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Sympathy, Interpersonal Awareness and Acknowledgment

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Abstract
According to a popular thought, sympathy is an epistemic phenomenon: in sympathizing with others we come to be aware of them as fellow sentient beings. This view–which I call the Epistemic View–effectively characterizes sympathy as a form of social cognition. In this paper, I will argue against the Epistemic View. As far as I can see, this view radically misconstrues the way sympathy is *directed at* others. I will at the same time provide some material for, and motivate, an alternative proposal according to which the primary significance of sympathy is practical rather than epistemic. On this account, sympathy is a form of interpersonal acknowledgment rather than interpersonal awareness.

Keywords Sympathy · Social cognition · Interpersonal awareness · Intentionality · Response · Acknowledgment

1 Introduction

Among the interpersonal affects, sympathy has long played a distinguished role in philosophical theorizing. According to a popular thought, sympathy's primary significance is epistemic: in sympathizing with others we come to be aware of them as fellow sentient beings. This view–which I shall term the Epistemic View (or EV for short)–effectively characterizes sympathy as a form of social cognition.

In this paper, I will argue against EV. As far as I can see, this view misconstrues the way sympathy is directed at others. I will at the same time provide some material for, and motivate, an alternative proposal according to which the primary significance of sympathy is practical rather than epistemic. This alternative view stresses sympathy's link to reasons or, as I shall say, its character as a response.[1]

I shall focus on a prominent version of EV which stresses the objective import of the interpersonal awareness sympathy is taken to constitute. This version, which is defended by Max Scheler (2017) and Colin Marshall (2018), conceives of sympathy as a distinguished way of apprehending other sentient beings *on their own terms* or *as they are*. To commiserate with someone's suffering or rejoice in her pleasure is, on this view, to be in direct epistemic contact with her sentient state as it actually is or, alternatively, with her reality as a sentient individual. I will call this version the Objective Grasp View (henceforth, OGV). It contrasts with those variants on which sympathy's epistemic yield is a matter of apprehending other sentient beings 'on our own terms', i.e. in respect of their significance or value for us (e.g. Wolf 18, 158). I choose this focus because OGV is the best worked out version of EV and moreover driven by a fairly robust intuition that holds sway even over theorists that are otherwise careful not to model sympathy on epistemic phenomena. However, my main criticism applies to any version of EV.

Since the term 'sympathy' is used in different ways, I will begin by delineating the usage relevant for my purposes (Sect. 2). I then outline OGV in more detail and develop my criticism (Sect. 3). The remainder elaborates what a view that is more faithful to the intentionality of sympathy might look like (Sects. 4, 5).

While I shall ultimately recommend a practical understanding of sympathy, I here lack the space to comment on the specifically ethical project in which OGV is sometimes embedded (cf. Marshall 9). However, I take it that the issue as to whether sympathy is a form social cognition is important in its own right.

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[1] This paper draws on my prior work on emotional intentionality (esp. Müller 2017, 2019). In this way, I hope to make some progress in the debate on the nature and significance of sympathy, which has been conducted largely independently of the general debate on the nature of emotion (cf. e.g. Marshall 2018; Roughley & Schramme 2018).

2 Sympathy

As an interpersonal affect, sympathy relates us to other sentient beings. In accordance with the term's etymology, sympathy is *feeling with* someone (cf. also the term 'fellow feeling', which is often used synonymously). In this context, the preposition 'with' does not merely express the simultaneous occurrence of an experience in both sympathizer and sympathizee but attests to sympathy's character as an intentional attitude. More precisely, sympathy is a group of affective attitudes directed at others' feelings, which includes feeling sorry at someone's distress or suffering (commiseration, compassion) as well as rejoicing or taking delight in her joy.[2]

In conceiving of sympathy in this way, I align myself with a conception that is most clearly explicated in realist phenomenology (cf. esp. Scheler 13). This conception differs from accounts on which sympathy is essentially or predominantly a function of imaginative projection (cf. esp. Smith 15). Thus, there is no presumption here that commiseration or sympathetic joy are based on some form of simulation or perspective-taking. Relatedly, the view I adopt also contrasts with a conception on which sympathy may be felt regardless of whether its target has any feeling towards her situation herself (e.g. Roughley & Schramme 12, 24f.) as well as with views according to which sympathy is first and foremost directed at the situation to which the target affectively responds (cf. e.g. Goldie 6, 213; Maibom 8, 3; cf. also Roughley & Schramme (12, 19) on sympathy's possible 'foci', as well as Blum's (1) otherwise similar use of 'empathy').[3] Accordingly, the way in which I use 'sympathy' in this paper excludes certain neighboring affective phenomena which are subsumed by other prominent uses. At the same time, in being restricted to affects directed at experiences of others, my use echoes certain contemporary uses of 'empathy' (especially of 'affective empathy').

