In more general terms, the Humean conception of sympathy is primarily a mental, not an emotional principle. Waldow also stresses that the Humean sympathetic process starts by forming an idea of the other person's mental state and not by spontaneously sharing emotions.[57] The importance of the precedence of ideas to emotions in the formation of sympathetic feelings is the entailment that feeling others' emotions requires our ability to conceive an idea of the passion which is sympathetically transmitted. Since passions are causes of behavioural expressions in the Humean sense in so far as they are perceived in constant conjunction with the behavioural effects, one also needs to possess the ability to link the two spheres of emotions (cause) and actions (effect). Furthermore, since others' emotions are imperceptible, the ability of self-observation is also necessary

[50] Ibid., 3.3.1.7.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 2.1.11.

[53] Ibid., 1.3.6.7.

[54] Ibid., 1.3.6.15.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 3.3.1.7.

[57] Waldow, 542; Baier and Waldow, 62.

for the sympathetic process to commence; without proprioperception, one would not be able to infer causal relations between passions and their behavioural expressions. The process of transmitting sympathetic feelings presupposes the activity of self-observation with respect to reflecting on one's own emotions, whose range and degree is definitely not mechanic. To initiate the possibility of passing from the behavioural effects to their emotional causes, these mental abilities are all required for the commencement of the sympathetic process.

The second move in Hume's account, the transfer of the idea of someone else's passion, the interpersonal step in the sympathetic transmission is possible on grounds of the principle of resemblance. The perception of ourselves, which never fails to be with us, is linked with the other person in the smoothest manner through the associative principle of resemblance. Hume notes in general that "nature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures,"[58] which law of human nature holds true in particular cases, thus "we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find a parallel in ourselves."[59] The minds of all human beings are alike with regard to their impressions (or in less technical term, their feelings) and also their operational mechanisms.[60] Due to these similarities, no one can be "actuated by any affection, of which all others are not, in some degree, susceptible."[61] It is worth noting that Hume's principal aim with his endeavour in the *Treatise* is to introduce the experimental method into the scientific discovery of human nature, thus he does not embark on emphasizing the infinite range of differences in our experiences, which could potentially explicate the varying degrees with which we are able to sympathize with the diversity of others' sentiments. Instead, what Hume finds essential is to establish the general laws of human nature. This is why the Humean claim, which would be a radical overstatement in a different context, can assuredly be stated: "*all* the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movement in every human creature."[62] Besides the common resemblance of all human beings, Hume also points out that the resemblance in character, the similarity of tempers and dispositions additionally facilitate the transition of sentiments.[63] The principle of universal resemblance among human beings creates such a strong association that nothing can have a

[58] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.5.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid., 3.3.1.7.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid. (italics added by the author).

[63] Ibid., 2.2.4.6.

greater effect on our mind than the sentiments of others.[64] Hume contrasts it with objects or riches such as wine, music or gardens, which cannot excite ideas in our minds at the same level of vivacity. The resemblance between the other person and ourselves creates a strong tie of association, which interpersonally transmits the vivacity of the conception initially attributed to the other person.[65] Hume explains this principle of human nature by a simile taken from natural sciences showing the mechanic laws of hydraulics. The vivacity of a sympathetic idea is the same as that of the original idea just as the level of water in a pipe cannot exceed the volume of water produced at the waterhead: "If I diminish the vivacity of the first conception, I diminish that of the related ideas; as pipes can convey no more water than what arises at the fountain."[66] The simile depicts the transfer of sentiments among people as if the force of the related ideas could flow interpersonally without any obstacles preventing its movement. The simile of the water pipe also reveals that the Humean account of the communication of sentiments requires no specific channel through which the vivacity of the conception could travel; passions simply flood and permeate the perception of human beings. The relation of the sheer resemblance of the two individuals renders the association of ideas, thus their transfer, possible. The greater resemblance we have with the person affected by the original sentiment, the greater vivacity is transmitted to us, consequently the more likely it is for our ideas to be enlivened into passions. As resemblance moves on a scale, rather than being present or absent in a polar manner, the strength of the association depends on the level of similarity, which, however, is not automatically given outside in the world but it is identified by the individual mind. Through the activity of reflecting on the similarities between the person affected by a passion and myself, the strength of the associations can be increased thus the transmitted impression becomes more enlivened.

Besides transferring the recognised degree of vivacity, sympathy also conveys the quality of the affection: the same sensation arises in us as in the person with whom we sympathize.[67] Hume does not explain or justify the reason why the same sympathetic feeling arises in us when we perceive others' affections. However, on this reading, the first step in the Humean account of the transmission of emotions, when our mind passes from the external signs of others' passions to their causes, presupposes that the observable effects of a passion stem from one single cause. This is to say, a specific gesture or

[64] Ibid., 2.2.5.4.

[65] Ibid., 2.1.11.

[66] Ibid., 2.2.9.14.

