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Catharine Macaulay on Cultivating our Sympathetic Potential

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Catharine Macaulay (1731 — 1791) is often construed as a historian, and moral and political philosopher chiefly concerned with the high privilege of reason. Accordingly, her Letters on Education (1790) are thought to advance her vision for how education must cultivate the rational capacities required to comprehend moral duty. In this paper, against scholarly consensus, I show that sympathy, not reason, makes possible the discovery of moral truths and inclines us to act in accordance with them. By attending to Macaulayan sympathy, this paper not only advances a novel approach to her moral philosophy, it also identifies a hitherto underappreciated aspect of her engagement with Hume. For Macaulay, Humean sympathy accounts for how fellow feeling produces social bias and leads us to draw distinctions among people according to their social rank (Hist. 6:xii). For Macaulay, this is not a necessary feature of sympathy: it is symptomatic of a failure to see that sympathy must be cultivated to establish the "consistent system of feeling" needed to penetrate distinctions of social rank and species using an "equal eye of compassion" (Hist. 6: xii). Macaulay's account of how sympathy must be cultivated so that this potential is realized is advanced in the Letters.

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Introduction

Catharine Macaulay (1731–1791) is often construed as a moral rationalist. Scholars have generally taken one of two approaches to establish this. Some, such as Sarah Hutton (2007) and Martina Reuter (2007), have argued that Macaulay is a moral rationalist because she takes it that reason alone leads one to discover and abide moral principles. Others, such as Karen Green (2020) and Alan Coffee (2017), have argued that while reason allows us to identify moral principles, it cannot, by itself, motivate moral behavior. In this vein, Green argues that "sympathy is a necessary adjunct to reason" in motivating moral conduct (Green 2020, 183), while Coffee (2017) suggests that without sympathy, one will lack the "fundamental dispositions" that underpin virtuous behavior (Coffee 2017, 847).

Notwithstanding differences in how scholars have sought to establish that Macaulay is a moral rationalist, what is striking about this reception is the lack of attention to her emphatic insistence "that the quality of sympathy is the basis of all human virtue" (*Correspondence*, 292; emphasis in original). Were it not for this "precious gift," Macaulay argues that it is unlikely that one would grasp the ideas of equity that are necessary to understand principles of morality in the first place (ibid; see also L II.viii; 275). This suggests that there is a deeper and more robust role for sympathy in Macaulay's moral framework that cannot be thought of as merely motivational or practical. But what exactly is this function? And exactly how does sympathy figure in Macaulay's broader moral outlook?

In this article, my principal aim is to clarify the nature and operations of Macaulayan sympathy. To achieve this, I pursue two argumentative threads. First, in §1, I establish that sympathy serves an essential epistemic function in the moral psychology that is advanced in the *Letters on Education* (1790). More concretely, according to the account advanced therein, sympathy at once discovers ideas of equity and makes these meaningful as it shows us the moral demands that these ideas place upon us. For Macaulay, then, sympathy is revealed as what confers the capacious understanding of the suffering of others that is required to grasp moral principles and that is necessary to moral motivation.

Second, I clarify why Macaulay insists in her *Letters* that sympathy must be cultivated through education in order for this epistemic role to materialize. Pursuant to this end, my discussion takes a surprising turn in §2 as I examine the dialogue with Hume on the point of sympathy that Macaulay begins in her *History of England* (1763–1783). It is in this earlier work that Macaulay asserts that the Humean general point of view, meant to stabilize moral judgments and prevent the biases of natural sympathy from infecting such judgments, cannot achieve this feat. This is evidenced by Hume's apparent inability to prevent his own sympathetic biases from inflecting his narration of key events in seventeenth-century England in his *History of England* (1754–1762).

This discourse thereby leads Macaulay to identify a shortcoming often aligned with sympathy-based accounts of morality: they lack a moral standard strong enough to counter the distortions caused by our natural sympathetic engagement. At the same time, Macaulay gestures toward a solution to this shortcoming when she challenges Hume's claim that social bias is an intrinsic feature of sympathetic engagement. Against this background in §3, I show that it is this very dialogue with Hume that leads Macaulay to articulate the position found in the *Letters*, which distinguishes naturally imbued sympathetic capacities from the more sophisticated and epistemic forms of sympathy that emerge only when one's education devotes sustained attention to its cultivation. This discussion makes clear why Macaulay asserts that education is essential to "encreas[ing] and elevat[ing]" the "precious gift" that is sympathy so that its moral potential is realized (*Correspondence*, 292).

§1 Macaulay on the Epistemic Importance of Sympathy

In this section, I examine Macaulay's discussions of sympathy as they appear in the *Letters*, as I build the case that there is a critical and epistemic dimension to these discussions that has hitherto been overlooked. In this vein, I will closely examine Macaulay's discussions of sympathy as they appear in L I.xx ("Sympathy") and L II.viii ("Sympathy-Equity"). L I.xx is a dialogue between Alcander, Lysimachus's tutor, and Lysimachus himself, with Alcander serving as Macaulay's mouthpiece. The conversation is prompted by a group of sportsmen chasing a hare. Alcander commences by lamenting that, although "Life should be a continued effort to banish our prejudices and extinguish our vices" (L I.xx; 189), we routinely encounter individuals who embrace both. The sportsmen's delight in "cutting the thread of existence … for [their own] enjoyment" at the expense of the hare's life is a clear example of this (L I.xx; 189). This triggers discussion between Alcander and Lysimachus concerning the conditions that led the sportsmen to indulge their prejudices and vices in their treatment of the hare.

The discussion can be divided into three parts. The first two parts show that there is a difference in the sympathetic responses to the hare from the sportsmen from Alcander and Lysimachus and discuss what could account for this difference. The third part explores how differences in sympathetic abilities impact conduct more generally. To these ends, Alcander first observes that, unlike he and Lysimachus, the sportsmen clearly do not "partake of some of that misery which" overwhelms the hare (L I.xx; 189). This means that the sportsmen do not sympathize with the hare, while Alcander and Lysimachus are clearly moved by its misery.

Wondering what could account for this variance, Alcander quickly rules out a natural difference: all people "are constituted of the same materials," and thus all

must "have the same portion of sympathy given to [them] … by nature" (L I.xx; 191). This establishes that the sportsmen do not lack a natural capacity for sympathy; they share the same natural capacity as Alcander and Lysimachus. In the second part of his analysis, Alcander points out that since no natural difference exists, an environmental factor must explain why the sportsmen fail to sympathize with the hare. He is therefore led to suggest that while he and Lysimachus have been placed in environments designed to develop and expand their natural sympathetic capacities, the sportsmen must have encountered environments that "neglect[ed] to cultivate sympathy" (L I.xx; 191). In the third part of his inquiry, Alcander examines how this neglect leads to prejudiced beliefs and vicious conduct. Here, he argues that individuals whose affective capacities remain uncultivated can never be truly virtuous. Instead, any of their behavior that "carries the appearance of benevolence, *is the mere power of habit*" (L I.xx; 191; emphasis in original).

To understand the meaning and significance of these claims, it is necessary to step back from the content of this letter to comment on two aspects of Macaulay's broader moral outlook. First, Macaulay is explicit that benevolence is the *summum bonum* and "the cardinal virtue" from which all other virtues stem: the "virtue of benevolence, … is of so comprehensive a nature, that it contains the principle of every moral duty" (L I.xii; 112). For her, this means that when one does not possess this virtue, one will not understand the principles of moral duty.

