

Sympathy and projection, and why we should be wary of empathy.

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Abstract

Far beyond cognitive bias, empathy has an inbuilt liability to epistemological and ethical destabilisation that originates in its derivation, which centrally involves projection, from *Einfühlung*. To the extent that empathy can be defended as a concept reliably explaining our knowledge of others' feelings it amounts to no more than sympathy as theorised by Hume and Smith; for their account projection, once properly understood, is largely mitigated. However when projection is complex empathy is intrinsically unreliable epistemologically and ethically compromised in practices involving it. Drawing on Richard Wollheim's distinction between simple and complex projection, and on ordinary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic psychology to characterise projection itself, I show the varieties of its interaction with sympathy in emotional communication. As natural 'propensities' unreflectively employed in concert, projection provokes sympathy, and sympathy responds to projection. I further show how the interaction of sympathy and projection makes up a functional whole in human emotional communication. This theoretical analysis also explains and underlines empathy's harmful potential for practices of investigation, care, and therapy.

1. Empathy

It is agreed that the concept of empathy is over-extended as an explainer of social cognition, in philosophy and the social sciences as well as in everyday life. In this chapter I provide an analysis of empathy which allows us to distinguish two different forms; a simple, reductive equivalent to sympathy and a complex functional unity of sympathy and projection. I argue that one way to construe empathy is indeed in terms of the concept of sympathy we owe to Hume and Smith, within which there is a place for a mitigated form of projection; thus clarified, sympathy can do the all epistemological work claimed for empathy as a route to knowing the mind of another. However, both philosophical analysis and psychological observation show projection to be a more complex and a more functionally complicating mental activity than philosophy and psychology have allowed. Once projection's full psychological range is noted, and its interactions with sympathy appreciated, we see that they make up a functional unity which might be taken to qualify as empathy, but where the action of projection can work against the knowledge of others' emotions that sympathy (or alternatively empathy, as I argue, when it is conceived as no more than sympathy) can deliver. For this reason we should not take at face value either the knowledge that empathy is supposed to supply, or the ethic of care and sharing that it is supposed to underwrite.

Two critical themes ensue; unless the contribution of projection is understood, and critically restricted, it will complicate the epistemology of empathy theoretically, and if it is not reflectively understood in its psychological application it will both interfere with individual

and social cognition and also risk recruiting these to unacknowledged and unethical ends. Claims made for empathy's theoretical contribution to our knowledge of others' mental states and feelings are ill-founded when philosophical and psychological explanations of empathy ignore projection's dynamic nature, its motivational connectedness, and its potential for complexity. In its functional interactions with sympathy, projection disrupts what empathy is supposed to accomplish. My analysis shows how projection compromises empathy epistemologically and ethically.

There is considerable criticism of empathy's epistemological and ethical shortcomings, particularly in the matter of bias (see eg. Prinz 2011, pp 225-8). However, critique is not accompanied by the theoretical understanding of projection needed to provide an explanation for this. In the copious philosophical and psychological literature on empathy very little is said about what projection is or what is projected, and no theoretical account is given about what forms it takes, what its psychological manifestations are, or how it comes to distort, bias, contaminate or otherwise interfere with our knowledge of others' and our own states of mind. However empathy originates from *Einfühlung*, a concept of aesthetics in which projection was conceptually key. When transferred into psychology, *Einfühlung* as empathy was the capacity for acquiring knowledge of another's mental states through projecting oneself, as one's 'ego', into a person or her situation (Merriam-Webster 1967): '1: the imaginative projection of a subjective state into an object so that the object appears to be infused by it. 2: the capacity for participating in another's feelings or ideas'; similarly the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1976) defines empathy as 'The power of projecting one's personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation'. Projection as an act of imaginatively putting oneself in the other's situation was thus what led to the sharing of feeling, although in a way not made clear by empathy's proponents.