[67] Ibid., 2.2.9.9.

the change of the tone of one's voice indubitably indicates the emotional cause that triggered it. When stating that the same quality of affection arises in the observer as in the person observed, Hume fails to question whether the same gesture might have originated from various different emotional states. Thus Hume rules out the possibility that one can explain others' observed behaviour with diverse emotional triggers. Such a simplified position on the constant conjunction of cause and effect is rather surprising in view of Hume's careful general observation of the fact that a "necessary connection depends on the inference, instead of the inference's depending on the necessary connection."[68]

The source of the last step in the sympathetic mechanism, the turning of an idea into an impression, rests on the notion that the idea and impression of ourselves are in close intimacy with us at all times, which is an undeniable fact for Hume.[69] We have an ever-present perception of ourselves: the idea of ourselves derives from the consciousness with such a great vivacity that we cannot help believing the existence of our own selves.[70] The impression of the intimate omnipresence of ourselves is crucial in the communication of sentiments as the great strength of this persistent impression provides the basis of sympathetically feeling the actual passion rather than merely possessing a faint idea of it. Mounce pinpoints the fact that, similarly to sympathetic feelings, indirect emotions[71] in Hume's system require a level of thought, which involves "the concepts of a language," since one needs to possess not only the impression of oneself, but should be able to focus on the differences between himself and the other selves in thought.[72] Hume seems to remain cryptic in his works about the importance of possessing a language at this phase in the process of the formation of sympathetic feelings. It is certain, however, that Hume treats the vigorous impression of our own selves as the source of infusing the idea of a sentiment with the vivacity needed to convert it into an impression of the passion. Due to the great liveliness and vivacity with which the perception of ourselves is intimately present to us, the idea of someone

[68] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.6.3.

[69] Ibid., 2.1.11.4.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Based on his observations, Hume classifies the passions as *direct* and *indirect* depending on source which raises them. Direct passions arise "immediately from good or evil, from pain or pleasure," while indirect ones involve "other qualities" (see Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.1.4). Hume's examples for the direct passions include desire, aversion, grief, joy, hope, fear, despair and security, while pride, humility, ambition, vanity, love, hatred, envy, pity, malice, generosity are named as indirect ones. Indirect emotions are parallel to sympathetic feelings regarding the fact that both take an object, the self (see Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.2.2), in contrast to impressions of sensation, which are "about nothing" (see Mounce, 63).

[72] Mounce, 64.

else's passion gains additional liveliness and reaches such a high degree of vivacity that it is transformed into an impression. In other words, the vivacity of the impression of ourselves has the power to invigorate an idea and turn it into a passion. In the Humean account of the sympathetic mechanism, the self behaves as an amplifier by enlivening the force of an idea to such an extent that it becomes an impression. It needs to be noted, however, that the self, according to Hume, does not change the quality of the perceptions, whose content remains the same.[73]

The four steps of the formation of sympathetic feelings clearly reveal that in the process of sympathy both passions and ideas operate. Hume emphasises that a "mere idea [...] wou'd never alone be able to affect us,"[74] nor is "one relation sufficient to produce"[75] the transition of sentiments. These are the grounds on which Hume accentuates the intertwined nature of sympathy, and stresses that passions in the mechanism arise from the double relation of impressions and ideas.[76]

For the sympathetic mechanism to work, its object needs to be related to us. In the *Treatise*, Hume observers that our ideas are not "entirely loose and unconnected,"[77] and the apparent connections between them are not by chance; on the contrary, our ideas are related to each other in a systematic manner. The systematicity lies in the "associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another."[78] The facility of transition from one idea to the other makes the association appear to be created without effort. Hume notes that we are hardly aware of the connecting activity of the mind since the mind moves from one impression to a related object with such an ease that it is "scarce sensible of it."[79] Based on his empirical observations, Hume categorizes the relations of ideas along three qualities from which associations arise: resemblance, causation and contiguity. The principles of association between ideas work in the Humean description as original endowments of our human

[73] Adam Smith, Hume's close friend, puts his account of the transmission of sympathetic feelings on a different footing in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). The self in the Smithian system of sympathetic passions is more than a mere amplifier. Smith (see *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1.1.2) argues that with the help of the faculty of the imagination we place ourselves in the other's situation and experience the impressions of our own senses. Smith warns that it is impossible to gain immediate experience of what the others feel as we "can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation."

[74] Hume, *Treatise*, 3.3.2.3.

[75] Ibid., 2.2.9.2.

[76] Ibid., 2.1.5.5.