As many have noted, sympathy is a relation of an especially intimate kind. As Scheler has it, in sympathy we "participate in" another's experience (2017, 3). This figurative characterization alludes to a specific, affective form of interpersonal involvement. Although it is not necessary that we share another's feeling in sympathizing with her, sympathy still comes with a characteristic type of experiential proximity. There is, intuitively, a clear difference between a cold, intellectual apprehension of another's distress and commiserating with her in terms of the way we partake in or are involved with her distress. Plausibly, this relation fails to obtain unless what the sympathizer feels resonates at least to some extent with the experience of her target (cf. Demmerling & Landweer 5, 186, 192; Marshall 9, 69ff.).

The attitudinal character of sympathy and its intimacy have been given more substantive treatment in the literature. The view I criticize in this paper offers one such treatment. The view I will recommend in its stead provides a rivaling account. In what follows, I explicate OGV in some more detail.

3 The Objective Grasp View

3.1 Apprehending Other Sentient Beings on Their Own Terms

OGV is a substantive account of sympathy's attitudinal character. On this view, sympathy is a specific form of interpersonal awareness, a way of directly apprehending other sentient beings as they are. To shed more light on this account, let me introduce its two main variants.

The first variant of OGV conceives of sympathy as a form of immediate awareness of other sentient beings *qua sentient*. On this proposal, in commiseration or sympathetic joy we directly apprehend others' experiences as they actually are. This variant has been carefully elaborated by Marshall (9). According to Marshall, sympathy (or, in his terms, 'compassion'[4]) is a case of 'being in touch with' another's experience. That is to say that it is a representational state in which (i) the other is phenomenologically given and (ii) her experience is revealed to us (ibid., chapter 3). Marshall explicitly conceives of this quasi-perceptual epistemic contact as an irreplaceable epistemic good (ibid., chapter 2). Sympathy alone puts us in touch with others' experiences and is epistemically valuable for this reason.

In conceiving of the representation constitutive of sympathy as making us aware of what the other's experience is actually like, Marshall is not committed to the view that her experience is grasped via an act of imaginative perspective-taking which abstracts away from our own specific perspective on the other. Still, there is a substantive sense in which, on his view, sympathy reveals the experience as it is in itself and has, in this respect, objective import (ibid., chapter 4). To illustrate how he

[2] While I focus on these two paradigm forms of sympathy, I do not wish to rule out that it comprises further attitudes.

[3] The conception adopted here is compatible with sympathy being *derivatively* about the sympathizee's situation, though. Indeed, in sympathizing with another's experience, it is plausibly not her experience *simpliciter* that we have in view, but the experience qua responsive to the way her situation bears on her well-being (cf. Blum (2018, 156) on cases of empathy directed at other's emotions).

[4] As Marshall conceives of compassion, it may target mere sensory (dis)pleasures as well as desires. As I said in n. 2, I will here focus on the two paradigm forms of sympathy introduced at the outset. I thus set this aspect of Marshall's view aside.

conceives of sympathy's epistemic yield, Marshall draws an explicit analogy with an account of perception on which veridical perceptual experiences in which material objects are phenomenologically given reveal what their sensible properties are actually like. This understanding is clearly articulated in Montague's (10, 44f.) description of color experiences: "In attributing redness to the ball, I attribute the property whose essential intrinsic character I take to be fully revealed in the phenomenological qualitative character of the experience. […] An aspect of the phenomenal redness resembles an aspect of the redness attributed to the ball. We feel the experience of phenomenal redness gets it exactly right about, completely conveys the *intrinsic qualitative character* of, the objective property." In a similar vein, Marshall argues, sympathy reveals the intrinsic qualitative character of another's experience in virtue of the way in which it resembles this experience. In line with the perceptual case, in commiserating with another's suffering, the unpleasant phenomenal character of the way I feel matches the unpleasantness of the other's experience. In this way, it discloses an important aspect of what her experience is actually like. Since this revelation is inextricably bound up with a perceptual impression of the other, an experience as of her being phenomenally 'given', there is an important respect in which it qualifies as a direct way of apprehending her experience.

By explicitly drawing an analogy between sympathy and perception, Marshall accounts for the intentional character of affective attitudes in line with a currently popular model in the philosophy of emotion. On this model, emotions in general are similar to sensory perceptions in respect of their intentional properties (e.g. Tappolet 16). His proposal also suggests a conception of sympathy's intimate character. Although Marshall does not explicitly discuss this, one might suppose that, on his view, being involved with another's experiences in the way characteristic of sympathy is tantamount to being in touch with those experiences. In being in touch with another's experience her experience is apprehended in a direct way, i.e. it is itself experienced. At least prima facie, this provides some intuitive content to the idea that sympathy involves a sort of experiential proximity with the other. I take this thought to be corroborated by Marshall's claim that her experience is revealed to us in virtue of its affective resemblance with the way we feel ourselves. As understood here, sympathy's intimacy is a matter of an experiential form of interpersonal epistemic contact.