Commenting on the character traits of the truly benevolent individual, Macaulay continues to indicate that because these individuals understand moral duty, they also know to forebear the gratification of their own inclinations when another's wellbeing is concerned, and they seize all opportunities to extend benevolence to living creatures, human or otherwise. Critically, however, she stresses that benevolence can only acquire the "prevalence" which enables one to "render all … [their] inclinations subordinate to it" when one has been afforded the right kind of moral education (L I.xii; 114). From what we have seen of Alcander's comments above, it follows that this education will obviously not neglect to cultivate sympathy. Instead, because of the link that Macaulay establishes between sympathy and benevolence, it would seem to follow that the right kind of education involves cultivating natural sympathy so that one can be brought to understand what benevolence is and to therefore appreciate the duties that issue from this understanding.

Of course, this raises a further related question: Aside from neglecting to cultivate sympathy, how exactly do some forms of education err so as to produce individuals like the sportsmen? Throughout the *Letters*, Macaulay articulates her concern for how "inconsistencies in the present mode of education" lead children to be governed by conventional norms of conduct, rather than to learn to regulate their conduct in accordance with their own robust understanding of moral duty (L I.xvi; 152). Children who are educated according to present modes

of education form the habit of aligning their understanding of moral duty and moral principles with the norms that convention imposes upon them, and they do not typically understand the principles that ought to ground morality. In an important passage, Macaulay explains:

> I shall not pretend to enumerate all the inconsistencies which arise on the present mode of education … I shall only observe, that the powers of the understanding are not sufficiently strong to combat the difficulties which in this early season of life it has to encounter. Hence reason loses its energy, and becomes no more than the echo of the public voice. Hence the task of original thinking is given up; the most absurd prejudices are adopted; the human character sinks into the gregarious animal; every part of morals becomes fluctuating; and customs, manners, sentiments change according to the notions of those in power. Thus virtue, stripped of all that renders her divine and useful, assumes no other form than worldly prudence, and owes her precarious existence to mental constitution and accident. (L I.xvi; 152—3)

Macaulay's point here unfolds in two parts. First, she asserts that children lack the mental fortitude that is conferred by strong powers of the understanding and needed for questioning or resisting the moral opinions of others. Elsewhere, she adds that children are eager to secure the approval of those who surround them (L I.xvi; 149–162). The result is that children are very likely to uncritically accept the opinions of those who surround them as true reflections of what is right and wrong, and they are very likely to behave in ways that they think will secure the approval of those with whom they interact.

The second part of Macaulay's explanation here points to the circumstances under which these characteristics become problematic. When children are surrounded by individuals whose understanding of the principles of morality and their duties to them are shaped by convention, they too are led to adopt an understanding of moral principle and duty that reflects conventional norms. This is problematic because these norms often reflect "public voice", which is inherently flexible, shifting with the whims of those in power and the changing customs and sentiments of society. For Macaulay, exposure to this voice imbues in children a sense that moral principles and duties to them are inherently flexible.[1] This leads to a situation where children learn that they need only to turn to

1. This resonates with aspects of Locke's account of the education of children. As Anik Waldow (2020) has usefully brought to light, Locke emphasizes in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) that the goal of education is to imbue in children habits that make their minds "pliant to the demands of reason" (Waldow 2020, 53). Like Locke, Macaulay emphasizes that adults act as role models when helping children learn to implement moral principles in their conduct.

how others in their society behave, especially to those in positions of power, to ascertain what is morally permissible and how moral rules should be applied.

This context deepens our understanding of Macaulay's claims concerning the relationship between sympathy and benevolence, and her claims about the conduct of the sportsmen in L I.xx. This is because it reveals that when Alcander asserts that individuals whose natural capacity for sympathy remains uncultivated can only *appear* to be benevolent, he intends to draw our attention to two aspects of Macaulay's broader moral outlook. First, precisely because of the neglect to cultivate their natural capacity for sympathy, these men do not fully *understand* what benevolence is and what it requires from them. As she indicates in L II.viii, and as I will discuss below, part of what is going on here is that when sympathy is not cultivated, one cannot acquire notions of the equity of all creatures in the capacity to suffer and experience varying states of happiness. These notions are needed for inclining one to genuine benevolence in the first place. When one is not equipped with these notions, one cannot understand either their duties towards living creatures or the moral demands that equity and benevolence place upon one as a result. Second, because of deficiencies in their education, the understanding of moral principles and their demands that the sportsmen end up with is straightforwardly determined by convention. Since conventional norms are themselves flexible, adapting to shifting sentiments, customs, and manners, this means that the sportsmen's understanding of morality is inherently malleable. This malleable understanding is reflected in their inconsistent and flexible moral conduct. Let us consider Alcander's analysis of the disconnect between the sportsmen's beliefs about themselves and their actual conduct in the following passage to make this salient:

> [The sportsmen] are, I dare say, honourable men too; they believe that they would scorn to effect the destruction of a fellow man with such excessive odds [as those faced by the hare]; and if you were to tell them that it was possible for them in any given situation of power, and prejudice, to use the same cruel violence against one of their own species, they would regard you as an abusive defamer. But this, Lysimachus, is an error; … Man, in the early ages of society, fed on man; and there is no violence which this being, who boasts that he is governed by reason, has not committed against his own species, whenever they have been found in opposition to his fancied interest. What atrocious cruelties has not pride, the lust of power, riches, beauty, and the dire passion of revenge, given birth to; and even where these keen excitements have been wanting, the mere insolence of superiority, and the force of habit, have given birth to injuries similar to those now suffering by this hare. Not to mention the treatment given by some of own countrymen to their African slaves; the

> Spartans, a race of men not destitute of the qualities of the heart, actually hunted the Helotes in their sports. (L I.xx; 189—91)

The sportsmen may believe themselves to be honourable, even establishing rules to abstain from cruelty. However, their failure to grasp notions of equity, combined with the failure to understand benevolence and its demands, is revealed in the cruelty they extend to humans and nonhuman animals alike. Alcander then identifies two ways in which this cruelty manifests. First, he notes that these individuals will commit "atrocious cruelties" toward those who obstruct their desires for "pride, the lust of power, riches, beauty," and they often act on "the dire passion of revenge." In other letters, Macaulay furthers this analysis and provides other concrete examples of this form of cruelty. Speaking of the education of young boys, she tells us that although their education often teaches the precept, 'lying is wrong' and that lying is a "debasement of conduct", young boys will very often *lie* when it suits them to do so, especially if doing so will satisfy their own desires (L I.ix; 84). This is the case even if doing so will bring about the harm of another. Speaking of the situation and education of women, Macaulay tells us that girls are raised to think that "their *summum bonum*, and the beauty of their persons [is] the chief *desideratum* of men" (L I.xxii; 208; emphases in original). Not only is this a conventionally borne 'moral' rule that has nothing to do moral principle in any real way, but it is also a woman's adherence to this rule that will often lead her to engage in "a long catalogue of the meanest of human vices" toward other women with whom she may be in competition for the attention of men and who might thereby stand in the way of her desire to gain a husband (L I.xxiii; 211 *et passim*).