Projection should therefore be considered as part of the definition of empathy. This in turn re-approximates the concept of empathy to that of sympathy as found in Hume and Smith, where a concept of projection can be shown to be integral to their account. However, although this meaning-convergence has been noted (see eg. Debes 2015) Titchener's translation of *Einfühlung* as 'empathy' has now firmly displaced the term 'sympathy' despite its notorious etymological miscegenation (Pigman 1995 p243). What has escaped notice is the significance of the conceptual baggage acquired *en route*; the introduction of *Einfühlung* into psychology reworks projection into a mode of active relating to others which involves more than imaginatively representing them. It is this expansion of projection's meaning which introduces ambiguity into the concept of empathy and helps perpetuate the inconclusive debates surrounding it. I do not here offer further intervention in such debates.¹ Rather, I aim to clarify what is involved in projection in its interactions with sympathy theoretically, to show when these go beyond a form of empathy that amounts to no more than sympathy, and to point, critically, to the importance of this for theory and practice. Theorists and defenders of empathy may then apply this critique as appropriate to the particular conception of empathy they employ.

Projection entered the vocabulary of psychology in the 19th century when *Einfühlung*, used the previous century by Herder to designate 'feeling in' as a method of historical enquiry was extended to active engagement with an aesthetic object. Herder wrote, 'Go to the time, the place, the entire history, feel yourself into everything' (Pigman 1995 p.238).² Robert Vischer

adapted this as an emotional projection of the individual's 'mental – sensory ego' into an object (Jahoda 2005 pp.151-63). Through the empathiser's imitating the object's aesthetic features while at the same time following the injunction to project oneself into it, subjectivity would come together with emotional and kinaesthetic phenomenology in an experience of being the object. Practical realisation of *Einfühlung* as a route to knowledge was thus an amalgamation of the familiar phenomenon of kinaesthetic responsiveness with the result of imaginatively re-locating one's subjectivity into an object. However projection, as the feat that achieved this result, was not otherwise explained. When, finally, *Einfühlung* arrived in psychology, imported by Theodor Lipps, this specification of an active exercise of ego-projection into the object introduced an unexplained concept, an underspecified practice and, as I shall show, an unappreciated complication once objects came to include persons.

Philosophy today treats projection as a cognitive act in which a subject attributes her own mental state to an object elsewhere, usually to another person; this minimal sense is that used by simulationist philosophers. Alternatively, though without making any formal distinction, what is said to be projected is the subject's 'ego' or self; the aspect of it through which she apprehends her mental state as hers. This version of projection, recognisable from the *Einfühlung* derivation of empathy and the dictionary definitions just cited, and implied already in Smith's treatment of sympathy, is what lies behind formulations of empathy as the imaginative act of putting oneself in the other's situation in order to 'experience and share' her feelings (Darwall 1998 pp267-8). Here, projection is not seen as a source of distortion; Coplan (2011, p 215) uses 'projects' when explaining 'egocentric' bias as the mistaken attribution of the subject's own feelings as derived from 'self-oriented perspective-taking'; this is distinguished from the properly empathic attribution of responses derived from an 'other-oriented' perspective. In her account the bias does not come from projection itself but from the subject's taking her own perspective rather than the other's. Goldie (2011) argues in contrast that only feelings the subject herself has can be produced in simulation. Although he acknowledges that 'there can be significant non-rational influences' on thinking, he does not consider the possibility that this can affect the simulator herself and contribute to bias in mental attribution. This is despite citing as non-rational influences mood and other 'existential feelings' which 'colour our thinking in ways we are often not conscious of and hardly ever take a theoretical stance towards (except in therapy and the like).' (pp 311-2). For Coplan, one source of misattributed feeling derives from a failure to distinguish self and other for which she indicates a psychodynamic explanation. There is here at least some intimation that it is in the domain of psychoanalytic theory and observation that the more complex and complicating dimensions of projection figure. More explicitly, writing from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Ozler and Gabrinetti (2017 p 36) distinguish projection carried out consciously in sympathy as a form of 'trying to understand' the other, from its unconscious deployment where there is 'contamination of our understanding of the other' in sympathetic relating.

Psychoanalytic theory is where we should look for clarification of what remains unexplained here; what the features of projection are which tie it to the subject's own feelings and mood to produce biased attribution, and which lend it to an unconscious mode of psychological deployment. By thus clarifying the conceptual and explanatory contributions of projection to empathy the two critical themes noted at the outset can be developed. I said that empathy is unreliable epistemologically and ethically compromised, for instance in practices of care, because of the unheeded contribution of projection in psychology. I show how Lipps's

importation of empathy drastically enlarged the domain of application of the concept of projection, and hence the concept itself, through the unintended consequence of active projection on the sympathy of the other. In the light of this, philosophical analysis offers a parsimonious rendering of empathy in which, once projection is disambiguated and we see how the scope of projection should be restricted to the imagination, its potential for producing bias and distortion are mitigated. Under this restriction, all the explanatory work which may properly be claimed for empathy is in fact done by the concept of sympathy as it is found in Hume and Smith.

