Pain, Pity, and Motivation: Spinoza, Hume, and Schopenhauer

by Peter Nilsson (Falun)

1. Introduction

Modern philosophy saw the rise of naturalism within philosophical anthropology. Instead of explaining human behavior in terms of goals and aspirations philosophers began seeking explanations in terms of efficient causes. The point was not to deny that human beings have hopes and desires, but rather to explain these in more basic non-teleological terms. Put in familiar metaphors: Instead of seeking ultimate explanations in terms of future goals that pull a person into action, proponents of the modern movement began looking for preceding causes that push a person forwards.

This paper deals with the theories of compassion, or pity,[1] in two well known advocates of the modern view: Baruch Spinoza and David Hume.[2] A third actor, Arthur Schopenhauer, will also be discussed. Although Schopenhauer takes an explicit stand against the anti-teleological claims of Spinoza and Hume, it will here be argued that he in fact endorses a theory of human motivation that is practically the same as the one of his predecessors.

The reason for focusing on these three thinkers is that they approach the phenomenon of compassion with the same aim, and out of very similar starting-points. All of them attempt to give accounts that explain how compassion can motivate a person to help another individual, and all of them start out from a naturalistic and, to some extent, mechanistic view of human motivation, according to which pain and suffering (or pleasure and happiness) are vital for pushing someone into action. Since all believe that pity can motivate a person to act, all

1 'Compassion' and 'pity' carry different connotations in contemporary English. In this text, however, they – along with 'commiseration' – will be used as synonyms. This is done partly for variation, and partly because both terms are used in the texts to be considered. What Curley translates as 'pity' in Spinoza ('commiseratio') is arguably the same phenomenon that translators of Schopenhauer call 'compassion' ('Mitleid'), and that Hume used both 'pity' and 'compassion' to denote.

2 Regarding Spinoza there are conflicting views as to whether or not he denied, or should have denied, goal-directed behavior in humans, see Lin (2006).

describe pity as in some way linked to an experience of pain. What is interesting to see is how differently they describe this link.

The similarities make it interesting to compare the differences. Because of their similar aims and starting-points, Spinoza, Hume and Schopenhauer all face the same challenges in providing an account of compassion. By comparing their accounts we can see how they meet these challenges in different ways, and thereby gain a better understanding of their separate views.

A secondary purpose of the paper is to present evidence for the claim that there is a development in the views on compassion from Spinoza to Schopenhauer, and that there is reason to believe that this is not a coincidence. There is already ample evidence suggesting that Hume not only read but also was quite influenced by Spinoza's *Ethics* (see Cassidy 1979, Klever, 1993, and Baier 1993). More evidence comes from comparing their views on compassion. As we shall see, there are so many similarities between these theories that it is reasonable to see Hume's as a response to, and improvement of that of Spinoza. To what extent Schopenhauer presented his theory in response to those of Spinoza and Hume is more difficult to tell. It is a well-attested fact that Schopenhauer read and admired both Spinoza and Hume (Brann 1972), but I have found no clear evidence for the claim that he formulated his theory of compassion in order to avoid the objections that can be raised against his predecessors.[3] Even so, there are, as we shall see, so many similarities, and so many crucial differences, among these three theories that it is reasonable to see them as developments in an ongoing debate about compassion and its place in the natural world.

2. Spinoza on Pity

According to Spinoza, "[p]ity is a sadness, accompanied by the idea of an evil which has happened to another whom we imagine to be like us" (E3da18, 191).[4] In this section I shall attempt to explain what this means, and why Spinoza saw the need to define pity in this way. In the course of doing this we shall consider both his views on how pity is caused, and his thoughts on how pity causes us to act in ways that are beneficial to others. Although I will raise some objections against Spinoza's views, the aim of the section is interpretative, not evaluative.

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3 Schopenhauer's private library contained works by both Spinoza and Hume. Marginal remarks from these books are reprinted in Schopenhauer (1968). Unfortunately there are no remarks that pertain to what Spinoza and Hume write about compassion (or sympathy or imitation of affects).