The second form of cruelty exhibited in the conduct of the sportsmen stems from the "absurd prejudices" that they harbor toward certain groups, some of which lead them to believe that honourable conduct is not owed to all living beings. In this way, while the sportsmen claim to abstain from cruelty, their actions reveal that they distinguish people according to their social rank and standing, while also demonstrating their willingness to be cruel to people and animals they deem outside the bounds of moral consideration, such as the hare. Once again, this is displayed in the conduct of all who have not had their natural capacities for sympathy developed, not just the conduct of the sportsmen. This is clear when Macaulay indicates that displays of cruelty are evident in historically and contemporarily accepted forms of violence, racial or species-based, which have systematically targeted certain marginalized groups. Examples of this cruelty, according to Macaulay, can be seen in practices such as the Spartan's hunting of "Helotes" for sport and in "the treatment given by some of our own countrymen to their African slaves" in eighteenth-century England (L I.xx; 190–1). Other examples include the continuing tyranny of men over women,

which occurs precisely because of prejudices that are articulated by the public voice concerning the capacities of the female sex (L I.xxii; *et passim*).

The crucial point of contrast here is with those who are like Alcander and Lysimachus, who can clearly see the problems in the conduct of the sportsmen and others just like them. For, as Alcander and Lysimachus make clear, their own education has led them to develop a "power of sympathy" that has allowed them to "acquire" the "notions of equity" that confer understanding of benevolence; it is clear to them exactly why they must forbear the gratification of their own desires for the sake of the wellbeing of others (L I.xx; 191). Their education allows them to clearly perceive the errors involved in failing to extend equitable treatment to all living creatures – regardless of race, gender, species, or class. This also makes clear to them exactly why the person who does not have ideas of equity is not equitable in their treatment of all living creatures and cannot be benevolent for this very reason (L I.xx; 191). What is essential here is that, for Macaulay, Alcander and Lysimachus are so easily able to see and discuss the errors of the sportsmen. They are able to grasp that all living creatures are imbued with an equitable capacity to suffer and to experience degrees of happiness precisely because *sympathy* has been appropriately cultivated in them. Given the role Macaulay ascribes to cultivated sympathy in enabling our grasp of the ideas of equity that constitute our understanding of what it is to be, and why we should be, benevolent, it is no wonder that she asserts, "the origin of those virtues in man, which render him fit for the benign offices of life … all center on sympathy" and that "all human virtue must derive … from" sympathy (L II.viii; 275).

But before we can pursue this line of argument further, it is important to pause and emphasize that this already begins to suggest that sympathy plays a role in Macaulay's moral framework that has not yet been appreciated. For what follows from these observations is that, for Macaulay, one cannot truly acquaint themselves with moral principles nor understand what these principles demand from them if one's sympathetic capacities are confined to what is naturally bestowed on all human beings. Once this is appreciated, doubt arises with respect to the veracity of the claim that, for Macaulay, one's grasp of and motivation to implement moral rules in their conduct is made possible through a purely rational appreciation of moral principles.[2]

2. Reuter (2007) claims that "[a]ccording to Macaulay, people are able to act in non-virtuous ways and do what is wrong, but she has to explain these acts as deriving from a lack of understanding or insufficient use of reason" (Reuter 2007, 154). For Reuter, passionate experience is important in the Macaulayan framework in two ways. First, passions "are a necessary condition for meritorious virtue: virtue is earned through reason's struggle against passions and appetites" (ibid). Second, having passions is constitutive of human experience: "if we did not experience passions we would not be able to act either virtuously or non-virtuously" (ibid). Either way, Reuter takes it that reason's triumph over the distortions of passionate experience enables one to become

Of course, one might think that sympathy is necessary to morality, just not in the way that I am suggesting. After all, it could be that sympathy is important because it motivates us to establish a moral character that reflects our rational comprehension of moral principles. This assertion grants an important practical function to sympathy without claiming that sympathy is necessary for understanding moral ideas. Iterations of this suggestion can be found in Alan Coffee (2017) and in Karen Green (2020). In the remainder of this section, I'll focus on differentiating my view from these, before turning to develop my position further in subsequent sections.

Coffee briefly discusses Macaulayan sympathy when discussing her republican conception of freedom. For Coffee, Macaulay distinguishes two senses of virtue. One refers to an individual's capacity to identify moral principles through their use of reason and to their willingness to act in accordance with the "dictates of reason" (Coffee 2017, 847). A second sense refers to the dispositions that one must cultivate as features of their character so that this willingness materializes in one's conduct. Accordingly, for Coffee, it is in this sense that Macaulay's concern is:

> [With] the sentiments that *motivate* our behaviour rather than … their rational basis [and she] … identifies certain fundamental dispositions that underpin virtuous behaviour, emphasising in particular benevolence and equity, both of which are necessary for sympathy. (Coffee 2017, 847; emphasis mine)

For Coffee, then, reason leads one to discover that benevolence and equity are moral principles.

One may demonstrate their willingness and capacity to subject themselves to these principles by forming a rule to heed them in their conduct. This person is thus virtuous in the first of Coffee's two senses. But this person is only virtuous in the second of these two senses if their character is such that they are benevolent and equitable in their treatment of all people. Sympathy here only enters the picture when one already understands moral principles as it motivates one to form a character that leads them to heed rationally discernible principles in their conduct.

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virtuous. Sarah Hutton (2007) advances a slightly different approach when she argues that moral principles emanate from God, who, in turn, subjects himself to a kind of necessitarianism "according to which his "moral perfections … subject him to a kind of moral necessity"" (Hutton 2007, 141). Since human nature emanates from God, Hutton takes it to follow that the moral education of children should cultivate a purely rational appreciation of the immutable moral principles and a corresponding understanding that rationality also demands that these principles be followed (ibid., 141—2). Sarah Hutton (2008) and Wendy Gunther-Canada (2003) take similar approaches.

However, textual evidence does not support the claim that benevolence and equity are necessary *for* sympathy, as Coffee supposes. Macaulay is very clear that sympathy gives us *access* to the ideas of benevolence and equity in the first place. To this end, she states:

> If we trace, Hortensia, the virtues in man, which render him fit for the benign offices of life, we shall find that they all center in sympathy. For had the mind of man been totally divested of this affection, it would not in all probability have ever attained any ideas of equity. Yes, it was the movements of sympathy which first inclined man to a forbearance of his own gratifications, in respect to the feelings of his fellow creatures; *and his reason soon approved the dictates of his inclination* (L II.viii; 275—6; emphasis mine).

The first sentence directly states that all the virtues that fit us for public life centre in sympathy. The second and third sentences qualify this claim to tell us that this is because, without sympathy, it is very unlikely that one's mind would grasp any ideas of equity at all, and that without the movements of sympathy that lead one to these ideas, one would not be inclined to act benevolently. This already suggests that Coffee's claim—that the ideas of equity and benevolence are necessary "for" sympathy—cannot capture Macaulay's position. There is, however, a deeper point suggested by Macaulay in this passage: by making the ideas of equity and benevolence accessible, sympathy enables recognition that all living creatures are equitable in their capacity to suffer and provides the inclinations that reason approves of: namely, our inclination to be benevolent toward all creatures. This suggests that sympathy plays a fundamental and epistemic role in morality that cannot be reduced to the straightforwardly motivational role that Coffee ascribes to it.