2. Sympathy

Sympathy, for both Hume and Smith, is a natural capacity. In a well-known passage Hume writes:

‘No quality is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, that that propensity we have to sympathise with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to, our own.....to this principle we ought to ascribe the great uniformity we may observe in the humours and turn of thinking of those of the same nation ...When any affection is infused by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself, and produce an equal emotion as an original affection. However instantaneous this change of the idea into an impression may be, it proceeds from certain views and reflections, which will not escape the strict scrutiny of a philosopher, though they may be the person himself who makes them.’ (Hume 1739 pp316-7)

Since we can have no direct experience of another’s feeling, empiricism dictates we can have no direct knowledge of it. Instead, we come to know it in steps through the causal processes serving cognition and imagination. Sympathy is a mode of the imagination (Hume variously calls it a principle or a power) which inflects causal reasoning by ‘enlivening’ the idea of another’s emotion into an impression which for the subject is ‘an equal emotion as an original affection’. That is, the impression is as vivid as if it had originally been our own experience, and its vividness means we are drawn to label it our own by association to the ever-present idea we have of our self. Hume here explains sympathy in terms of his Newton-inspired conception of the mind, in which all empirical knowledge comes from ideas causally produced from the impressions of experience and subjected to causal reasoning governed by general principles of association.

The impression’s presentation in the mind thus belies its causal trajectory from our idea of the other’s feeling in the situation we observe her in. When Hume says, ‘However instantaneous this change of the idea into an impression may be, it proceeds from certain views and reflections, which will not escape the strict scrutiny of a philosopher, though they may be the person himself who makes them’ he is making a critical point about the reliability of phenomenology, perhaps directed at Smith; while phenomenology presents as simple, the psychology behind it, as described in Hume’s analytic theory, is complex (as a general point this is made by Richard Wollheim). Hume insists that it is analytical reflection which reveals the true origins of one’s fellow-feeling. But he does not explain how the reference to the

other, present in the idea of their emotion, is retained through that idea's enlivenment into our own impression and its capture by the ever-present idea we have of ourself. If it is the impression's causal history, as known to the philosopher, which links the subject's own emotion to the other, we would expect that causal indexation to be represented to the subject herself. Hume may mean that it will be available if she reflects once philosophically instructed, but he does not say so. However, we can offer a partial reconstruction, based on Hume's own view of causation, since it would follow that the constant conjunction of the idea of the other's emotion and the direct experience of the emotion by the subject would produce the belief that the one causes the other, as a 'me too' moment of direct response or mirroring. But here, while the causal connection is grasped by the subject, it connects the experiences of the observed and observer mechanically, not intentionally. Enough has been said by now to suggest that the theory of ideas, when confined by Hume's mechanism, is insufficient as a theory of representation for Hume to tackle sympathy's core puzzle: how one person's mental state can be said to represent that of another person. Hume lacks an account of what represents it as the other's, since mechanism cannot supply the difference between the two in intentional terms.³

However, Hume's analytic reconstruction does provide Smith with a causal explanation to support a phenomenological approach to the puzzle; Smith takes imagining as a psychical technique for manipulating phenomenology, and with it intentional content, when it places us in the other's situation, represents to us what we would feel there, and thereby elicits that feeling in us. Writing of 'our brother on the rack' Smith says,

'It is the impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy. By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.' (Smith 1759/2012 p12)

Although he does differ over the causal origin of the emotion Smith is not so far from Hume in what he wants to achieve. What is at issue here is how the experience of a feeling, necessarily the subject's own, comes to be indexed as another's. Though Hume himself does not carry this through, Smith has resources for marking the difference since phenomenology provides for intentionality:

'It is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his [the other's] sensations.... Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, than by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case'. (*ibid* para 3).

