



Empathy in Sophie de Grouchy (1764–1822)

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The *Letters on Sympathy* engage with Adam Smith's philosophical analysis of sympathy in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. In particular, Grouchy believes that Smith does not go back far enough to give a good account of the origins of morality, that he notes the 'existence, and principal effects' of sympathy but does not go back to 'its first cause, showing that it must belong to all sensible beings capable of reflection.' For Grouchy, the origins of sympathy must be physiological. She traces them back to early infant-hood, and to the physical relationship of a baby and its nurse. The pleasure experienced by the infant from feeding, and the pain from hunger, she says, create the first tie it has with another human being, and are ultimately responsible for the development of sympathy as an infant learns to associate her pain with that of her nurse (Bergès 2015a, 55). As this trigger is common to all human beings who have survived infant-hood, sympathy is also universal.

Primary Sources:

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