It is in part because of this passage that Karen Green (2020) has recently conceded that there is a "shift" in the moral philosophy presented in Macaulay's *Letters* from that advanced in her earlier writings (Green 2020, 183). For Green, the "position developed" in the *Letters* places "far more emphasis on sympathy" and in so doing, "approaches more closely to the positions developed by Hume in the *Treatise of Human Nature* or that developed by Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*" (ibid., 183 emphases in original). Accordingly, in the *Letters* Macaulay allegedly concedes to "Hume and Smith that sympathy is a necessary adjunct to reason" in part because "a moral education cannot just be an education in principles, it must work to form the character" (ibid.). This apparent concession moves Macaulay from the argument of her *Treatise*—that reason is all that is needed to discover moral truth and to motivate one to behave in accordance with the discoveries of reason—to the position of the *Letters*, whereby

Macaulay argues that "the path to discovery of [moral truth] … is opened up by sympathy, and [that] the motivation to act in accordance with them is blocked by its absence" (ibid.). For Green, a crucial difference between Macaulay's conception of sympathy and Hume and Smith's position is that Macaulayan sympathy requires cultivation so that it can play this motivational role properly.[3] Like Coffee, then, Green aims to establish that sympathy's importance principally lies in how it enables one to form a character that properly motivates one to comply with the demands that moral principles impose.

There are, however, two critical points of departure between the view that I advance here and Green's. First, while I do not disagree that sympathy is important to one's moral character, sympathy does not merely open a path to truth, as Green suggests. Sympathy is not something that motivationally instigates a process that leads to moral knowledge. Instead, sympathy renders accessible and meaningful ideas of equity and benevolence, which in turn enables us to understand what it means to act morally toward others. It is only once sympathy has provided access to these ideas, and has made them meaningful to us in so doing, that we can be motivated to act morally. The point of difference is therefore that sympathy serves an overtly epistemic function that Green does not recognize.

Second, while Green correctly notes that Macaulayan sympathy needs to be cultivated through education, she does not specify what this process involves, nor does she indicate what the difference is between natural and cultivated sympathy. This is a problem because the term "sympathy" itself is notoriously elusive and used in a variety of different ways in the early modern period, and so it is not as if we can uncover an obvious answer to what Macaulay might mean simply by turning to the broader eighteenth-century context.[4] The suggestion that Macaulay discusses sympathy because of an alleged *concession* to Hume and Smith does not help.[5] For one thing, there is currently no evidence to suggest

3. Green does not elaborate on this claim, nor does she return to it in later writings on Macaulay. Instead, in her most recent work on Macaulay, Green (2023) emphasizes those elements of Macaulayan moral thought that apparently anticipate Kant. Here her focus is on establishing that Macaulay is one of many women who anticipate Kant's views on rationally grounded moral obligation. Partly because this is her goal, Green focuses on articulating that Macaulay is a moral rationalist and does not attend to the role of feeling in her moral framework. In my view, Macaulay ascribes to feeling and sentiment a role that is more robust than even those who stress that feeling plays a positive role in Kantian moral psychology can allow. See Owen Ware (2014), and Alix Cohen (2024, 2020 and 2018) for useful discussions of the role of feeling in Kant's moral psychology.

4. For a detailed discussion of the use of "sympathy" in the eighteenth-century context, see Ryan Patrick Hanley (2015) and Luigi Turco (1999).

5. Hume and Smith do not have identical accounts of sympathy. Samuel Fleischacker (2021) provides a recent and useful outline of the differences between Hume and Smith in this regard. It is unclear whether Green intends to run Hume and Smith's views together here, whether she intends to point out that Macaulay's account of sympathy borrows elements from both Humean and Smithian sympathy, or whether she simply means to draw attention to the fact that Hume and

that Macaulay engaged with Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. For another, while Macaulay's engagement with Hume concerning the facts of England's seventeenth-century history is well-documented,[6] it is not obvious that she *concedes* anything to Hume on the point of sympathy there or elsewhere. Rather, as I will now move to show, Macaulay develops her own position on sympathy in response to *shortcomings* she identifies in Hume's moral framework. As we will also see, Macaulay's dialogue with Hume on this subject is initiated in her *History* and continued in her *Letters.*

§2 Hume & Macaulay

Once we recognize that sympathy plays an essential epistemological role in Macaulay's moral philosophy, a number of difficult interpretive questions arise. In particular, one might wonder exactly what inspired Macaulay to argue that the operations of natural sympathy work to prevent our access to the ideas of equity and benevolence while still stressing that the cultivation of sympathy is essential for conferring moral knowledge in the first place. One might also wonder what operations she thinks define natural sympathy, how these operations differ from other forms of sympathy, and precisely how she believed we should be educated so that natural sympathy is appropriately cultivated.

In this section, I will principally focus on the first of these questions as I lay the groundwork for considering the second and third questions in the final section of this article. As the title of this section suggests, part of the answer to the first question is bound with Macaulay's engagement with Hume's moral philosophy. In order to understand their dialogue, however, we must first step back from discussion of Macaulay and turn our attention to key elements of Hume's moral philosophy.

§2.1 Humean Sympathy and the General Point of View

Sympathy is the bedrock of Hume's sentimentalist account of morality, according to which "[m]orality … is more properly felt than judg'd of" (T 3.1.2.1; SBN

Smith have a shared commitment to the claim that reason alone cannot confer moral motivation. The way Green phrases her point does not allow us to distinguish which of these points she has in mind. Even so, there is no evidence currently available to suggest that Macaulay read or engaged with Smith. Macaulay *was* familiar with the fundaments of Humean sympathy, both because of her familiarity with his *History*, and, as Green argues, with arguments of the *Treatise* and the Second *Enquiry* via David Hartley (Green 2020, 18082). For these reasons, I will not discuss the suggestion that Macaulay conceded anything to Smith.

6. See Karen Green (2012) for discussion of Hume's and Macaulay's stance toward history.

470). In the conclusion to Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume tells us that sympathy is a "very powerful principle in human nature" that has "great influence" in how "we judge of morals," and in how it delivers the "strongest sentiments" of moral approbation or disapprobation (T 3.3.6.1; SBN 618). The operations of Humean sympathy, however, are the subject of much discussion.[7] My discussion here will not be able to do justice to the full range of ways in which Hume took sympathy to inflect human life, nor will I be able to deeply engage with some of the more challenging areas of debate concerning the exact nature and role of sympathy in Hume's overall moral picture. Instead, here, I will focus on offering a broad outline of those features of Humean sympathy that engage Macaulay's attention.

In the *Treatise*, Hume first introduces sympathy as a mechanism that allows us to "receive by communication … [other's] inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own" (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 316—7). In the Second *Enquiry*, Hume tells us that sympathy allows us to "enter into the same humour, and catch the sentiment by a contagion" (EPM 7.2; SBN 251).[8] This form of communication first involves an inference from "those external signs in" one's "countenance and conversation" of a particular passion to the idea of the passion that is the typical cause of these signs (T 2.1.1.3; SBN 317). Having formed an idea of the passion that underlies these signs, the idea turns into that passion so that we share another's emotion. In this sense, Humean sympathy is mechanical because it is responsible for *moving* passions from one individual to another. For Hume, the stronger our relations (by which he means resemblance, contiguity, or causation) with a particular individual, the stronger the effects of mechanistic sympathy (EPM 5.42; SBN 229; EPM App.3.2; SBN 303).[9]

However, Hume also distinguishes what he calls *limited* from *extensive* sympathy, and he indicates that there are at least two ways in which extensive sympathy operates. Limited sympathy is restricted to what is communicated by another through our one-to-one contact with them, while extensive sympathy involves us "extending" this initial "sympathy" so as to form a "lively notion of all the circumstances of that person, whether past, present, or future; possible,

7. See Lauren Kopajtic (2024) for a recent overview of some of the different positions taken by Hume scholars concerning sympathy. See also Donald C. Ainslie (2005) for a rich discussion of the interpretive landscape concerning sympathy, as well as problems that one might identify in Hume's construal of sympathy. See Philip A. Reed and Rico Vitz (2018) for discussions of the various ways in which Hume's moral philosophy is relevant to contemporary moral psychology.