While the subjunctive mood has no phenomenological mode of presentation (and certainly cannot be handled by the Humean model) Smith supplies it with a means to represent a unique context through the device of the 'case'.⁴ 'In every passion of which the mind of man is susceptible, the emotions of the bystander always correspond to what, by bringing the case home to himself, he imagines should be the sentiments of the sufferer.' (*ibid* p13). Smith elaborates how 'bringing the case home to himself' involves counterfactual imagining that is made intelligible by reasoning from counterfactual premises:

But though sympathy is very properly said to arise from an imaginary change of situation with the person principally concerned, yet this imaginary change is not supposed to happen to me in my own person and character, but in that of the person with whom I sympathise. When I condole with you for the loss of your only son, in order to enter into your grief I do not consider what I, a person of such a character and profession should suffer, if I had a son, and if that son was unfortunately to die: but I consider what I should suffer if I was really you, and I not only change circumstances with you but I [were to] change persons and characters. My grief therefore is entirely upon your account and not in the least upon my own. (*ibid* p374)⁵

This passage is sometimes read as the claim that sympathy involves imagining what the other person is feeling, but Smith's use of the subjunctive mood and construction show this to be mistaken. Smith's spectator imagines what, were she to change both person and character with the other, she would feel and sympathy then produces this feeling in her. The spectator's counterfactual self-endowment with the other's 'case' of attributes and situation is what enables Smith to specify that her imagining from the subjective vantage-point from which she experiences her own response to the other's situation occurs under known conditions. The other's case comprises everything that to the spectator's observation and knowledge is individual to him in his character and life-conditions as well as his current circumstances. It is the spectator's ability to embed herself and her point of view in these in order to imagine what she would feel that casts her sympathetic response as answering to the other's character, not to her own. The subject's own feeling is indexed to the other through circumstances and character which she has counterfactually assumed as her own.

For both Hume and Smith, sympathy is a subjective emotional response to another person mediated by a form of imagination in which a matching emotion is attributed to the other in such a way as to produce a belief of fellow-feeling.⁶ The relevant difference between Hume and Smith is not over whether it is the subject or the other who is being imagined; I have argued that for both, the imagining is always centred on the point of view of the subject.⁷ For what follows, the relevant difference is in the place afforded projection by their two methodologies. Although Smith's account more obviously displays a role for projection it is Hume's mechanistic account which allows for projection to have a more complicating role. On Smith's phenomenological approach the intentionality of sympathetic imagining is such that a subject can tutor her emotional response by embedding her point of view in the circumstances and character 'repertoire' belonging to another.⁸ This is an earlier version of what Lipps, following Vischer, urged as projection of the ego into the object; it posits an imaginative act of relocation of the subject's point of view. It takes for granted the intelligibility of such an act and its transparency to the subject. Hume's analysis, while it converges with Smith's in producing the same phenomenological endpoint of a feeling indexed as the sympathiser's own, is a different explanatory project providing a psychological mechanics. As a mechanics it helps supply sympathy with an error theory for explaining bias from propinquity and self-centredness. It is here that projection, too, has the potential to be a source of bias.

Delineating the contribution of projection in sympathy is necessary to mitigate this problem; what follows is a rough guide to places where projection figures, in all but name, in Hume's sympathy.

3. Projection in sympathy

Hume himself does not use the term 'projection' but he provides its classic formulation when he writes of 'the mind's propensity to spread itself upon external objects' (*Treatise* 1.3.14.24) and, (*Enquiry* Appendix 1) that 'taste....has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours borrowed from internal sentiment, (it) raises in a manner a new creation.' What is projected is some quality of internal sentiment; where it is projected is onto objects in the world, and how it is done is by imagining, and so coming to believe, that a subjective mental content is not the subject's own but is located elsewhere. Although Hume does not connect this directly to belief-formation in sympathy, projection can be said to figure in his theory if we take him to be a projectivist in the way that he is about values and causes (Mackie 1984, Beebe 2007). This makes projection intrinsic to the formation of the belief of fellow-feeling in sympathy, as it is in beliefs about value and causation. So it is consistent with Hume's epistemology that projection of the subject's sympathetically felt emotion can be rationally justified, just as with the projection of value; projection is a psychological activity and psychology provides the only justification we can have for knowing the world.⁹ Also, consistency suggests that when Hume claims that it is the philosopher who provides the 'views and reflections' of what happens in sympathy when the subject mirrors the other's emotion, we would expect the role of projection in our knowledge claims about others' emotions to be visible to the philosopher.¹⁰