[77] Ibid., 1.1.4.1.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 1.3.8.2.

nature, and thus Hume treats them as unexplainable natural principles.[80] He does not attempt to give an explanation for the reasons why the association of ideas works the way he describes it since such a trial would go beyond the range of experimental science and consequently it would result in "obscure and uncertain speculations."[81] At the same time, Hume acknowledges that it is difficult to prove that his classification of the principles of association of ideas resulted in a complete and exhaustive list.[82] Nevertheless, his observations lead Hume to conclude that the mechanism of sympathy is one of the "many operations of the human mind [which] depend[s] on the connexion or association of ideas."[83] Namely, the associative principles are responsible for the transmission of particular emotions as "we observe that the affections, excited by one object, pass easily to another object connected with it; but transfuse themselves with difficulty, or not at all, along different objects, which have no manner of connexion together."[84] The first relation in his system, the associative principle of resemblance, allows us to enter smoothly into the feelings of those who share close similarity with us, e.g. the same language, manners, professions etc.[85] The second, the principle of cause and effect, amplifies the emotions of our family and friends livelier than those of strangers[86] as "all the relations of blood depend upon cause and effect."[87] Hume treats the relation of cause and effect to be the most powerful among the three, the one which creates the strongest connection between ideas.[88] Further, it is the only relation which goes "beyond the senses,"[89] "which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses,"[90] and it is the only type of association which connects our present and past experiences, and also our expectations about the future.[91] While the principle of contiguity, that is of neighbouring objects both in space and time, dramatically influences our affective perception of our own property: "The breaking of a mirror gives us more concern when at home, than the burning of a

[80] Ibid., 1.1.4.6.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 3.3.

[83] Ibid., 3.18.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.5.

[86] Ibid., 2.1.11.6.

[87] Ibid., 1.1.4.3.

[88] Ibid.,1.1.4.2.

[89] Ibid., 1.3.2.3.

[90] Ibid., 1.3.6.7.

[91] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 4.1.4.

house, when abroad."[92] Contiguity is responsible for our livelier experiences of sympathy "with our acquaintances, than with strangers, with our countrymen than with foreigners."[93] The three principles of association between ideas strengthen each other, and when all three relations are combined, we conceive others' sentiments in the strongest and most lively manner.[94] The joint presence of the three relations of ideas infuse the others' passions in our souls the most violently and the minds of men become "mirrors to one another"[95] in so far as they reflect each other's emotions.[96]

While the mechanism of sympathy operates as long as the object is related to us, its degree, the strength with which we feel another person's passion, depends on the closeness of "relation of the object to our self."[97] If the first sensation is small in itself, or if it is not closely related to us, it does not have the power to engage our imagination,[98] and the mechanism of sympathy does not operate. In the *Treatise*, Hume attempts to introduce principles in the science of human nature which are similar to the ones in natural sciences. Accordingly, a remote object is observed to induce the sympathetic effect in a proportionally weaker manner than an object which is in our vicinity. This is a principle similar to what we notice in the perception of external bodies, namely, "all objects seem to diminish by their distance."[99] Contrary to this effect, if the relation is strengthened between us and the object, the imagination makes the transition with greater ease and conveys "to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own

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[92] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.7.3.

[93] Ibid., 3.3.1.14.

[94] Ibid., 2.1.11.5-6.

[95] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.2.6.21; relying on the metaphor of the mirror, Pitson argues that the Humean sympathetic model is not a cognitive process (see Pitson, 262).

[96] Rizzolatti et al. found a group of neurons in the brain of primates that "fire when the individual sees someone else perform the same act. Because this newly discovered subset of cells seemed to directly reflect acts performed by another in the observer's brain, we named them *mirror* neurons;" see Giacomo Rizzolatti, Leonardo Fogassi, and Gallese Vittorio, "Mirrors in the Mind," *Scientific American* 295 (2006): 56-61. Similarly, Collier emphasises that social neuroscientists have discovered the existence of affective mirror systems in the brain which fulfil the function of making us capable of feeling the pain of others; see Collier, op. cit.; also Tania Singer, Ben Seymour, John O' Doherty, Holger Kaube, Raymond J. Dolan, and Chris D. Frith, "Empathy for Pain Involves the Affective but Not Sensory Components of Pain," *Science* 303 (2004): 1157-1162. Emotional communication is tapped in the brain not only among loved ones but among strangers as well. These studies support the mirroring associative hypotheses: the same neural circuits fire when we feel pain as when we observe pain in others.

[97] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.8.

[98] Ibid., 2.2.9.

[99] Ibid., 3.3.32.

person."[100] For this reason, the fortune of people who are close to us can never leave us indifferent. Due to the force of sympathy, we enter into their sentiments as if they were originally our own: "we rejoice in their pleasures and grieve for their sorrows."[101] As our sympathetic engagement depends on the proximity in the relation of the object to the self, Waldow raises the problem of being too self-preoccupied.[102] In the case of an overly concerned state with oneself, sympathy is expected to be blocked since the self is unable to connect to the object. Waldow calls attention to another problem stemming from the fact that it is the idea of the self which is related to the object is one's belief about oneself.[103] Hume does not address this issue; however, his account of the nature of the sympathetic process implies the proximity of a related object to oneself also depends on what kind of belief one forms about oneself. My belief who I am influences how far I place an object on the relation continuum. The concept of the self, which is formed by the individual person, affects the degree of liveliness of the idea the self naturally transmits to the object. That is, how much I am engaged sympathetically is affected by the notion how I define myself, which idea is not mechanically produced.