8. The moral philosophy in Hume's *Treatise* and Second *Enquiry* differs in certain key respects. Throughout this section, I freely draw from both texts where sympathy is concerned. See Jacqueline Taylor (2015) for discussion.

9. In the *Treatise*, Hume tells us that we are able to feel another's passion as our own because we have an ever present and maximally vivid impression of ourselves. Accordingly, a share of this vivacity is transferred to anything that is related to us by resemblance, contiguity, and causation. See T 2.1.11.4; SBN 317–8 for explanation.

probable or certain" (T 2.2.9.14; SBN 386). Whether we experience limited or extensive sympathy depends upon the "force or vivacity" of what is communicated in our encounter with the object of our sympathy: "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" (T 2.2.9.14; SBN 386).

In Book II of the *Treatise*, Hume is clear that extensive sympathy allows us to sympathize with a person's future condition or situation. Here the idea is that the more vivid our ideas of an individual's present situation, the easier it is for this vivacity to be communicated along various chains of ideas, like the water moving through the pipes (T 2.2.9.14: SBN 385–6). In Book III of the *Treatise*, however, Hume employs a different sense of the term "extensive" when he indicates that sympathy serves as the source of moral sentiment. Here, we extend our sympathy to the pleasures and pains that those in one's narrow circle experience as a result of their encounters with the individual in question. In this case, it is our sympathy with these others that produces the distinctively moral sentiments of praise or blame, approbation or disapprobation in relation to one's character. When he explains how this form of sympathizing generates moral sentiments, Hume considers an important objection:

> [S]ympathy … is very variable, … We sympathize more with persons contiguous to us, than with persons remote from us: With our acquaintance, than with strangers: With our countrymen, than with foreigners. (T 3.3.1.14; SBN 580—1)

Because sympathy produces bias in our feelings toward people with whom our associative ties are strongest, one might wonder how it could play any desirable role in producing the moral sentiments that are necessary to judge the characters of others. For what prevents moral judgments from varying as much as our sympathies? To block this objection, Hume introduces the general or common point of view, which allows us to consider how others would assess one's actions and the moral character those actions speak to such that we may "depart from [our] … own private and particular situation" in order to arrive at an objective assessment of their moral character (EPM 9.6; SBN 272). But how do we learn to perform this feat? More precisely, what is it that enables us to move from our own perspective of a particular individual to a general point of view so that we may objectively assess another's moral character? Hume answers this by deferring to experience, noting that:

> *[E]xperience* soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments. … Such corrections are common to all the senses; and indeed 'twere impossible we cou'd ever make use of language, or communicate our

> sentiments to one another, did we not learn to overlook the momentary appearances of things and overlook our present situation. (T 3.3.1.16, SBN 582; emphasis my own)

For Hume, then, our ability to adopt the general point of view unfolds spontaneously and evolves as a natural consequence of our immersion in the social world of others. The process that underlies this ability, however, is nuanced and requires some explanation. Drawing on Hume's analogy with sense experience, Anik Waldow (2020) notes that when we look at a tower from far away, it appears to us as small and round. To avoid misjudging its actual size, we must overlook the momentary appearance of this tower as small and round and situate our present impression within a broader scope of experience. Here we integrate past experiences we might have had of this particular tower and of other towers with the imagined or actual perspectives of people who have also had experience with this and other towers in their lifetimes (Waldow 2020, 108– 111). This process of integration allows us to correct the momentary impression of the tower as small and round in order to arrive at an objective understanding that the tower is large. Thus, experience itself at once makes us privy to the need for correcting the momentary appearance of a specific tower and teaches us the process of that correction.

For Hume, a similar corrective process takes place when dealing with persons and their moral characters. Here, the momentary appearance of one's character becomes available to us through our one-to-one, limited sympathizing with them. Because such sympathy is biased, just like the tower whose size we want to judge, experience teaches us again that we must overlook the momentary appearance of this person's character if we wish to judge it accurately. We do so by considering our present feelings towards this person in conjunction with the sentiments occasioned by our previous encounters with them (if we have them), and we integrate this with the feelings, affections, and sentiments of other people who regularly interact with that person. This last step involves extensively sympathizing with the pains and pleasures felt by the individuals within an agent's "narrow circle" of associates, enabling us to see the person's general effect on those who surround them. This multiplication of perspectives allows us to move beyond the transient appearance of a person's character to an apparently objective assessment of their character which our moral judgment depends.[10] But it is once again critical to emphasize that it is our experience and our continual immersion in the social world of others that teaches us to correct our judgements about people based upon the momentary appearance of their character that we find in our interactions with them.

10. See Waldow 2020, 111.

§2.2 Macaulay's Response to Humean Sympathy

What does this context mean for Macaulay? In §1 we saw that, for Macaulay, sympathy naturally moves passions between individuals, allowing us to "partake in the feelings" of those closely related to us (L I.xx, *et passim*; see also L I.i; 12). In this respect she agrees with Hume that our naturally bestowed sympathetic abilities transfer passions quite easily, especially among those closely related to us. Closer attention to the details of Humean and Macaulayan sympathy, however, reveals at least three differences in how they understand sympathy and its operations.

First, Macaulay and Hume give different accounts of *who* can sympathize. Hume emphasizes the similarities between humans and nonhuman animals, arguing throughout his *Treatise* and *Enquiries* that animals can reason, feel passions similarly to human beings, and sympathize (T 2.2.12.6; SBN 398). For Macaulay, however, reason is a "valuable gift" whose potential outstrips "those instinctive powers which nature has bestowed on the brute" (L I.iii; 23). Because animals do not have the potential to reason, she concludes, without much argument, that they also cannot sympathize.[11] To this end, she states that "a cat worries its prey without considering whether she is doing evil or the contrary; but man has sympathy in his nature" (L I.xx; 196). The development of natural sympathy allows man to gain "knowledge of the relations of things" so as to understand "the place of" a "sufferer" (L I.xx; 196—7). Second, Macaulay variously refers to sympathy itself as an "affection," a "tender sentiment," and a "passion" (L II.viii; *et passim*). For Hume, by contrast, sympathy is not itself a passion: it is principally a mechanism through which passions, sentiments, and affections are communicated.

The third and most important difference is Macaulay's charge that Hume offers an *impoverished* understanding of sympathy and its operations. We can distinguish two tightly bound objections: one concerns Hume's account of the relationship between sympathy and moral judgment; the other solely concerns Hume's conception of sympathy itself. Macaulay identifies both as weaknesses in Humean moral psychology in her *History* and develops solutions to these

11. That sympathy cannot occur in a creature who also cannot reason introduces further, and very difficult questions about how Macaulay conceives of the relationship between sympathy and reason. Does this mean, for example, that sympathy, even in its natural, uncultivated state, necessarily *involves* operations of reason? Is it the case that only beings who have the potential to engage in moral reasoning will be imbued with sympathetic abilities? My task in this article is to point to features of Macaulayan sympathy that have not yet been noticed in the extant literature, and to draw attention to how Macaulayan sympathy responds to Hume. Because of this, clarifying the precise nature of the relationship between sympathy and reason is not a task I undertake here.

concerns in her own account of sympathy advanced in the *Letters*. I turn now to these points.