However, on Hume's view, the psychology is not apparent to the subject herself. While convinced phenomenologically by what she mirrors she remains unaware of the justification Hume's psychology affords for her understanding this to be the other's emotion. This justification precisely resides in the chain of events, including projection, whose operation she remains unaware of as she forms her beliefs. It would be consistent with Hume's thought that this lack of transparency should be reversible however. Since Hume insists (against Hutcheson and the Rationalists) on the moral educability of natural abilities, such educability requires a psychology of sympathy which provides not just for effective intervention into the natural mechanics of social interaction (by inculcating the reference point of the general view), but also an analytic-psychological account available to the reflection of a competent thinker undergoing moral education. When the subject engages in philosophically-informed reflection she can come to understand the mechanisms at work in sympathy, and so in principle could come to see that what she is attributing to the other is her own state of mind. Hume partly anticipates this problem in connection with the need to correct inappropriately strong emotion arising from propinquity, by requiring our idea of the other's feeling to be corrected for the general standard of what is an appropriate response. Waldow (2018) argues that Hume intended sympathy to include the ability to correct naturally for bias in our own feelings due to propinquity and our own self-centredness. Had he considered our capacity to re-arrange the contents of our minds to suit our own self-centred view as due also to projection, he might perhaps have proposed that this too could be naturally be mitigated by moderating our own feelings. However his robust scepticism about human rational capabilities might equally have suggested otherwise to him. In Early Modern sentimentalism the literary depiction of self-conscious affective life includes the ways this can allude to, betray or otherwise register the workings of a mind not wholly transparent to itself (Chandler 2013). In this context the caution which Hume issues about the fiability of phenomenology has a critical consequence beyond his direct theoretical interests. He cautions that what

appears in the mind as an immediate emotion is deceptively simple with respect to the causal history specified in the chain of mediating events leading to the sympathetically produced impression. This chain of events is open to causal influences; one such is the enlivening power of sympathy, but we can expect there to be others, such as the power of projection to alter appearances in the mind by the reallocation of our own feeling to another person.

So far, we see that there is room in Hume's theory for the thesis that projection may be implicated in distorting our perception and beliefs about others, when our own self-centred or unacknowledged feeling distorts the sympathetically-felt emotion that is projected. This potential for bias from projecting unwarranted content is managed by checking the latter against accepted norms to ensure so far as possible a mitigated or restricted projection of feelings already calibrated against the general case. However, reference to the general case does not address the bias which comes from the rearrangement of mental content by projection itself. This theoretical possibility arises once it is seen that projection, as a psychological process, has a more complex role in the mind than philosophy has allowed. In the psychology of the drama, as Ffytche (2015) writes, 'The very example of a scene in which person A [as spectator] contemplates and attempts to empathise with the emotion of person B, should also alert us to the counter-model in which person A distributes the experience of their own emotions amongst *dramatis personae* A/B/C as a way of encountering that emotion. Precisely when we seem able to reflect on emotion from a safe distance, we may be employing ...projection ..of the emotion we are not willing to own directly.' With respect to appearances in the mind, and our capacity to go beneath these, in Hume's psychology projection is antithetical to full transparency.

4. Two sorts of projection

As noted, philosophy treats projection as the attribution by a subject of a mental state of her own to another person. It assumes that imaginative attribution is a form of cognition that is carried out by intention and is transparently available to rationality. This reductive formulation passes over almost everything that is important if we are to understand how projection operates in the mind. In particular, subsuming projection into cognition discounts the contribution of Hume's classic formulation of its primary imaginative character. Yet if Hume is taken to be a projectivist about the formation of certain classes of belief, and if these include beliefs generated by sympathy, then we should assume that this would be the form of projection that he would endorse; the belief about the other's mental state that eventuates from our projecting our own state onto her comes about through an imaginative act.

What now needs to be brought into view is that, while projectivism is an epistemological thesis about the contribution of projection to belief-formation, projection itself is an activity of the mind with a ramified involvement in mental life that both extends far beyond cognition and bears on its role there. Projection's core activity is the re-distribution of mental content, so as to represent in imagination a scenario that services one of more of three dimensions of a subject's mental life: regulation of her mental milieu; complexity in relating with subjects and objects around her; functional interaction with other mental activities, both her own and those of others. Here, I give only a simplified account of the first and second, and more detail of the functional interaction with sympathy.