In respect of the connection it forges between sympathy's intimacy and its purported epistemic import, Marshall's account is on a par with second variant of OGV. On this further version, the affective involvement characteristic of sympathy is underwritten by a form of direct interpersonal awareness, too. At the same time, there are some important differences.

Unlike on the first variant, what is disclosed in sympathy on this version is not the other's experience, but her status as a sentient being in her own right, i.e. her individuality. While, on this view, we have direct epistemic access to the experiences of other sentient beings independently of sympathy, it is only in feeling with them that we properly apprehend them *qua others*. This proposal is due to Scheler (13, chapter IV.2), who conceives of sympathy's epistemic yield in terms of the dissipation of an illusion of egocentrism. This illusion shows itself in certain respects in which, according to Scheler, "the natural man is […] a *relative* solipsist, if one compares his consciousness of his own reality with his degree of parallel conviction concerning other people." (ibid., 59). More specifically, for the natural man "these others certainly exist as souls, but, it is, for all that, a shadowy sort of existence; […] such an existence is in reality and character merely relative to his own ego, his own field of values, and his own supposedly absolute notion of reality." (ibid.). To be under this illusion is, in a crucial sense, to misapprehend the other's ontological status qua being that is just as real as oneself. Correspondingly, adequately apprehending the other for what she is, on this view, is a matter of gaining awareness of her as possessing the same value as oneself and hence as being valuable in her own right. Scheler positively characterizes what is apprehended in sympathy as follows:

> Without the aid of images or concepts we gain here an immediate insight into a truth which, expressed in propositional form, would run somewhat as follows: 'As a man and a living creature, the other person's value is the same as your own, he exists as really and truly as yourself. Other people have the same value as you do.' (ibid., 61)

While, as articulated here, this insight is propositional, the beginning of the passage suggests that the relevant awareness is non-conceptual – it is attained "without the aid of […] concepts" – and direct. Though Scheler does not explicitly model sympathy's epistemic role in terms of perception, some of his remarks in preceding passages on the views of Schopenhauer and Bergson at least hint in that direction. There Scheler shows himself open to the view that sympathy has a "function [which] is cognitive in the same pre-logical sense as applies to the perception of situations " (ibid., 57). This suggests an account on which sympathy makes us quasi-perceptually aware of the other as a being in her own right. In feeling with others, we gain a more adequate grasp of her as a real individual insofar as we experience her status as an axiological peer.

Like Marshall's view, Scheler's variant of OGV also speaks to sympathy's intimate character. As Scheler variously stresses, sympathy is concerned with the other's experience *as that of another*. Elaborating on this, he explicates

sympathetic participation in terms of a "genuine out-reaching and entry into the other person and his individual situation, a true and authentic transcendence of one's self (…)" (ibid., 46). In light of the above, it seems natural to suppose that this is achieved by dissipating the egocentric illusion and apprehending the other as valuable in her own right. Since the relevant grasp is direct, intimacy seems here, at least partly, to be a matter of epistemic proximity, too. In this case, however, the relevant epistemic contact is not with the sympathizee's experience, but with her individuality.

Both Marshall and Scheler build an extended case in support of OGV, which in part draws on pre-theoretical, especially phenomenological, considerations.[5] While I believe there is space to put some pressure on the support each offers for OGV, I shall here refrain from closer examination of their arguments. It seems that there is a relatively simple, direct objection to the view, which suggests that it significantly mischaracterizes the intentionality of sympathy. What I shall say in developing this objection should yet also diminish the prospect of advocating the view on pre-theoretical grounds.

3.2 Where the Objective Grasp View Goes Wrong

Like all versions of EV, OGV conceives of sympathy as a type of interpersonal awareness: to sympathize with others is to apprehend or grasp (i.e. come to be aware of) something about them (their sentience, their individuality). (Here, 'aware of' is used in an inclusive sense which comprises different forms of epistemic contact (perception, being in touch, propositional knowledge).) To appreciate what is wrong with this, let us take a closer look at sympathy's intentionality.

As noted in Sect. 2, sympathy is directed at another's sentient state: one commiserates *with* or feels sorry *for* someone's distress or suffering, rejoices or takes delight *in* her joy. A helpful way to get clear about the type of directedness characteristic of these attitudes is by considering other locutions we commonly use to attribute intentional objects to them. In particular, it is useful to consider how we use the verbs 'meet' and 'respond' in this context. To commiserate with another's distress is to *respond* to her distress with commiseration or, alternatively, for her distress to be *met* with commiseration. Likewise, to rejoice or take delight in another's joy is to *respond* to her joy with delight or, alternatively, for her joy to be *met* with delight.[6] If we examine this usage more closely, it seems that these verbs serve to ascribe motivating reasons for the respective attitude. That is, they are used in the same way as when we ascribe reasons for which someone performed a certain action by saying that they responded to or met some state of affairs by performing that action. In saying, for example, that the magistrate responded to someone's offences with severe punishment (or that her offences were met with severe punishment by the magistrate), we specify these offences to be a reason for which the magistrate acted as they did: the offenses are that in light or on account of which punishment was administered. Likewise, in meeting or responding to another's feeling with commiseration or sympathetic joy, we commiserate or feel delight in light or on account of her feeling. This observation suggests that sympathy's attitudinal character can be explicated in terms of the relation of 'being a (motivating) reason for'.