The experimental method allows Hume to describe how the principle of sympathy works in several diverse situations. The main rules and even the explanations of the seeming or real exceptions to these rules all strongly suggest that the sympathetic process operates in a passively mechanical way. In the explication of the mechanism of the double relation of impressions and ideas, Hume considers the interconnectedness of the imagination and the passions, the role of memory, and even the different tempers of people, which all amount to certain universal rules of natural causation.[104] Hume's examples tend to suggest that sympathetic passions come upon us purely by natural means in a passive manner, without the active use of any of our capacities or faculties. Based on these principles, Darwall draws attention to the mechanistic character of the Humean sympathetic process.[105] Along the same lines, Rick emphasizes the automatic, "starkly mechanistic" nature of the Humean description of sympathy, which is evaluated as completely void of any reflective process or imaginative projection.[106] Boros also

[100] Ibid., 2.1.11.5.

[101] Ibid., 2.2.9.20.

[102] Baier and Waldow, 69.

[103] Ibid., 82.

[104] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.6.

[105] Stephen Darwall, "Empathy, Sympathy, Care," *Philosophical Studies* 89, no. 2 (1998): 261-282; Stephen Darwall, "Sympathetic Liberalism: Recent Work on Adam Smith," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 28, no. 2 (1999): 139-164.

[106] Jon Rick, "Hume and Smith's Partial Sympathies and Impartial Stances," *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2007): 135-158, 138.

declares conclusively that Hume's mechanism of sympathy is almost analogous with the working of the necessary laws of nature due to the similarity in their efficiency, which interpretation excludes the possibility of any form of non-mechanic alteration in the mechanism.[107] Within Hume's sympathy-based account of morality, where moral approbation and the esteem we feel for artificial and other virtues is grounded in sympathy, the entirely automatic nature of the formation of sympathetic passions would touch upon the problem of one's responsibility in moral matters in an embarrassing way. This is the reason why Alanen raises serious questions about Hume's mechanistically understood psychology.[108] It is dubious for her whether the human mind (more specifically, reason) in the Humean associationist framework is capable of contributing anything in the formation of judgements or it is a "passive recipient of impressions."[109] In opposition to the standard mechanic interpretation of the Humean sympathetic process, Waldow emphatically clarifies that the sympathetic mechanism does not directly stimulate "unmediated emotions,"[110] and calls attention to Hume's blurring "the line between inference-based and experience-caused interpretations of other minds." Vitz also recognizes that "sympathy is a cognitive mechanism" in the *Treatise*.[111]

Despite the fact that 'the Newton of moral sciences' undeniably arrives at universally working principles, his account of the mechanism of the communication of the passions is far from being completely mechanic.[112] In the following, I will identify at which points the otherwise mechanically and passively operating process of sympathetic feelings is open to be modified in the Humean framework by actively influencing certain skeletal points of the mechanism.

## V. The non-mechanic nature of sympathy

Several examples of the Humean accounts of sympathy show the possibility of the active use of our faculties in the modification of the sympathetic process. The examples through which I will show the non-mechanic traits in the

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[107] Gábor Boros, "On Hume's Theory of Passions," *The History of Philosophy and Social Thought* 57 (2012): 17-30.

[108] Lilli Alanen, "The Powers and Mechanism of the Passions," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 179.

[109] For a broader discussion of responsibility in Hume's moral philosophy see Paul Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment. Hume's Way of Naturalizing Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[110] In Waldow's terminology a mediated emotion is preceded by thoughts while an unmediated emotion spontaneously emerges without the presence of a thought (see Waldow, 541).

[111] Vitz, 263.

[112] William Edward Morris, and Charlotte R. Brown, "David Hume," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2019.

mechanism include the generation of the sympathetic feelings of a) beauty, b) shame, c) anticipated emotions, d) the respect for the rich, and e) the use of eloquence.

*i. The sympathetic feeling of beauty*

The Humean explanation why we sympathetically feel the beauty of the property of another person shows that the principle of sympathy fails to operate completely mechanically, even if it works systematically. According to Hume, we are affected by the beauty of another person's house because we sympathize with the owner, we "enter into his interest by the *force* of imagination, and feel the same satisfaction, that the objects naturally occasion in him."[113] To find an object beautiful, we need to be aware of the fact that it has "a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor,"[114] or that it brings some advantages to its owner. If the principle of sympathy was totally mechanic, the beauty of the appearance of the house on its own could automatically induce sympathetic pleasure. However, the Humean account renders the imagination also essential in raising the sympathetic feeling of beauty, which is not confined to follow one single direction at all. Our imagination is not restricted to turning to the interest of the owner, it might as well take an utterly different path. However, without deliberating the advantages the beautiful house provides for its owner, we are not affected by the beauty of another person's possession. The pure observation of a beautiful object does not spontaneously excite sympathetic emotions; particular thoughts need to be considered in our imagination, which is not completely mechanic even in the Humean framework.