The regulatory activity of projection is described by Freud; in an echo of Hume, Freud writes that 'internal perceptions of emotional and thought processes can be projected outwards in the same way as sense perceptions; they are thus employed for building up the external world..' (Freud 1913 pp 62-64). For Freud (as for Hume) projection is a natural propensity, but in Freudian psychology there is an affective motivation for building up the world in this way; under the Pleasure Principle the mind operates dynamically to maintain mental tranquillity. Projection is active in psychic defence when our representation of the world carries features we have put there, motivated by our wish to get rid of unwanted aspects of ourself by attributing them elsewhere. This is not solely a psychoanalytic view; we do not need psychoanalysis to tell us what is meant by 'the pot calling the kettle black' or to see that defensive projection can distort our perception of the world. As Jung observes, unwanted aspects of the self tend to reappear 'in the guise of a hostile neighbour'. Here, psychological projection is conceived as a motivated imaginative activity which allows us to re-arrange our representations and see through them the world as we wish to see it, not in the way that others do. As a defensive activity projection, and its resistance to reflective insight, are familiar to everyday observation.

Complexity supervenes when others in the world are not merely affected as a consequence of the subject's imagining but are actively drawn into it by her projection. While consequential effects may be felt or suffered by someone misrepresented in the subject's imagining, and while they may detect, and reject the misrepresentation, complexity as I derive it here from Wollheim (below) introduces a new dimension of projection in which what the subject imagines is realised through actions intended to produce effects in the other.¹¹ What the subject says and does to enact her projection brings about a situation in which it comes true; it appears to her as if what she disowns from her mind has indeed 'turned up' in the other, in his thought or behaviour.¹² I will call this complex enactive projection, and distinguish it from simple imaginative projection; simple imaginative projection produces representations while projection enacted on objects and persons in the world produces 'collusion'.¹³ It is the element of collusion from the world with the subject's enactment which makes her projection complex (and not merely enactive). It occurs when the recipient of the subject's enactment produces a response which sufficiently matches the subject's disowned state of mind. We can put the difference analytically as follows: in simple imaginative projection the imagination adapts the subject's mind to the world by crafting her imaginative representations into beliefs; in complex enactive projection the imagination adapts the world to the subject's mind by crafting her behaviour so as to provoke the world into producing or confirming her beliefs.

5. Empathy as functional interaction of projection and sympathy

Sympathy and projection are two natural psychological capacities which can, and do, work together. Simple imaginative projection both provides for embedding the subject's point of view in the other's situation, in Smith's account of sympathy, and provides Hume's projectivism with a psychological mechanism of belief formation. Here sympathy includes simple imaginative projection as a functional part; this is the limit case of empathy where, with complex enactive projection set to zero, empathy equates to sympathy which does all the work, both conceptual and psychological, of establishing fellow-feeling and 'shared emotion'.

This is not only a limit case but an idealised one since even simple imaginative projection can be implicated in a subject's mental regulation and distort her representation of herself through the disowning of unwanted feelings, as illustrated by Ffytche's example of the drama. Thus, even when empathy amounts to no more than sympathy the regulatory activity of projection can disrupt the well-functioning of sympathy and distort the knowledge of the other that empathy is supposed to deliver. And, as a limit case, it precisely has a limited application in the explanation of social cognition anyway. Once other people enter the picture so does complex enactive projection and, as well, the functional interaction of sympathy and projection itself becomes interpersonal, with the subject's complex enactive projection eliciting a response from the other's sympathy; we have seen that in enactive projection the subject's imagination crafts his behaviour so as to provoke the other into producing or confirming her beliefs. Thus, while the subject may take himself to be imaginatively occupying the other's place so as to feel as she feels, the knowledge he believes himself to have gained by empathy may be erroneous because he has enactively elicited it from her.

This can be seen in the interaction between two subjects: A ('he') who projects his own anxious state of mind into B ('her') where A thereby acquires the unconscious and false belief of its location in B. A acts to realise his wish to rid himself of this state of mind by relating his worries. A may or may not be aware of his intention to arouse B's anxiety: A may believe that telling B about his worries will relieve his own mind; 'a trouble shared is a trouble halved'. What is unconscious is his wish to rid himself of his anxiety by making B anxious. A elicits a sympathetically anxious response in B, mediated by B's sympathetically imagining herself in A's place, where she feels anxiety in fellow-feeling with him. A then detects B's anxiety. A's unconscious wish to relocate his anxiety outside of his own mind is represented as realised by its appearance in B.¹⁴