Turning now to the epistemic phenomena with which sympathy is identified by proponents of OGV, we find that their intentionality does not admit of this explication. To apprehend or (come to) to be aware of x is not to respond to x (or for x to be met) with apprehension or awareness [cf. also Müller 2017]. On the reason-ascribing use of 'respond' and 'meet', it is not true that in coming to be aware of a problem with OGV, say, I respond to this problem with awareness (or that it is met by me with awareness). It does not so much as make sense to think of the problem as something in light or on account of which I come to be aware. This point is supported also by considerations on the specific form of awareness to which Marshall and, arguably, Scheler assimilate sympathy. Thus, to perceive e.g. a beautiful sunset is not to meet this sunset with perception. Accordingly, there are grounds for thinking that the intentionality of these epistemic phenomena cannot be elucidated in terms of the relation of 'being a reason for'. In this respect, it contrasts with the intentionality of sympathy. I take this to spell bad news for any proposal to the effect that sympathy is a form of interpersonal awareness. To think that sympathetic attitudes are ways of coming to be aware of something about other sentient beings is to mischaracterize their intentionality.[7]

To further support this, note that the difference I have highlighted provides a straightforward explanation of a disanalogy concerning the cognitive preconditions of sympathy. As Scheler (13, 8f.) rightly stresses, to commiserate or rejoice with others' experiences, one must have apprehended these *prior to* feeling with them. This is not true of

[5] To be fair, unlike Scheler, whose considerations are predominantly phenomenological, Marshall also offers substantive, theoretical considerations in unpacking and supporting his claim that sympathy is disclosive of another's experience in virtue of resembling it.

[6] In the same vein, what we are afraid of is met by us with fear, and we respond with desire to the prospects we desire.

[7] On this type of disanalogy cf. also Mulligan (2010), Müller (2019, chapter 3).

In a first pass at explicating his proposal, Marshall (2018, 42f.) considers the possibility that sympathy might involve intentionality of a fundamentally different kind than perception. His reply seems to be that, on the Lockean account of intentionality which he (initially) relies on to develop his view, there is no room for this distinction. Yet if, as I argued, there is good reason to draw this distinction, then so much the worse for this account.

apprehending or coming to be aware of something. Clearly, my coming to be aware of a problem does *not* presuppose that I have already apprehended this problem. Indeed, it is not possible for me to already be aware of the problem prior to coming to be aware of it. This difference is well accounted for by sympathy's specific directedness or character as a response. As is widely acknowledged, for something to qualify as a reason for which we hold some attitude, it must have entered our cognitive ken *before* we form the attitude for that reason. Correspondingly, that forms of awareness do not have this sort of cognitive precondition is because they are not directed in this way [cf. also Müller 2019, 68f.; 2021, 3568f.].

It might be surprising that I take this disanalogy to tell against both variants of OGV. After all, Scheler is alive to sympathy's responsive character and its cognitive preconditions qua response. Apparently, he takes it that sympathy apprehends another's individuality *as well as* being a response to her experiences. This might seem to indicate a way for proponents of OGV to accommodate my objection. Could sympathy not involve the apprehension of others' individuality *in addition to* being a response to their feelings?

As far as I can see, this hybrid picture is not a viable option. To begin with, it seems to entail that sympathy has an epistemic component in addition to the responsive attitudes ascribed by locutions such as 'commiserate with *x*'s suffering', 'take delight in *x*' joy'. After all, as my above remarks indicate, these responsive attitudes are not forms of awareness: If commiseration and sympathetic joy were to be forms of awareness, their intentionality ought not to admit of characterization in terms of the relation of 'being a reason for'. The proposal thus seems revisionary in that it posits that sympathy involves an intentional state over and above those states that we pick out by these locutions. However, if it is those responsive attitudes that we refer to with them, we would need a strong reason for thinking that sympathy comprises this further intentional state. Clearly, the supposition that instances of sympathy comprise intentional states over and above commiseration and sympathetic joy would deviate considerably from the conception that we started with. It seems far more natural to suppose that the alleged epistemic component is a phenomenon distinct from sympathy.