The imagination for Hume is a faculty by which we repeat vivid impressions in our mind and at the same time transform them into less forceful ideas.[115] Hume applies the term imagination in two different senses, which lends it some degree of indistinctness or even ambiguity.[116] In the narrower sense, Hume opposes the faculty of the imagination to that of reasoning, in which case demonstrative and probable reasonings are excluded.[117] Not referring to the faculty of the imagination as a whole, Hume separates a reasoning-based belief formation

[113] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.2.5.16.

[114] Ibid., 3.3.1.8.

[115] Ibid., 1.1.3.1.

[116] Kenneth R. Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume's Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press, 2008).

[117] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.9.19.

and a sphere outside of it.[118] In the broad sense, however, the imagination is described as an extremely agile, magical faculty[119] in the soul capable of collecting any ideas[120] in the blink of an eye irrespective of the topic in question.[121] Hume describes the faculty of the imagination with "a very irregular motion in running along its objects," where the thought "may leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order."[122] Thus, Hume's explanation of the manner how we form ideas that could neither possibly originate from the senses nor from reason resorts to the imagination. Considering the nature of the faculty of the imagination, Hume distinguishes it from the faculty of memory by claiming that the imagination is responsible for the production of non-mnemonic ideas as it has the *liberty* to "transpose and change its ideas."[123] Along with liberty, the ideas of the imagination are "fainter and more obscure"[124] than those of the memory. Although their difference lies in the different degree of vigour, "an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of memory,"[125] as long as custom and habit strengthens it. The imagination is not constrained by the way the actual world operates, and consequently it has the freedom of exploring "the full range of unrealised possibilities."[126] With regard to the focus of the imagination, Hume also emphasizes our freedom by claiming that in the imagination I can "fix my attention on any part of it [the universe] I please."[127] That is, Hume is convinced that we are endowed to choose which ideas to reflect on in the imagination; such a choice is not mechanically determined in his philosophy of mind. Furthermore, since the strength of a passion also depends on the repetition of the idea,[128] the active animation of an idea is possible through thinking often of it, which is not mechanically automated, but depends on the choice of the individual.

Despite its distinguishing feature of liberty, the faculty of the imagination cannot be described as completely capricious. The imagination is not

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[118] Fabian Dorsch, "Hume on the Imagination," in *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Imagination*, ed. Amy Kind (New York: Routledge, 2016), 40-54.

[119] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.7.15.

[120] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 5.2.

[121] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.7.15.

[122] Ibid., 1.3.6.13.

[123] Ibid., 1.1.3.4.

[124] Ibid., 1.3.5.3.

[125] Ibid., 1.3.5.6.

[126] Dorsch, 42.

[127] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.9.4.

[128] Ibid., 2.1.11.7.

absolutely free from rules, it follows certain systematic principles. Hume states that "nothing wou'd be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty, were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places."[129] One of these principles, as Hume describes it in a maritime simile, is the imagination's tendency of not being able to discontinue its line of thinking abruptly: "the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse."[130] Due to this tendency of extended continuation, Biro finds Hume's concept of the imagination excessively automatic.[131] Additionally, Hume also declares that the imagination follows the three associative principles of ideas according to the three species of relation (resemblance, causation and contiguity),[132] which systematic constraint seems to limit the freedom of the faculty of the imagination. Also, from the point of view of its generative power, Merrill assesses the freedom and creative power of the imagination delusive on grounds that it "operates within the narrow limits of the outer and inner senses"[133] and cannot create its own basic building materials, the impressions and ideas. Furthermore, there is regularity in the different levels of strength and vigour with which the imagination enlivens particular ideas. The principles of experience and habit both "operate upon the imagination, make me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages."[134] The different levels of vivacity of ideas leads Hume to differentiate between ideas which are assented to and thus believed, from ideas which are completely fictitious and not believed. When explaining belief itself, Hume finds himself "at a loss for terms,"[135] and stresses that belief "does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive an object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity."[136] From Hume's position that "the belief super-adds nothing to the idea, but changes our manner of conceiving it, and renders it more strong and lively,"[137] one might conclude

[129] Ibid., 1.1.4.1.

[130] Ibid., 1.4.2.2.

[131] John Biro, "Hume's New Science of the Mind," in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, ed. David Fate Norton, and Jacqueline Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 50.

[132] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.6.13; 1.3.9.2.

[133] Merrill, 148.

[134] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.4.7.3.

[135] Ibid., 1.3.7.7.

[136] Ibid., 1.3.7.5.