4 All references to the *Ethics* will have the standard abbreviated form: 'E' standing for the *Ethics*; '3' for part 3; 'da' definitions of affects; 'p' proposition; 'd' demonstration; and 's' for scholium. Page numbers refer to Spinoza: *The Ethics*, in *A Spinoza Reader*, ed. and transl. by Edwin Curley. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. Quotations from the *Ethics* are taken from this edition.

Objections are raised for the purpose of advancing our understanding of Spinoza, and of the developments of his successors.

In his list of definitions of the affects, Spinoza then defines pity as "a sadness accompanied by the idea of an evil which has happened to another whom we imagine to be like us" (E3da18, 191). Starting from the back, we can note that the reason why Spinoza adds the clause about someone "whom we imagine to be like us" is to allow for the possibility that we may pity those we do not love or care about.

Earlier in the *Ethics* Spinoza has said that "[h]e who imagines what he loves to be affected with joy or sadness will also be affected with joy or sadness […]" (E3p21, 165). He then said that E3p21 "explains to us what *pity* is" (E3p22s, 166). This last part is clearly an overstatement. E3p21 does not explain what pity is. Rather, it indicates one way in which pity can be brought about. If you perceive that someone you love is sad, then this perception will cause sadness in you. If this sadness is also accompanied by the idea of an evil, which has happened to this person, then, by Spinoza's standards, you will feel pity towards him or her.

But Spinoza also thinks that we can come to feel pity towards people whom we do not love. To explain this he refers to a process of imitation of other people's affects: "If we imagine a thing like us, toward which we have had no affect, to be affected with some affect, we are thereby affected with a like affect." (E3p27, 168) Thus, if I imagine you, or any other person, to be affected with joy, then I too will become affected with joy. And if I imagine that you are affected with sadness, I will be affected with sadness. As Michael Della Rocca (1996: 248f.) has made clear, Spinoza believed that this would happen regardless of whether or not I love you, or care about you in any other way.[5]

The connection between the thesis of imitation and the definition of pity should now be clear. The latter contains the clause about "another whom we imagine to be like us" in order to indicate, and allow for the possibility, that we can pity people whom we do not love. In these cases pity is brought about through the imitation of the other's sadness. Spinoza makes this clear when he states: "This imitation of the affects, when it is related to sadness is called *pity*" (E3p27s, 168).

After making the connection between pity and imitation, Spinoza goes on to prove some corollaries. Number 3 states that "[a]s far as we can, we strive to free a thing we pity from its suffering." (E3p27s, c3, 168) The demonstration reads as follows:

5 For further discussions of the thesis of imitation, and Spinoza's proof of the thesis (which can be found at E3p27d, 168), see Broad (1930: 37f.) and Della Rocca (1996: 247f.).

> Whatever affects with sadness what we pity, affects us also with a like sadness (by P27). And so (by P13) we shall strive to think of whatever can take away the thing's existence, *or* destroy the thing, that is (by P9S), we shall want to destroy it, *or* shall be determined to destroy it. And so we strive to free the thing we pity from its suffering, q. e. d. (E3p27s, c3d, 168f.)

This demonstration holds the key to why Spinoza defined pity as a sadness accompanied by the idea of another individual's evil. Before explaining that, however, I want to consider his reason for defining it as sadness.

Following a claim made by Michael LeBuffe (2009: 206f.), I will argue that Spinoza is forced to define pity in this way due to his view of human motivation. The reason is that Spinoza seems to endorse the view that particular desires, i. e., desires for and against particular things, states or events, are always (or nearly always) caused by joy or sadness. This, together with his view that pity motivates a person to act in ways that are helpful to others, forces Spinoza to define pity as a sadness.