Moreover, what I will argue in the next section suggests that we apprehend another's individuality *prior to* sympathizing with her. An adequate understanding of the responsive character of sympathy conceives of commiseration and rejoicing with others as responses to their experiences as experiences of a fellow individual. In line with my above remarks, this conflicts with the claim that their individuality is apprehended only in feeling with them: if we need to be aware of their individuality in order to feel with them, then sympathy is not what makes us aware of their individuality.[8]

It is worth stressing that the misconception I have been criticizing in this section is by no means exceptional. It is characteristic also of many accounts that conceive of emotions in general as forms of value apprehension (cf. Müller 2017; 2019, chapter 3). These accounts, too, misclassify the relevant affective phenomena in respect of the type of attitudes they are. I take this mistake to be a good reason to discard such views. The disanalogy I have highlighted also has some positive dialectical import, though. As will transpire in the next section, it simultaneously provides some directions for a more plausible contender.

4 The Responsive Character of Sympathy

To provide the contours of an alternative, non-epistemic view of sympathy, it will be helpful to examine more closely what we respond to in sympathizing with others. So far, I have identified others' experiences as reasons for which we feel with them. However, this picture is too crude. We do not seem to be motivated to sympathize with others by their experiences *simpliciter*. Rather, they are reasons for sympathy only under certain aspects. I take it that there are two plausible candidates for such aspects.

First, in sympathy we respond to others' experiences *as their experiences*. This point, which is evocative of Scheler's account of sympathy's intimacy, is supported by at least two considerations. According to the first, it is warranted by contrasting sympathy with emotional contagion. In emotional contagion we are automatically infected by another's feeling without ascribing it to her. By contrast, in sympathy, we experience ourselves as feeling some way in light of what we apprehend as part of the other's psychology.[9]

This consideration does not imply that, over and above responding to the other as a distinct psychological subject, we also respond to her individuality in the evaluative sense delineated by Scheler. It seems, though, that there is a second consideration which supports a stronger constraint on

[8] Cf. Mulligan (2010, 233ff.) and Müller (2017) for a parallel worry for the view that emotions in general apprehend value properties.

To be fair, there is a question as to whether what we pre-sympathetically apprehend is another's individuality in the exact same sense that informs Scheler's version of OGV. Cf. my remarks in the following section. However, as should become apparent, if Scheler's basic point is that sympathy affords awareness of others as sentient beings in their own right so as to provide a corrective to an egocentric view of them, there is a clear respect in which such awareness is supplied pre-sympathetically.

[9] Cf. Scheler (2017, 14f.), Demmerling & Landweer (2007, 178f.), among many others.

these lines. There are affective responses to another's distress which are superficially similar to sympathy but not performed for the right reasons. For example, someone averse to others' distress may feel pained at their suffering because she is unable to bear witness to it (cf. Scheler 13, 41). This response is egocentric: it ultimately responds to the sympathizer's own well-being. Moreover, we feel reticent to count her response as genuine commiseration precisely for this reason. Whilst clearly a response to the other qua distinct psychological subject, her affect seems to fall short of sympathy in that it fails be responsive to the other qua independent in a more substantial sense. Genuine commiseration, it seems, requires that we feel pained not on account of the other's distress being negatively significant for us, but because it compromises something that matters to the other herself.

There may be different ways to make explicit how precisely this intuitive difference qualifies others' experiences as motivating reasons for sympathy. The core thought, though, is that sympathy is a response to these experience's bearing on others' well-being as something that has import for themselves. Understood in this way, this constraint resonates with Scheler's evaluative notion of the reality of the other, as grounded in her equal value. That is, in apprehending another's sentient state as ultimately mattering to her, there is a clear sense in which we apprehend her as being axiologically on a par with us. Her well-being is apprehended as important in its own right or, in Kantian language, as being as much an end in itself as our own. To be precise, there is a difference here in respect of Scheler's conception of axiological parity, which concerns the other's status as a human being, not her well-being in particular. There is also a resemblance, though, in that the idea of another's well-being as an end in itself clearly a conveys a sense of her being a sentient being in her own right.

If we accept this account of the intuitive contrast between sympathy and superficially similar, egocentric responses, the thought that we sympathetically respond to others' experiences as *their* experiences thus requires a fairly demanding interpretation. Rather than pertaining exclusively to their distinctness as psychological subjects, it also concerns their status as axiological peers. While this suggests that Scheler is right to invoke an evaluative notion of individuality in characterizing sympathy, it is crucial that this interpretation is not committed to his epistemic view of sympathy. As an aspect under which sympathetic attitudes are directed at others' experiences, individuality is something we *respond* to in feeling with them. In line with what I said in the previous section, it follows that their status qua individual is apprehended *prior to* sympathy. Thus, it is not by sympathizing with the other that we come to be aware of this status. We are already aware of it in feeing with her.