[137] Ibid., 1.3.8.

that fictitious ideas often repeated in the fancy can become so vivid that their strength makes them indistinguishable from the ideas of the memory; that is, ideas of the fancy will be believed as real rather than fictitious. Hume expresses clear opposition to this assumption by warning that the too lively activity of the imagination generates madness: people who give their assent to vivid ideas of the fancy without the support of experience lack sanity.[138] With regard to force and vivacity, it needs to be remarked that an idea of the imagination that is not believed, one that is not enlivened enough by habit and custom, is most probably not forceful enough to bring the process of sympathy to completion either.[139] Hume's position on the importance of belief in the generation of passions is not the least tentative; he declares that "belief is almost absolutely requisite to the exciting our passions."[140] Pitson also emphasises that "the absence of belief will normally prevent an idea"[141] from being transformed into the impression it represents. The natural force of the belief is what ensures that passing ideas of the fancy to which no assent is given do not raise sympathetic feelings in the sane person.

Although the faculty of the imagination follows systematic regularities which definitely impose certain limitations, it is far from being mechanically constrained. First of all, it needs to be mentioned that one of the three relations, the principle of resemblance, "hardly counts as a mechanic principle."[142] Demeter also considers resemblance to be a non-mechanic relation, one which "implies the active contribution of the mind."[143] In general, he emphasizes how the principles of association are dissimilar from Newtonian gravity as they have no uniform effects on all ideas but depend on the ideas' particular properties, especially on their representational content. To go even further, the imagination enjoys complete freedom in some sense. The vast variety of the modifications in the connections of ideas is unlimited since the imagination can change the position of ideas "as it pleases."[144] Hume explicates how natural it is for the imagination to be unbounded to take any particular path by arguing that "all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and that there are not any two impressions which are perfectly inseparable."[145] It takes little challenge for Hume to explain why there is such a diversity in the

[138] Ibid., 1.3.10.9.

[139] Ibid., 2.3.6.7.

[140] Ibid., 1.3.10.4.

[141] Pitson, 262.

[142] Alanen, 184.

[143] Demeter, 162.

[144] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.3.5.3.

[145] Ibid., 1.1.3.4.

connections of ideas through the activity of the imagination by pointing out that it is natural for this faculty to move ideas apart and exchange them.[146] Once a compound idea is separated, the imagination is free to create new connections among them, "we may mingle, and unite, and separate, and confound and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways,"[147] the imagination "can join, and mix, and vary them [ideas] in all the ways possible."[148] Owing to this capacity of the imagination, we can consider even contrary propositions in matters of fact with equal ease, as "the imagination is free to conceive both sides of the question."[149] To conclude, the imagination has the propensity to enjoy liberty in its creative power, even if there are certain systematic tendencies it typically follows.

With this in mind, let us now return to the emergence of the sympathetic feeling of beauty. Since a particular idea, the one that the object produces pleasure or advantages to its owner, is indispensable in the generation of this sympathetic feeling, its transmission is not the least mechanically carried out. The sympathetic feeling of beauty is excited only if the creative power of the imagination, which is able to form a wide array of possible connections of ideas instead of running on one single, mechanically determined track, connects this very idea with the beautiful object.

Besides applying the power of the imagination, Hume's account of the sympathetic pleasure derived from the beauty of another person's property includes another prerequisite. His argument for the reason why we feel a sympathetic pleasure when seeing someone else's beautiful house asserts that the sense of beauty is intimately connected to utility. The proposition is supported by the example of the image of two hillsides, one of which is covered in beautifully blossoming furze and broom, while the other in vines and olive-trees.[150] To the person who is not familiar with the value of each, both hillsides in bloom might appear equally beautiful. Yet, he who knows the value of wine and that of olive oil cannot feel the mere flowery bushes to be as beautiful as the lavish vines and olive-trees. Accordingly, he cannot admire the owner of a hillside covered in furze and broom as much as the owner of vine and olive-trees. Apparently, the mechanism of sympathy is not automatic at this point: what appears to the senses does not simply initiate the process of sympathizing. One needs to be well-acquainted with the worth and utility

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid., 1.3.7.7.

[149] Ibid., 1.3.7.3.

[150] Ibid., 2.2.5.18.

of the otherwise beautiful object in order to appraise its real value. Without the appropriate knowledge of assessment, the sense of beauty is not excited to its full potential. To generate the sympathetic feeling of beauty, one needs to gain proper knowledge about the object, or ample experience about the object's relevant constant conjunctions. Besides knowledge or familiarity with the object, the assistance of the imagination is also needed at this point in the process of sympathy, since it is the imagination which attaches particular thoughts to the sensually perceived beauties of the object. Hume declares that the foundation of beauty is in the imagination, not in the senses.[151] In case one knew about the practical value and utility of a beautiful object, but failed to connect it with the impression produced by the senses, the feeling of sympathetic pleasure would not be excited with great intensity and the sympathetic process would not unfold. On these grounds, sympathetic feelings of beauty cannot be regarded as completely mechanic either.