This defensive mechanism for disowning parts of oneself by realising a fantasy, or imaginary scenario, of relocating them into another is what psychoanalysis calls projective identification (see Braddock 2018). Here, the collusion, or match, of B's response validates the misrepresentation in A's mind post-projection. The change in B produces internal change in A, who does not just gild the world but recruits it, unconsciously, to her purposes. Wish-fulfilling self-deception elides A's unwanted state from consciousness; cooperation by the world functionally fixes the projection to keep it so. Unlike simple imaginative projection, A's complex enactive projection is intractable to reflective correction, because reality has been altered and both A and B have actually changed, in line with A's wishes.¹⁵

The result is not only epistemological obfuscation; it has an ethically significant dimension. A can use his own sympathy to read B's responses, while provoking B's anxiety by further projection. A can in effect titrate his projections against B's responses to control these and therefore to control B. A thus practises upon B's psychology in ways that B may be quite unaware of or, if aware then uneasily, and unclearly. And, finally, not only may B be unaware of these effects, A may be unaware of them too. This amounts to a subtle, hard to detect but effective mechanism of exerting power by acting upon the other psychologically, arousing and manipulating emotions, as well as installing false beliefs which may eventuate in action.

Both in its exploitation of the subject's own sympathy and in functional interaction with that of the other, complex enactive projection compromises both the epistemology and ethics of

empathy. Whether investigator or therapist, A may be in bad faith, motivated not to know what he purports to be trying to find out. Instead of seeking B's true state of mind, he acts so as to find in B what he has himself disowned; he is then unconsciously motivated to keep B in this position through the exercise of psychological power. The conclusions to be drawn are both practical and theoretical. Since projection is ubiquitous there is an inbuilt risk in employing empathy of being epistemologically misled by self-deception or ethically compromised by unconscious motivation. This should make for caution in advocating empathy as a practice, whether in investigation or in therapy. Theoretical understanding of how this comes about is not sufficient to prevent it, once projection's non-transparency is appreciated. Grasp of the theory should lead to the conclusion that only by restricting empathy to its limit case of sympathy, where simple imaginative projection offers some purchase for reflective insight, can there be any prospect of control of the potential for distorting the knowledge of the other that is supposedly acquired.

6. Concluding remarks

I have been arguing towards a distinction within the over-extended concept of empathy between a simple reductive equivalence with sympathy and a complex functional interaction of sympathy and projection, to which some of the broader usage of empathy might correspond. We are now in a position to see what this interaction consists in. Sympathy and projection are complementary components of a functional unity subserving communication and this unity itself can be thought of as natural in occurrence. Sympathy itself is just one part of a complex human capability for affective communication; projection is an equally significant part and like sympathy it is a natural psychological propensity. The two components are analytically separable and may at times operate in a way that presents them as independent; for instance when sympathetic imagining produces fellow-feeling with a fictional or long-dead figure, or when simple imaginative projection contributes to wish-fulfilling scenarios in daydreaming. There can also be a more reciprocal mode of interaction where the communication between subjects is mutual; for instance, with complex enactive projection being used by both individuals in a 'probe and read' way to coordinate feeling and action. Thus, although sympathy and projection can be isolated for purposes of conceptual analysis neither operates naturally in isolation and affective communication is to be explained in terms of their functional interaction.

This points towards a re-assembling of what philosophers, not least among them Hume, have pulled apart; the interactive functional whole that sympathy and projection together make up. This functional unity is a natural mechanism for communicating and reconciling the contents of different minds; the intentional states of imagination, affect and cognition which individuals share, in the sense of communicate, with each other. As such, this unity might qualify as the referent for a broader concept of empathy although to no explanatory advantage. The *explanandum* of human emotional communication needs reinstating from its fragmented state into the working functional whole itself, before can we understand how it works and the ways it can dysfunction. But the analysis given here shows that empathy even when broadly conceived in this way does not amount to more than sympathy together with projection. Once projection is properly understood as able to serve self-deception as well as emotional recognition we have a clearer view of the potential for empathy, and empathising,

to cut both ways in human interaction. This in turn provides a theoretically robust basis for investigating 'empathic' practices and phenomena in the wider social world.