According to LeBuffe (2009: 208), there are strong reasons for believing that Spinoza held the view that all desires, or almost all, arise from either joy or sadness. LeBuffe (2009: 207) mentions one exception to this rule, namely desires caused through imitation of other people's desires. Another exception, which is perhaps too obvious to mention, is man's basic desire to persevere in existence, which, according to Spinoza, is the essence of every human being. With these exceptions, however, it seems to be the case that Spinoza believed that whenever a person desires something, be it a thing, state or event, or the absence of a thing, state or event, then she does so because she is affected with either joy or sadness.

LeBuffe (2009: 206-210) makes a number of observations that support this interpretation. Here I shall only repeat one of these. As LeBuffe points out, there are certain claims in the *Ethics*, that when combined, yield the conclusion that particular desires are, in most cases, caused by joy or sadness. To start off, consider the proposition immediately following upon E3p27 and its corollaries: "We strive to further the occurrence of whatever we imagine will lead to joy, and to avert or destroy what we imagine is contrary to it, *or* will lead to sadness." (E3p28, 169) Hence, if I imagine that something will lead to joy, then I will desire, or "strive to further the occurrence of", this thing, state or event. If, on the other hand, I imagine that it will lead to sadness, I will be motivated to avert or destroy it.

However, as LeBuffe has argued elsewhere (2004), Spinoza does not seem to be content with this. Judging from the ways in which he characterizes particular desires, and aversions, in the *Ethics*, he also seems to hold that in the majority of cases our desires for, and aversions towards, particular things are ultimately based in our desire for joy, and our aversion towards sadness (LeBuffe 2004:

135f.). If I desire a certain thing, then I normally do that because I imagine that it will lead to joy, and because I have a basic desire for joy. And if I desire to avert or destroy another thing, then I normally do that because I imagine that this thing will lead to sadness, and because I have an aversion towards sadness.

However, in these cases I do not desire to preserve or destroy the thing simply because I imagine that it will lead to joy or sadness (LeBuffe 2009: 206). As Michael Della Rocca (1996: 223-230) has shown, the idea that the simple anticipation of joy or sadness can motivate a person to act does not sit well with Spinoza's naturalism, i.e., the project of explaining human behavior in the same basic terms as the motions of inanimate objects. Spinoza solves this problem, however, by claiming that the anticipation of joy and the anticipation of sadness are joyful and painful in themselves.[6] This, together with his claim that occurring joy always gives rise to a desire to preserve and increase joy, and the claim that occurring sadness always causes a desire to remove it (E3p37d, 173f.), allows him to explain how the anticipation of joy and sadness can drive a person into action, without having to resort to any teleological explanations. What pushes a person towards or away from a certain thing is an occurring affect of joy or sadness coupled with the idea that this thing will preserve or augment the joy or the sadness. The affect provides the impetus, and the idea serves as a guide that steers the mind towards or away from whatever it takes to be associated with the affect.

Although Spinoza does not make this claim explicitly, in view of these observations it does seem reasonable to suppose that he was in fact working from the assumption that all particular desires, except those caused through imitation, are caused by joy or sadness. If a person desires a thing, state or event, then she does so either because she is or has been affected with joy or sadness, or because she has imitated the desire of someone else.

Returning to Spinoza's definition of pity, we can then see that if pity is to be able to create a desire to help another person, then it must consist in either joy or sadness. Since it cannot very well be joy, it has to be sadness.

If this explains why Spinoza defined pity as sadness, there is still the question of why he defined it as sadness accompanied by the idea of another's evil. As already indicated, I believe that the answer to this question lies in the demonstration of E3p27s, c3. Recall that this demonstration starts by saying that "whatever affects with sadness what we pity, affects us also with a like sadness". It then goes on to say that this motivates us to do whatever we can to remove or destroy this thing, and so it happens that pity motivates us to relieve the other of his suffering.

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6 This follows from E3p18, see Della Rocca (1996: 227).

The first thing to note here is that Spinoza does not say that we strive to alleviate the other's suffering because it causes us to suffer. What he says is that we do it because the thing that is the cause of the other's suffering is also a cause of suffering in us. So if you are sad because your house has been damaged, and I feel pity for you, then I am motivated to help you, not because your sadness makes me sad, but because the state of your house does.