The first few volumes of Macaulay's *History* were initially parsed as a Whig reply to Hume's *History*. However, as the volumes progress, it becomes clear that her work is not consistently politically motivated in this way. Instead, as Shane Greentree (2019) suggests, it is more appropriate to cast Macaulay's *History* as broadly political in the sense that she seeks to illuminate England's moral and political failings and triumphs. Bound with that endeavour is the task of showing that historians such as Hume do an injustice to the people of England when they provide historical narratives that are "dangerously selective" (Greentree 2019, 309). The danger lies in how Hume narrates events so as to elicit the reader's sympathy and approval of the actions of certain individuals and to elicit disapproval and contempt for the actions of others.

In her *History*, Macaulay thus charges that Hume's narrative encourages praise for the political elite and blame for the poor. Two episodes in Hume's *History* serve as particularly good evidence of this. The first is his characterization of the life and death of Charles I. Hume paints a picture of a king with exceptional moral character, one who possessed a capacity for sympathy so developed that he "dissolved into a flood of tears" (H 59.97) upon hearing of the death of an ally and whose execution triggered a contagious wave of sorrow throughout society that was so pronounced that "women" were said "to have cast forth the untimely fruit of their womb" (H 59.131). As James Harris (2015) notes, Hume utilizes "every device at his disposal to excite sympathy for the fate Charles suffered," as he puts the "best possible gloss on Charles's deportment during his trial and prior to his execution and giving the worst possible construal of the motives and behaviour of those who put him to death" (Harris 2015, 347). Hume strikes a very different tone in his descriptions of English peasant revolts, deploying "every device at his disposal" to excite sympathetically occasioned feelings of contempt for some of the leaders in this revolt. He labels those leaders "murderers" (H 17.12), "seditious peasants" (H 17.11), and warns that "insurrections of the populace, when not raised and supported by people of a higher quality are … to be dreaded" (H 17.12).

In her own characterization of Charles I, Macaulay makes plain that Hume's description of the life and death of Charles is gilded by authorial bias. He paints "the character of Charles" as having "qualities of temperance, chastity, regularity, piety, equity, humanity, dignity, condescension, and equanimity; some have gone so far as to allow him integrity" and to "give him the title of a moral man" (*Selections*, Skjönsberg, 26). In turn, such a depiction fails to give due weight to the atrocities Charles committed toward his own people, downplaying "offenses, [such as murder, defilations, and treason which] render him an

unfit object for pity, mercy, and pardon" (Hist. 4.VI; 391–2).[12] This is especially problematic when considered against Hume's comments about the poor more generally. Macaulay not only finds that Hume's descriptions of peasant life are pejorative but also that he fails to feel the suffering of peasants living in conditions of perpetual misery. It is precisely because Hume does not sympathize with their plight that he cannot properly account for the misery of their situation and instead offers narratives which denigrate any attempt they make to improve their condition (Hist. 3.429n).

This touches on a worry in Hume's account of sympathy that often goes without comment among Hume scholars. Hume's understanding of sympathy, and the way in which it produces passions of esteem and contempt, will mean that sympathy works to reinforce existing social hierarchies. In so doing, sympathy helps stabilize hierarchies that keep those in the lower echelons of society oppressed, while simultaneously preventing those in the higher echelons from fully appreciating how the lower classes are affected by such orders. Jacqueline Taylor (2015) emphasizes the classism built into Humean sympathy:

> If we are more likely to sympathize with those who are like us in some relevant way, then we may be less likely to sympathize with —and may feel some form of antipathy, such as envy or contempt, towards—those whom we perceive as different. The differences of rank, although erected by the artifice of government, nevertheless carry with them different expectations for the passions and manners of people according to their station. Sympathy explains our internalization of these expectations regarding respect and deference, pride or humility, and the possibility of contempt, and also helps to familiarize us with the different expectations to which others are subject. (Taylor 2015, pp. 74–5).

As Taylor rightly notes, Humean sympathy leads us to identify more easily the perspectives of those whom we take to be like us and explains why we are likely to have different expectations concerning the manners and passions of people according to their rank and class. This echoes our discussion in §2.1. Humean sympathy operates such that we are *more* likely to sympathize with those most like us, in some relevant ways, and we are less likely to sympathize with those whom we

12. One might here think that in characterizing Charles I as having committed "atrocities" Macaulay is equally biased in her assessment of the King. I take it that Macaulay is appealing to what she takes as established standards and facts about Charles's actions that negatively affected the welfare of his people. This point aside, this does not detract from the philosophical significance of her claims about weaknesses in Hume's moral philosophy, upon which he relies in his *History*. Since this is my focus, I will not enter into discussion of the factual merits of Hume's or Macaulay's historical recounts.

perceive as different from us. If we belong to a higher social class, we sympathize more readily with those of comparable or superior social ranks as ourselves. Conversely, we are less likely to sympathize with the very poor because of how different they may seem from us. Even when placed in situations where we can catch the emotions of the very poor, Hume thinks the resulting uneasiness produces *contempt* or antipathy toward them, whereas the same principle produces esteem for the wealth and power of the rich. Thus he contends that "nothing … can give us an esteem for power and riches, and a contempt for meanness and poverty, except the principle of *sympathy*" (T 2.2.5.14; SBN 362; emphasis in original; see also EPM 6.33n34.1; SBN 248). The point is therefore that even when we find ourselves met with the opportunity to sympathize with those less fortunate than us, this often leads us to harbour contempt or antipathy toward them, whereas when we sympathize with those who are as or more powerful than us, this increases our esteem and feeds into the respect and deference that we feel and show toward them.

Of course one might accept it as an unfortunate yet undeniable empirical truth that sympathy produces and reinforces social hierarchies and produces differences in the passions and expectations that we have toward people of different classes in so doing. Macaulay, however, denies that this is a necessary feature of all forms of sympathy. For, as noted in our discussion of L I.xi in §1, this would only seem to follow when sympathy remains at what is *naturally* available to all human beings. When one's capacities for sympathy are not cultivated, one will only sympathize with those who they take to be most like them, and one will be unlikely to sympathize with those whom they take to occupy ranks that afford them no respect from others. This is partly why she thinks that natural sympathy can prevent us from discovering the ideas of equity, and why she thinks that it is only when sympathy is cultivated through education that one can acquire these ideas. Macaulay therefore provides an important historical precedent for concerns about the classism built into Hume's account of the indirect passions that arise directly from his account of sympathy. This is a point that she initially gleans from the authorial biases evident in Hume's discussions of Charles I and the peasant revolts that took place in seventeenth-century England.