Turning to the second candidate, it seems there is, moreover, an important respect in which reasons for sympathy are partial. In support of this, suppose you ask someone why she commiserates (rejoices) with another and receive one of the following explanations:

She is in distress (having a great time), but her distress (joy) is completely alien to me.

She is just so miserable (cheerful), but I can't relate to her feelings at all.

While the first part of these answers makes the respective sympathetic response intelligible by citing the target's experience as a motivating reason, the second part undermines the intelligibility conferred by this reason. This indirectly suggests that others' experiences constitute reasons for sympathy only under a specific aspect: as states to which the sympathizer can–at least to some extent–relate.

As a first pass, we can think of the required rapport in cognitive terms. It seems natural to suppose that one can relate to an experience insofar it is intelligible to one. On this reading, the above answers report lack of understanding. Although this is an intuitive reading, it needs some amendment. As widely noted, sympathy is selective. More specifically, we tend to sympathize with the members of a certain 'in group' and do so most readily with those that are closest to us (Goldie 6, 216; Demmerling & Landweer 5, 171). There is hence a requirement to the effect that the sympathizee be apprehended as belonging to a community with which the sympathizer to some extent identifies. This community may well be very large and even extend to the whole of humanity (and, arguably, parts of the animal kingdom). It does not follow that this membership requirement is trivially satisfied in this case, though. This is evident in light of failures to sympathize with others who are denied the status of humans for ideological reasons (cf. Demmerling & Landweer 5, 171). I take it that this constraint implies that the requisite rapport with others' experiences is not purely cognitive. As these and other examples of lack of sympathy suggest, membership in the relevant in group is not necessarily secured by the mere intelligibility of the other's psychology, but seems to require at least a minimal degree of interpersonal concern or attachment. If this is right, we might say that others' experiences qualify as reasons for sympathy only under a further aspect: they must in some basic, but significant, sense be apprehended as states of a *fellow* sentient being.[10]

In highlighting sympathy's partiality, this additional requirement may seem to pull in a different direction than the demand for the other to be construed as an axiological peer. However, there is no real tension. Although relating to

[10] This use of 'fellow' is meant to capture both the relevant attachment to the other as well as the cognitive rapport with her experience. It thus characterizes her in a way that also contrasts with being alien in the sense of unintelligible.

others' experiences is not immune to various forms of egocentric bias[11] (such as e.g. the inclination to assimilate their experiences to our own) the constraint does not inherently promote this type of distortion. As such, the requirement to understand another's feelings and identify her as a member of the relevant community is entirely compatible with the need to apprehend her well-being as important to herself. Indeed, depending on the respective attachment and sense of commonality, the ascription of axiological parity may well be part of identifying her as a member.

Supposing, then, that these constraints can be jointly satisfied, the picture of sympathy's motivating reasons we started with admits of refinement in several respects. To the extent that the foregoing considerations adequately characterize the objects of sympathetic responses, others' distresses and joys constitute reasons for sympathy only if apprehended both as experiences of distinct psychological subjects whose well-being matters to them and as experiences to which we can relate. To give this conception a more 'portable' gloss, I shall say that sympathy is a response to experiences *qua states of a fellow individual*. Thus understood, sympathy is not a form of interpersonal awareness, but presupposes interpersonal awareness. Relatedly, what makes sympathy intimate, on this view, is not an epistemic type of proximity, but the reasons for which we feel with others. This conception can be made to fit with Scheler's metaphor of reaching out to the other in her individuality. However, on the present account, we reach out to the other by sympathetically responding to her individuality, not by gaining awareness of it. Since sympathy thus becomes intelligible as a way of *putting to use*–rather than supplying–interpersonal awareness, the view is practical rather than epistemic.

In motivating this alternative proposal, I have drawn on pre-theoretical considerations that overlap to a large extent with those offered by Scheler himself. As should have become apparent, these can plausibly be conceived as speaking to sympathy's responsive character, though, and hence to do not mandate an epistemic approach. While it seems to me that this proposal rests on some reasonably intuitive observations about this responsive character, it is clearly tentative and stands in need of further development and defense. In assessing its philosophical credentials, it is worth bearing in mind, though, that even if my specific considerations on objects of sympathetic responses are ultimately found unpersuasive, the core observation that qua attitude sympathy is a response to others should suffice by itself to motivate a different, non-epistemic perspective on its nature and significance.

[11] In this connection, cf. also Scheler (2017, 46f.), Blum (2018, 157f.).

In what follows, I elaborate on this proposal in one further respect. On the assumption that my remarks in this section possesses at least some initial plausibility, I shall close this paper by making more explicit the practical role accorded to sympathy on the approach I recommend.

5 Sympathy as Interpersonal Acknowledgment

If my take on sympathy is on the right lines, we feel with others in light of their experiences qua states of fellow individuals. Closer examination of the role of these experiences in reason explanation suggests that they are not only motivating reasons for sympathy, though. That is, they moreover make sympathy *appropriate*.