Spinoza does not deny that someone who has imitated another person's sadness is sad because the other is sad (see E3p27s, c2, 168). The point here is simply that if he is motivated to help the other, then he is so because his sadness – the sadness that constitutes his pity – is rooted in the cause of the other's sadness. This makes it reasonable to interpret 'evil' ('mali') in the definition of pity to denote the cause of the other's sadness, rather than the sadness itself. Seeing that Spinoza is prone to identify the cause of an affect with the idea that accompanies it (see Bennett 1984: 275), the claim in the demonstration comes down to the same as the definition: a sadness caused by whatever affects the other with sadness is, for Spinoza, a sadness accompanied by the idea of whatever affects the other with sadness.

Now why does he say this? Why does he say that pity is sadness caused by, and accompanied by the idea of, the state or event that causes the other to be sad, rather than sadness caused by the other's sadness? My suggestion is that this has to do with his definition of hate. Hate is, according to Spinoza, sadness accompanied by the idea of an external cause (E3da7, 190). Hence, if you are sad, and you take x to be the cause of your sadness, then you hate x. Had it then been the case that pity is a sadness caused by, and accompanied by the idea of, another's sadness, this would have meant that you hated his sadness, and presumably also him as the bearer of this sadness. By instead claiming that pity is a sadness accompanied by the idea of the cause of the other's sadness, Spinoza can avoid this consequence, and instead reach the conclusion that pity entails hating this thing, which, as it would seem, is tantamount to desiring the removal of it. This, I think, is one good reason for him to define pity in this way.

Spinoza is also very much aware of the close connection between hate and pity. In E3p27s, c2 he writes that "[w]e cannot hate a thing we pity from the fact that its suffering affects us with sadness." The reason is that "if we could hate it because of that, then (by p23) we would rejoice in its sadness, which is contrary to the hypothesis." (E3p27s, c2d, 168) This is not much of an explanation. Admittedly, if pity is incompatible with hate, then whatever causes the one cannot at the same time give rise to the other. But why should this process give rise to one rather than the other in the first place? Why, in particular, should imitation of another person's sadness give rise to pity rather than hate? As far as I can see, the *Ethics* does not contain any answer to this question.

We see then that there is a tension in Spinoza's account. When explaining how pity is caused, he describes it as a sadness caused by the sadness of someone else. When, on the other hand, he attempts to explain why pity motivates us to help, he says that it is a sadness caused by the thing, state or event that causes the other person to be sad. He has to say the latter in order to be able to explain why pity motivates us to help. And it seems that he cannot say the former because, by his standards, that would make us just as likely to hate the other as to pity him.[7]

There are, however, also some problems with Spinoza's explanation of how and why pity motivates us to help. I would like to end this section by pointing out one of these. Recall Spinoza's claim that "we strive to free the thing we pity from its suffering". This, I believe, is an accurate description of the phenomenon, but I do not think that Spinoza's explanation is true to it.

The problem is that there is now plenty of empirical evidence showing that compassion is linked to an altruistic desire to help others (see Batson 2011). However, on Spinoza's account we do not help the other because we care about him, or because we have an ultimate desire to see him free from pain. We do not strive to relieve him of his suffering for his sake. The reason we help, or, rather, the reason we act in ways that are helpful to him, is that the thing that makes him sad also makes us sad. This motivates us to act so as to remove or destroy this thing, and so it happens that we act in ways that are beneficial to him. Hence, we do not strive to free him from his suffering. Rather, we strive to free ourselves from suffering, and this just happens to coincide with freeing him of his.

So not only is Spinoza's account of the emergence of pity problematic. His explanation of how pity motivates us to help also leaves much to be asked for. Next we turn to Hume to see how he encounters, and deals, with these problems.