Critically, however, Macaulay also identifies a related but distinct issue.[13] More specifically, by the time she writes Volume Six of her *History*, Macaulay

13. Adam Smith similarly argues that sympathy tracks distinctions of rank. For Smith, "because mankind are disposed to sympathise more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow, … we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty" (TMS I.iii.ii; 60). Moreover, we tend to sketch the state of a man of rank as occupying a "perfect and happy state" which is the "the final object of our desires" (*TMS* I.iii.ii 61). This leads us to feel "a peculiar sympathy with the satisfaction of those who are" of high rank (*TMS* I.iii.ii; 61). Speaking in relation to the situation of Kings, Smith writes: "Every calamity, that befals them, every injury that is done them, excites in the breast of the spectator ten times more compassion and resentment than he would have felt, had the same things happened to other men. It is the misfortunes of Kings only which afford the proper subjects for tragedy." (*TMS* I.iii.ii; 62).

recognizes that Hume's inability to prevent the authorial biases produced by natural sympathy from creeping into his historical narratives signals a deeper problem in his account of the relationship between sympathy and moral judgment. Directly appealing to the "judgment of the candid" reader, Macaulay asks:

> [W]hether … [the Humean way of] sympathising, [which proceeds] according to the … distinctions of power, birth, office, or fortune, with a few individuals who possess these advantages, and the beholding without pain, … the happiness of the community at large sacrificed to the rapacious lusts of interested governors, is more rational than that generous and extensive sympathy which regards, with an equal eye of compassion, the infirmities and the afflictions of all men, and who censures in proportion to the magnitude and the extent of the mischiefs which attend the selfish conduct of the powerful. (Hist. 6; xiii)

Here Macaulay moves from the charge that Hume presents a history stained with clear bias and esteem for the rich and powerful and contempt for the poor to insisting that Hume fails to uphold a historian's fundamental ethical commitment: to be guided by an "*equal eye* of compassion" in narrating historical events. That eye should lead the historian to provide an account of the events of *all* human suffering and triumph, not an account that focuses solely on the suffering of kings, the powerful, and those like themselves. It also involves resisting narratives that gloss over the suffering endured by the lower echelons of society or that produce in readers the same contempt felt by the narrator toward those individuals who attempt to change political regimes that have systematically harmed them.

Hume's failure to mitigate his own sympathetically induced biases in his narration of England's seventeenth-century history serves to show that his general point of view, intended to counter such biases, is not put into practice by him in his *History*. On a charitable reading, the problem may be that Hume does not cast his gaze widely enough when he extensively sympathizes with Charles's narrow sphere of associates; he thus lacks the information needed to form an "objective" assessment of Charles's character. This could be because the limitations of sympathy, as Hume construes it, may prevent him from seriously considering the perspectives of those with whom his associative relations are weakest. Practically speaking, this means that, because his capacities for sympathy remain at the mere level of what is naturally available to all human beings, he can consider only the perspectives of those most like him in terms of class, race, and gender. As a result, he can only seriously entertain the sentiments of those who are likely to agree with him about Charles's moral character when performing the multiplication of perspectives necessary for moral judgment. On

a less charitable reading, Hume may be exploiting the operations of mechanistic sympathy in such a way as to convince his readers of a particular political perspective that he thinks that they ought to hold. Either way, Macaulay takes this as evidence that the spontaneous unfolding of *experience alone* is not robust enough to teach one to adopt a stable and truly general point of view that eliminates the distortions of natural sympathy. In other words, for Macaulay, Hume does not provide us with a moral standard that is strong enough to resist those distortions.

This articulates a familiar concern among some Hume scholars. In particular, like Macaulay, Kate Abramson (1999) stresses that it is not obvious how Hume's appeal to the general point of view can "solve sympathy's variability problem" since "the sentiments we come to have through extensive sympathy would also then vary with whether we resemble those in the agent's narrow circle, whether we are their friends, etc" (Abramson 1999, 337). It thus remains an open question whether Hume's claim about the connection between extensive sympathy and the general point of view can be squared with his claim that sympathy always operates so as to make it easier for us to enter into the sentiments of those who we take to be most like ourselves. Of course, this is not to deny that there are ways to defend Hume from this objection, and Hume scholars have proposed various ways to defend Hume from it.[14] My point here is rather that Macaulay was astutely aware that this is a concern for Hume's moral philosophy, and she asserts that Hume's *History* reveals that his theoretical reflections on how objective moral judgment is made possible through naturally unfurling sympathetic capacities are not supported by experience.

Critically, Macaulay's engagement with Hume on *this* point leads her to articulate a solution. As she implies in the passage cited above from the Preface to Volume Six of her *History*, socially produced bias need not be part and parcel of sympathetic engagement, as Hume's theorizing on sympathy suggests. Instead, Hume fails to see that *natural sympathy* can itself be cultivated into a "more rational" and "extensive" capacity than he envisions. For Macaulay, a more rational way of sympathizing will mean that sympathy itself allows us to regard "with an equal eye of compassion … the afflictions of all men," regardless of their rank or relation to us. It is only when one learns to sympathize in this way that one can deploy their faculties to discern what is needed to compassionately advance "the welfare of society" as a whole (Hist. 6; xiii), for only then will they possess the ideas of equity that are needed to develop an inclination to genuine benevolence.

14. See again Lauren Kopajtic (2024) for a rich discussion of Hume's account of sympathy. See also Nir Ben-Moshe (2020) and Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (1994) for accounts that seek to rectify the issues of the *Treatise* account of sympathy and the general point of view through reference to Hume's *Enquiries* and his essays.

What follows is the account of sympathy that Macaulay advances in the *Letters*, where she stresses the need to cultivate natural sympathy through education. To this end, it is useful to remember our discussion in §1: for Macaulay, the sportsmen are not "incapable" of engaging in "natural sympathy" (L I.xx; 191). As we have already seen, Macaulay understands natural sympathy to operate in much the same ways as Humean mechanistic sympathy in so far as it allows us to partake in the feelings of those whom we deem most like us. However, while natural sympathy allows the sportsmen to partake in the feelings of those whom they resemble in class, gender, race, *and* species, they generally *fail* to sympathize with people and beings whom they take to be unlike them (L I.xx; 191). Their inability to overcome these biases prevents them from attaining the "positive excellence" needed to see beyond and change the "barbarous customs" of society in favour of "a more consistent system of feeling" (L I.xx; 191). And so, it is because their capacities for sympathy remain underdeveloped that their moral judgements remain "founded on partial, and even mistaken views of interest," as their moral beliefs and conduct track conventional patterns of behaviour concerning acceptable treatment of certain people and creatures (L I.xx; 192–3).

That this is a critique of Hume is rendered unambiguously clear when Macaulay suggests that his moral system produces individuals like the sportsmen. She charges that Hume's system yields "inconsistency and mutability" and that errors "hang on his [moral] system, in the same proportion as they hang on every system of morals founded on human sentiment" (L I.xx; 193). Hence she argues that naturally occurring sympathetic capacities must be developed through education so that it can help us achieve the stability in moral judgment that does not occur when experience alone is our corrective teacher. This is why Macaulay argues that it is only when sympathy is cultivated through education that one can be brought to the notions of equity and to a felt awareness of the demands that these ideas impose. If this is correct, then, far from arising as a concession to Hume, Macaulay's position develops precisely because she recognizes that Hume fails to see how sympathy must be developed if the moral enlightenment of society is to take place.[15]

15. This resonates with contemporary debates about empathy. In some areas of this debate, scholars wonder whether empathy is an essentially limited feature of human cognitive life. Those who think of empathy this way tend to think that for this reason it ought not (and indeed doesn't always) play a role in moral deliberation. Here a broadly Humean view of sympathy is sometimes mentioned as rightly drawing attention to the sympathy's inherent partiality. To this end, drawing from Hume and Smith's definitions of sympathy, Paul Bloom (2017) argues that "Empathy is biased, pushing us in the direction of parochialism and racism. While empathy can motivate prosocial behavior, we will see that it can also spark atrocities. Even when it is put to good use, empathic distress can be an ineffective motivator, as it can lead to burnout and exhaustion." (ibid., 24–25; see also Prinz 2011). That this is not a necessary feature of sympathy is exactly the point that Macaulay makes against Hume.