*ii. The sympathetic feeling of shame*

The mechanic nature of the process of sympathy is also dubious in the case of those sympathetic emotions which are the transitions of non-existing affections. Hume claims it to be possible that "we blush for the conduct of those, who behave themselves foolishly before us; and that tho' they shew no sense of shame, nor seem in the least conscious of their folly."[152] The example of the sympathetic feeling of shame clearly demonstrates that, contrary to Hume's universal principles drawn on observations,[153] not all sympathetic feelings are the exact copies of an original emotion. Even if the person observed feels no shame, the mechanism of sympathy can excite shame in us, an emotion which has clearly no equivalent in the other person. Due to the activity of the imagination, the process of sympathy can produce a completely different emotion in us. That is, the imagination is more than a mere amplifier for Hume: it is the faculty which makes the generation of the sympathetic feeling possible, which is otherwise not present in the other person. In the case of transmitting originally non-existing feelings, e.g. that of shame, the mechanism of sympathy is not limited to passive automatisms. Similarly, to the pervious example of exciting the sympathetic feeling of beauty, the active use of the imagination plays an important part in the communication of the passions in this example too, which is obviously non-mechanic. Waldow also points out that "Humean sympathy unfolds even in cases where other people

[151] Ibid.

[152] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.2.7.

[153] Ibid., 2.2.9.9.

lack the relevant emotion."[154] It is worth mentioning that not all observers would blush in the same situation as the path along which our imagination runs is not determined mechanically. This is why Demeter emphasizes that sympathy is "active in selecting the relevant ideas"[155] to be transformed into corresponding impressions.

*iii. The sympathetic feeling of anticipated emotions*

The time-extension aspect of the process of sympathy also reveals how far this principle is from being completely automatic. Hume declares that sympathetic feelings can be raised not only in relation to the present, but with regard to the future as well. "It is certain that sympathy is not always limited to the present moment, but that we often feel by communication the pains and pleasure of others, which are not in being, and which we only anticipate by the force of imagination."[156] The use of the imagination forms no obstacle in imbuing our ideas with such a vivacity that they become violent impressions; that is, the mechanism of sympathy runs to its completion even if the affection of the other person is not yet present. The time gap does not alienate us from feeling a sympathetic emotion, "considering the future possible or probable condition of any person, we may enter into it with so vivid a conception as to make it our own concern."[157] Again, the principle of sympathy is effective as long as our imagination deliberates about the possible outcomes of a situation in the other person's life. That is, sympathetic feelings with a future reference cannot be excited without carrying out reflections in the imagination, thus completely mechanic means do not raise them.

*iv. The sympathetic feeling of respect for the rich*

Our sympathetic feeling of respect for the rich arises in a less than spontaneous manner, too. Giving esteem to the rich is not a mechanic infusion of emotions; in order for it to take place we need to turn our attention to certain thoughts, according to Hume. The principle of sympathy communicates the admiration of the rich if "we consider him [the rich] as a person capable of contributing to the happiness or enjoyment of his fellow-creatures, whose sentiments, with regard to him, we naturally embrace."[158] In this case, the

[154] Waldow, 543.

[155] Demeter, 153.

[156] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.2.9.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid., 3.3.5.

communication of the sympathetic passions depends on our imagination. The idea of another's feeling is transformed into the corresponding feeling in us as long as our imagination turns to the capacity of the rich to enhance the pleasures of the people around him. Without this specific thought, the mechanism of sympathy does not work to its fullest capacity. The sheer sight of the wealth of the rich cannot mechanically excite sympathetic feelings in us; our deliberation is indispensable in the process.

All the accounts of the above Humean examples of the generation of sympathetic feelings show that the sympathetic process is not completely mechanic as it greatly depends on the activity of the imagination, on deliberation and on the association of ideas. In favour of a mechanistic reading of Hume's account of the sympathetic process, one might argue that the activity of the mind in connecting ideas works mechanically in the Humean system. To a first approximation, the statement holds true as the association of ideas appears to be mechanic for various reasons. The mechanistic nature of the associative principles might be explained by the fact that the transition of ideas from an impression to a related object seems to proceed without effort,[159] and also because it happens in such a quick manner that the imagination "interposes not a moment's delay."[160] Yet, the association of ideas is not without reflective mental activity. Hume claims it is custom which "renders us, in a great measure insensible" of the fact that "we accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection."[161] In less technical terms, the association of ideas is so much well-practiced that we do not even recognize its working. That is, reflection is not completely excluded from the Humean system of the transmission of the passions: it is merely not emphasized in the explication of the process, but kept in the background since we tend to connect ideas on a customary basis. Additionally, the association of ideas gives the appearance of working mechanically since one can easily read Hume's associative principles as if they were of the same nature as the laws of physics. Indeed, Hume sets out in the *Treatise* to introduce the scientific experimental method into the exploration of human nature. Yet, there is a crucial difference between the nature of his three principles of association of ideas and that of Newton's three laws of motion. For example, the acceleration of a body of a given mass can be precisely predicted if the vector sum of the forces on the body is known by applying Newton's second law. Hume's explanatory principles, however, cannot anticipate the outcome of our associations. It is impossible to foresee which relation of the three will be associated in a given

[159] Ibid., 1.3.8.2.