This point is supported by the following observation. It seems that answers that cite the requisite rapport with another's feeling as a motivating reason for sympathy not only explain but also tend to *justify* the respective response. To see this, consider the following, typical answers to questions as to why someone sympathizes with another:

I can relate to what she is going through.
I completely get how she feels.
That's a natural (human) thing for her to feel in these circumstances.
She is my friend/partner/a member of my team/…

In each of these cases, the speaker's rapport with the target's experience (or her attachment to this person[12]) is cited as the reason for which she feels with her. At the same time, these answers are apt also as justifications: they display the speaker's response as appropriate.

On a common understanding of justification, it follows from this that the reason cited is not only a motivating reason, but also a normative reason. That is, for the answer to do duty as a justification it must also be a reason *to* feel sympathy. While this suggests that others' experiences also have normative force,[13] it does not show them to be specifically

[12] For reasons indicated earlier, the last of the above answers at least implicitly refers to *S*'s experience as something to which the speaker can relate, too, though. If we did not suppose the speaker found this experience relatable, her answer would fail to make her sympathetic response intelligible.

[13] To be precise, this status accrues to experiences only if they actually satisfy the relevant description, that is, if the sympathizing subject actually has the requisite rapport with them.

moral reasons. Considering what it is about such experiences that speaks in favor of sympathy, it seems natural to think that this force is grounded in part in the way they bear (i.e. favorably or adversely) on the other's well-being.[14] Yet, in contrast to how the normative force of moral reasons is traditionally conceived,[15] the status of others' distresses and joys as normative reasons for sympathy also seems to depend on our attachment to them. Intuitively, a strong case can be made that we have *more* reason to sympathize with those dear to us than with distant others. However, in order to elaborate on the practical role to be accorded to sympathy on the view I propose, there is no need to think of others' distresses and joys as specifically moral reasons for sympathy. All that is needed for this purpose is their recognition as making sympathetic responses appropriate.

If we grant that, in addition to being motivating reasons, experiences of fellow individuals also have normative force, this makes available a further, non-trivial characterization of sympathetic responses. This characterization follows directly from their role as both motivating and normative reasons for sympathy and helps precisify how we put to use prior awareness of others in feeling with them: If in sympathetically responding to experiences qua states of fellow individuals, we respond in a manner which is appropriate to such experiences, we thereby *acknowledge* these experiences as those of fellow individuals. To appreciate the plausibility of this claim, note that there is a perfectly common use of 'acknowledge x as F', on which we acknowledge x as F by responding to x's F-ness in the manner appropriate to F-ness. On this use of the term, acknowledging x as F requires two things: (i) doing what is appropriate given x's being F and (ii) doing so for the reason that x is F. To illustrate this usage, consider what it takes, intuitively, to acknowledge someone as your boss. If you act towards this person in the appropriate manner, but do so for some reason unrelated to her supervisory status, you will, intuitively, not count as acknowledging her as having this status: you fail to comply with her authority as your boss. Likewise, your response won't qualify as acknowledging her status if in responding you do not conform with the demands this status imposes on you. By contrast, if you conform with those demands by acting towards her in the appropriate way and do so in response to this status, you thereby acknowledge her authority in this intuitive sense. These same conditions are satisfied, mutatis mutandis, by sympathetic attitudes: in feeling with other's experiences qua states of fellow individuals, we feel as is appropriate to feel towards such experiences and do so on account them qua states of a fellow individual.[16]

I take this to be a significant refinement of the non-epistemic view sketched in the previous section. If we can think of sympathy as a form of interpersonal acknowledgment, this provides a more definite, positive alternative to OGV. Relatedly, this refinement sheds additional light on sympathy's intimacy. It suggests that sympathetically reaching out to others is a matter of complying with the normative force of their experiences qua normative reasons. To the extent that this force is grounded in the value of their well-being and our specific rapport with them, we thereby submit to demands they have on us qua fellow individuals.

To be fair, the thought that sympathy is intimately related to interpersonal acknowledgment is not entirely new. For example, some commentators of Adam Smith's sentimentalist ethics have argued that Smithian sympathy (or one particular form of it) is bound up with a specific respect for persons *as such*, which accounts for a certain tendency to value others as equals (Darwall 3, Debes 4).[17] While this view assigns to sympathy a similar practical role, it is worth noting that it differs from the account I have been advocating. Thus, although there is a parallel between Smithean sympathetic respect and sympathetic acknowledgment to the extent that both concern the other as an axiological peer, the status that we respect on the Smithean view is not specifically related to the value of her well-being.[18] (See also my comments on recognitional attitudes below.) Moreover, these commentators offer no substantive account of sympathy's practical role that shows this role to constitutively depend on its character as a response. On the Smithean account, this role is largely elucidated in terms of a specific form of perspective-taking. As noted at the outset, however, the assumption that sympathy centrally involves perspective-taking is not part of the conception I have adopted here.