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¹ There is an accepted pluralist *status quo* surrounding empathy; indicative are Coplan and Goldie (2011, p xxxi) who ‘believe that it would not be a good idea to attempt to regiment the term into one single meaning’ but rather that authors should ‘sharpen the term in a way that facilitates the particular topic and stance of the particular researcher and his or her readers’. The different interests served by versions of empathy include: explicating simulation in the ‘theory of mind’ debate; the interest in empirical findings in emotional development and ‘prosocial behaviour’ subsequent to Anscombe’s revival of moral psychology in 1955; the rise of care as an ethical concept in philosophy and social science; speculative theorising of the ‘mirror-neuron’ hypothesis in social cognition research prompted by scientific advances in functional neuroanatomy.

² See Waldow, this volume Chapter 2.

³ Hume’s psychology of sympathy in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739/40) is not revisited nor, consequently revised, in the *Enquiry into the Principles of Morals* (1749/54), nor in his responses to Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). The early mechanistic ‘Newtonian’ psychological explanation of sympathy, while not definitive, may nonetheless be retained as an analytic reconstruction (Postema 2005, Craig 1987) alongside a more naturalistic treatment of sympathy in Hume’s thought (Greco 2012).

⁴ Forrester (1996) discusses the ‘case’.

⁵ Smith is using the subjunctive to talk about a non-actual state of affairs in which the subject adopts the other’s characteristics and situation. The force of ‘person’ as more than a synonym for character is moot; there is no reason to suppose Smith means Lockean identity rather than the set of attributes describing the other.

⁶ Smith and Hume also allow a direct ‘contagious’ sympathy as an immediate response to observing another. Smith suggests that (though does not explain how) motor mimicry and synaesthesia directly engage the sympathetic imagination. (Smith 1759/2012 p12)

⁷ The claim that one can imagine from another’s point of view is, as Wiggins (1976 p 143) remarks ‘a... phenomenon deserving of more attention than philosophers have given it. Is my imagining being Mosesequivalent to my imagining the (impossible state of affairs of) me being Moses..?’ He concludes, ‘the inability to leave oneself out of the picture precisely disables one from achieving anything much by way of imagination.’. Williams (1966/1973 p38) proposes a form of pretence, ‘participant imagery’, as the way to represent imaginative occupation of the other’s point of view but concludes that, ‘at least with regard to the self, the imagination is too tricky a thing to provide a reliable road to the comprehension of what is logically possible’ or, one can add here, that is analytically unambiguous. For recent review of some aspects see Naynay (2010).

⁸ Anticipated here is Wollheim’s concept of ‘central imagining’ in which the other’s character and life-circumstances are part of the ‘repertoire’ the imaginer equips herself with when she imaginatively acts the other’s part. Wollheim also addresses the difference between imagining oneself in a given situation and imagining being another person in that situation. (Braddock 2012, Wollheim 1975, 1984)

⁹ Craig (1987) argues that Hume intends his psychology as the only justification available for the operations of reason, including belief-formation.

¹⁰ See also Waldow (2009).

¹¹ Accusatory speech acts (mis)representing the other as culpable in some way, are a behavioural medium for projection of unwanted affect (Braddock 2018).

¹² This oversimplifies; the individual can be directly affected by socially instituted collective misperception.

¹³ I have adapted complex projection to my topic of interpersonal psychology. Derived from psychoanalytic psychology's concept of projective identification Wollheim's account, in which 'the world' responds collusively, is developed within a theory of aesthetic and moral value.

¹⁴ This explanation in terms of wish-fulfilling thought answers to the ordinary observation of relief at unloading one's feelings while leaving the interlocutor worse off; when egregious it is called 'dumping' one's feelings.

¹⁵ Representing this formally with Gardner's schema of necessary and sufficient conditions for the imagined relocation of a thought we have:

- (i) B sympathetically responds to A's enactive projection: B is in *S*
- (ii) A sympathetically detects that B is in *S*: A is not in *S*
- (iii) A is not in *S* and B is in *S*
- (iv) If B were not in *S*, A would be in *S*

Adaptations to Gardner (1996 p 212): (a) his order of these (non-temporal) conditions changed (b) his 'unconscious sensitivity' interpreted as 'sympathetically responds' and 'sympathetically detects' (c) his 'imagines' interpreted as 'imagines in such a way that what is wished is represented by the imager as being the case'. Conditions (i) and (ii) are material conditions; as realised by sympathy and projection, conditions (iii) and (iv) are then met; these are formal conditions to capture the structure of non-transparent projection.