§3 Cultivating Sympathy & Lessons of the *Letters*

We can now answer the question of exactly how Macaulayan sympathy must be cultivated so that it can be deployed to achieve moral ends. As we have seen, the "growth and prevalence" of sympathy "in great measure depends" on one's education (L II.vii; 276). In this section, I will explain how this takes place as I bring the article to its conclusion.

For Macaulay, *natural sympathy* involves the vicarious sharing of emotions of those most like us. While naturally possessed by all human beings, it must be developed to serve a useful role in human life. For this reason, Macaulay is clear that to begin sympathetic cultivation, educators must first aim to expand the scope of beings whose emotions children can catch. They do so by fostering habits "of attention to all the objects which surround" them (L I.iv; 45–6). By this, Macaulay specifically means that tutors must lead children to pay attention to the signs of emotion in creatures in general, including those with whom they have no close relations and who might be very different from them (L I.iv; 45–6). This establishes a recognition that it is possible to sympathize with those very different from us, which is necessary to gain ideas of equity.

Interestingly, Macaulay explicitly recommends turning to nonhuman animals, rather than people, to achieve this.[16] Children should keep "as many animals as they can properly *attend*" (L I.xiii; 125; emphasis mine). As is obvious to anyone who owns a dog or a cat, part of caring for them involves learning to read the signs of their emotions and learning to identify when they are happy, or sad, sick, or well. In Macaulay's terms, such attention not only leads the child to *feel* that their dog can be happy or sad, but it also grants them "knowledge" of the affective nature of their pet that staves off "prejudices" about their affective lives (L I.xiii;125). The child's care for their pets is thus an important stepping-stone to attending to the affective lives of a wide range of creatures including "birds," "hares," and even "worms" (L I.xiii; 121–122). In turn, this cultivates an awareness of happiness and suffering in beings with whom one shares no immediately obvious resemblance or relation.[17]

16. Macaulay follows Rousseau in thinking that negative education is best for children. Commenting on why sympathetic cultivation should start with animals, rather than with people, Macaulay uses the example of how the practice of giving alms to the poor often works to produce pride and vanity in the mind of the child, which are passions that thwart the development of sympathy. See L I.xx; 115—117 for discussion.

17. Macaulay does not directly indicate how the very young child moves from attending to the feelings of animals in a general way, to widely attending to the feelings of people from different classes and walks of life. She does however provide a couple of hints. First, in her outline for what she thinks children should be reading, she hints that tutors need to be very careful to give children histories that present a plain narration of facts (L I.xiv-129–130). Presumably, this is partly so that children can learn about history in a way that is ungilded by current societal bias. Second,

If tutors have instilled proper habits of affective attention, a child will gain broader knowledge of "brute creation," which will enable him "to put himself in the place of a sufferer" (L I.xx; 196–7). Because the child's mind is still developing, they require help from their tutor to be encouraged to do so, and so the tutor must "fire the [pupil's] mind" to "a retrospect of its own capabilities of misery, … [so as to] teach it with the celerity of thought to transport itself into the situation of a suffering object" (L I.xii; 115). This involves, for instance, inviting children to reflect on their own experience of a situation that has caused them harm or misery, to recall what has been learned about a certain being's affective nature, and to put these points together to "transport" themselves "to the situation of a suffering object." Using the example of the hunted hare, Macaulay indicates that the suffering experienced by the hare as a result of "the chace [sic] and other sports of the field" is the same suffering the child would experience were they the hare (L I.xiii; 122). Other examples that Macaulay lists are a child's coming to understand that using worms as bait or robbing bird's nests are situations that not only cause those creatures distress but would be similarly distressing to the child were she in their situation (L I.xiii; 121–122).

Such sympathetic change of place allows one to "acquire the ideas of equity," including that all creatures (nonhuman animals and people of all classes, races, and walks of life) share both an equitable capacity to suffer and an interest to avoid suffering (L I.xx; 197). These ideas incline one to forbear the gratification of their own interests "in respect to the feelings of … fellow creatures," and reason's swift approval of this inclination produces recognition of the moral truth that all creatures are owed tenderness (L II.viii; 275–277). For Macaulay, this corresponds with two desires in the child: (i) to abstain from and prevent unnecessary harm and suffering wherever it may occur, and (ii) to actively extend kindness to all living creatures. Macaulay refers to the former as compassionate sympathy or as "the compassion of the sympathizing" (L II.viii; 280); the latter is the hallmark of genuine benevolence. Both desires must be "improved" so that they appropriately and consistently materialize in our actions (L I.xx; 197). Thus to nurture the child's desire to be compassionate and benevolent and to regulate their conduct in accordance with the rational recognition of the truth that tenderness is owed to all living creatures, tutors must lead by the example through their own conduct. For this reason, Macaulay stresses that tutors must always set the "example both of a negative, and an active goodness in a total

she tells us elsewhere, that the habits which prevent the creep of prejudice, if started properly "in youth" will "continue through life" so long as they are firmly and correctly impressed into the mind (L I.xix; 184). From this, we can infer that when children acquire the habit of paying attention and the ability to catch the emotions of animals, this paves the way for them to do so with a wide variety of people and to recognize that humans who are very different from them can suffer just as any living creature can.

forbearance of every unnecessary injury, and in the seizing of all opportunities to do acts of kindness to every feeling being" (L I.xiii; 121–2), so that a child is led "to an emulation of disinterested actions, which can call its attention to distress without itself" (L I.xii; 115). In so doing, the child learns how to act benevolently and compassionately towards all living creation, forming the more consistent system of feeling that can only arise through sympathetic cultivation.

§4 Concluding Remarks

Of course, the interpretation sketched here raises several clusters of questions for further research. In particular, because this interpretation highlights an epistemic function of sympathy that is independent of its motivational and practical roles, it remains an open question what further implications this has for other parts of Macaulay's moral and political writings. We must also ask whether Macaulay is consistent, throughout her writings, in the claim, articulated in the *Letters*, that reason approves the inclinations set forth by sympathy. These are interpretive questions that I cannot begin to answer here. Nevertheless, this limitation does not detract from the significance of the position advanced in this article, which casts Macaulay's discussions of sympathy, and their place in the history of philosophy, in a new light. For not only does Macaulay ascribe to sympathy an epistemic function, but she does so in direct response to the weaknesses she identifies in Hume's moral philosophy. For Macaulay, an impoverished and uncultivated sympathy is responsible for the perpetual cruelty observable in human action throughout history to present day. This is what leads her to insist that efforts must be made to cultivate sympathy through education. Only then can sympathy enable us to transcend arbitrary socioeconomic and species distinctions and regard all creatures with equitable compassion. By undergoing this educational program, Macaulay believed, human beings could harness their sympathy to become "the gentlest of all animals" (L I.xv; 139).

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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