Another cognate view, which is more similar to the account I recommend in respect of its Schelerian inspirations, is offered by Blum (1). Echoing the Smithean picture,

[14] This seems plausible if we suppose that things that bear favorably or adversely on her well-being (qua mattering to her) thereby derivatively possess positive or negative value and hence call for a corresponding positive or negative response.

[15] This conception has been challenged, though. Cf. e.g. Keller (2013). On the relation between partiality and morality in connection with sympathy cf. also Marshall (2018, chapter 8).

[16] Since 'acknowledge x as F', as used here, implies that x is F, it does not to apply to inappropriate cases of sympathy in response to experiences that are falsely apprehended as satisfying the relevant description (e.g. because we cannot actually relate to them). As I show in Müller (2017), there is a related, non-factive use which covers such cases. On this use, we acknowledge x as F by responding to x's *apparent* F-ness in the manner appropriate to actual F-ness.

[17] Though her overarching concern is with sympathy's importance for the acknowledgment of social and intercultural differences, this view is in line also with Churcher's (2019, esp. chapter 2) take on Smith.

[18] One might wonder whether there is also a difference in respect of the role of the other as a *fellow* individual on the two accounts. Though I believe there is, showing this would require close examination of the notion of the impartial spectator on Smith's view, which I here lack the space to provide.

Blum compares empathy (which he takes to comprise sympathetic attitudes) with attitudes such as respect, recognition and affirmation (which he calls 'recognitional attitudes'). He does not go as far as to identify sympathy as a recognitional attitude. As he stresses, empathy differs from respect, recognition and affirmation in that it is concerned with well-being. Still, Blum proposes, there is something like interpersonal affirmation in empathy: there is a respect, for example, in which in commiseration we affirm the other's negative view of her situation (ibid., 149).[19] Although this view, too, resembles my proposed alternative to OGV, there are, again, some significant differences. Thus, Blum does not, or at least not explicitly, trace sympathy's practical role to the reasons for which we feel with others either. Moreover, from a pretheoretical point of view, affirmation closely resembles (or even constitutes) a form of approval and, in this respect, differs from acknowledgment on the common use I have explicated. To see this, consider negative emotions like anger or indignation. These emotions qualify as a form of acknowledgment on this use [cf. Müller 2017]. In being indignant about something we respond to it under the aspect of being a serious offence; moreover, serious offences make indignation appropriate. While, accordingly, being indignant about something is a way of acknowledging it as a serious offence, it is not a form of approval. On the contrary, indignation is form of disapproval.

This brings me to a further difference, which restricts the extent to which sympathy qua acknowledgment can be assimilated to the type of attitude that serves as a model for both Blum and the aforementioned commentators of Smith. On a widely held view, recognitional attitudes are essentially interpersonal: they target human beings (and, perhaps, sentient animals) as bearers of certain types of status or attribute. Although this is true of sympathy, too, it is does not hold of acknowledgment on the use at issue. On this use, I may, for example, acknowledge a beautiful sunset as valuable, say, by responding to it with joy. By contrast, the parallel claim is not true of respect, recognition or affirmation (at least in the sense invoked by these authors). Unlike views that spell out sympathy's practical role by assimilating it to recognitional attitudes, my proposed specification this role in terms of the concept of acknowledgment situates sympathy within a wider class of affective attitudes that may take a whole range of different objects (including events in the inanimate environment).

All of this is not to say that the comparison between sympathy and recognitional attitudes is entirely misguided. Exploring this analogy may well prove fruitful not least in virtue of opening up new avenues which take seriously the idea that sympathy is a type of interpersonal response rather than awareness. Supposing the account I have offered is on the right track, however, we need to be careful about how far we push this analogy if we also wish to do justice to the kinship which sympathy qua acknowledgment bears with forms of affective acknowledgment that are not interpersonal.[20] At any rate, it is a noteworthy feature of this account that it makes sympathy intelligible as practically significant in a sense that is plausibly characteristic of our emotional engagement with the world at large.

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[19] Similarly, Vetlesen (1993) occasionally characterizes what he calls empathy (which, as in Blum's case, comprises sympathetic attitudes) in terms of recognition of the other as other. In light of his views on the connection between empathy and perception, it is not obvious, though, whether Vetlesen properly distinguishes between recognition as a way of coming to know and recognition in the here relevant sense (as a response to what one knows).

[20] A further problem in this context concerns the moral status of recognitional attitudes. As Schloßberger (2005, 207f.) argues in criticizing sympathy's construal as a form of recognition, it is not clear that there can be duties to sympathize with others. For the reasons given in Sect. 4, I would maintain that there are normative reasons for sympathy. As also noted there, it is a further issue, however, whether sympathy is a response to moral normative force.

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