[160] Ibid., 1.3.6.14.

[161] Hume, *Treatise*, 1.1.7.18; Pitson notices that though custom may operate independently of reflection, "Hume points out that in the case of more unusual associations reflection may assist custom;" see Pitson, 266.

situation, and even the very principles themselves can result in a multitude of different associations of ideas. Hume's associative principles explain the connections of ideas one has already made, but they cannot predict which ideas in the imagination are going to be connected next. The connection of the impressions would be foreseeable if the human mind was operating completely mechanically. However, experience and habit, reflection and deliberation all change the course of the connection of ideas and prevent it from running on a mechanically determined path.

*v. Sympathetic feelings excited by eloquence*

Finally, in the account of the process of communicating sympathetic feelings, Hume argues that the art of verbal representation has the power to modify our sympathetic engagement. Even if the initiation of the mechanism of sympathy can be described as automatic to some extent, in some cases our ideas of other's passions are not violent enough to turn immediately into vivid impression, and thus we are left sympathetically unaffected. However, in such cases the process of sympathy can be brought to a culmination by the persuasive power of words. Hume points out that "nothing is more capable of infusing any passion into the mind, than eloquence, by which objects are represented in their strongest and most lively colours. We may of ourselves acknowledge, that such an object is valuable, and such another is odious; but 'till an orator excites the imagination, and gives *force* to these ideas, they may have but a feeble influence either on the will or the affections."[162] That is, the degree of liveliness of our ideas does not always allow for a spontaneous communication of the passions on its own without the presence of some aid external to the mechanism. If sympathy was a mere passive automatism, the relation of impressions and ideas might fail to take place; however, sympathetic communication can be brought to a completion by an eloquent speaker actively amplifying the vivacity of our ideas. In Hume's account, eloquence is as powerful in animating ideas and creating emotional involvement as close proximity of the object: "Virtue, placed at such a distance [old history], is like a fixed star, which, though to the eye of reason, it may appear as luminous as the sun in his meridian, is so infinitely removed, as to affect the senses, neither with light nor heat. Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connexion with the person, or even by an eloquent recital of the case; our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approbation converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and regard."[163]

[162] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.3.6.7.

[163] Hume, *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 5.43.

The use of eloquence in actively generating sympathetic feelings differs from the previous examples. All the other examples demonstrate that the person whose sympathetic feelings are excited can himself amplify or even generate the sympathetic process through the active use of the faculty of the imagination, through self-observation, deliberation or reflection and through gaining knowledge about the object of sympathy. The account of the importance of the appropriate verbal phrasing in generating sympathetic feelings, however, illustrates that the person observed or a third party can also be responsible for the non-mechanic alteration of the sympathetic process. Thus, the Humean sympathy is an interpersonal mechanism which can be modified by the participants involved and even by an observer narrating the emotional transfer.

## VI. Conclusion

The aim of the present paper, to further our understanding of the operation of the sharing of emotions in human life, was carried out by fathoming Hume's schema of the communication of the passions. In Hume's works, it is the sympathetic mechanism through which we are capable of partaking in the emotional life of others: the principle of sympathy enables us to participate in others' pleasures and pains. The operation of sympathy as a principle of communication among human beings allows us to share ways of thinking and sentiments, and to be directly moved by the passions of others. With regard to the way how emotions are mediated and transformed, Hume's ostensibly mechanic and automatic model of the communication of the passions can definitely be characterized as systematically aiming at universal principles; however, the mechanistic model does not exhaust Hume's account of sympathy. The Humean examples of the process of sharing our feelings show clear signs of the lack of a completely self-regulatory mechanism. The Humean framework allows for a touch of a quality of voluntariness. Summing up the implications of the above Humean examples of transmitting feelings, it is grounded to claim that the communication of the passions through the sympathetic mechanism is capable to be modified. The alterations can be initiated by the person who receives the sympathetic feelings and also by the person whose passions are transmitted, or even by a third party narrating the original affections. In the first case it is the activity of the imagination; one's power of deliberation and reflection; the choice of the focus of one's attention; one's concept about one's self; the range and degree of self-observation; and also one's knowledge, experience and familiarity with the object which can change the formation of sympathetic feelings; while in the second case the sympathetic process is free to be changed by the eloquent use of words. That

is, even in a seemingly mechanic model, there is room for altering or at least amplifying one's sympathetic feelings. When sympathizing with others' affections we are not mere passive recipients, our "passions arise in conformity to the images we *form* of them."[164]

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[164] Hume, *Treatise*, 2.1.11.

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