3. Hume and the Desire for Another Person's Happiness

Hume starts out with the same basic aims as Spinoza. He also wants to give an account that portrays compassion as a state connected with pain and suffering, that explains why someone feeling compassion for another is motivated to help this person, and that explains how we can come to commiserate with perfect strangers.

Hume also starts out from a view of human desires that is very much similar to that of Spinoza's. According to Hume, desires and aversions are (in most

7 It is unclear to me whether or not Spinoza actually manages to explain how pity, as sadness accompanied by the idea of an evil, which has happened to another, can come about. It may seem as if he only manages to explain how pity, as sadness accompanied by the idea of another's sadness, can emerge.

cases) caused by pain or pleasure or by ideas of pain or pleasure. Desire is said to be caused by an experience of pleasure or an idea of something pleasant and good, and aversion is said to be caused by an experience of pain or an idea of something painful and evil (T 2.1.1, 275, T 2.3.9, 439).[8]

Hume then finds himself in a situation very much like that of Spinoza. If he wants to explain how compassion can motivate a person to act, there is a strong *prima facie* reason for him to describe it as connected with either pain or pleasure, or a vivid idea of pain or pleasure. And if he wants to stick to the idea of compassion as a state of 'suffering with' another person, he must describe it in a way that connects it with pain and suffering. How then can he meet these criteria? Is there a way for him to meet them that at the same time steers clear of the problems that Spinoza was faced with?

In this section it will be argued that there is. More importantly, I will attempt to show that Hume actually found such a way, and that he did it in conscious response to Spinoza's problems. Although there are some obvious differences between the accounts of Spinoza and Hume, I hope that the following presentation will be sufficient to show that the similarities are so many and so great that the latter's account is best viewed as a response to, and adjustment of that of his predecessor.

Hume's advances lay both in his characterization of what pity is, and in his explanation of how it is caused. "Pity", says Hume, "is a concern for […] the misery of others, without any friendship […] to occasion this concern" (T 2.2.7, 369). The first half of this quotation states what pity is. The latter half indicates how it is and is not caused. I shall explain them in order.

The first part shows the biggest difference between Hume and Spinoza. Instead of characterizing pity as a kind of sadness or pain, Hume says that it is a concern, viz. a concern for the misery of others. As he later points out, this means "pity is a desire of happiness to another, and aversion to his misery" (T 2.2.9, 382). Hence, to pity someone who suffers, or who you take to suffer, *is*, in part, to desire to relieve him of his suffering.

This provides Hume with a very simple answer to the question why someone feeling pity is motivated to help the other. Given that pity is a desire for the other's happiness (and an aversion to his misery), if you believe that you can

8 Hume states explicitly that there are exceptions to this rule. He mentions desires that are caused by instinct or natural impulse, e.g., hunger, lust, and our desire of happiness to our friends. 'These passions, properly speaking, produce good and evil, and proceed not from them, like the other affections.' (T 2.3.9, 439). Another set of exceptions, that Hume does not mention, are desires and aversions caused through the process of sympathy. We shall have reason to return to them later. (All references to Hume's *Treatise* will have the form 'T x.y.z' with 'T' standing for *Treatise*, and 'x.y.z.' standing for the numbers of the book, part and section referred to. Page numbers refer to David Hume: *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed. Ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.).

fulfill this desire by helping him, you will be motivated to help. In this way Hume can also avoid the problem that Spinoza encountered. Even though Hume holds (as we shall see) that pity is rooted in a pain of one's own, since it is essentially a desire for the other's well-being, there is no question of helping the other because it ultimately helps us. For Hume, pity just is an other-regarding, altruistic concern.

This raises the question of how pity is caused. A hint is given in the second half of the definition quoted above: "Pity is a concern for […] the misery of others, without any friendship […] to occasion this concern". Hume adds the latter clause to allow for the possibility that "[w]e pity even strangers, and such as are perfectly indifferent to us" (T 2.2.7, 369). The claim is that pity is neither caused by, nor in any other way dependent upon, a prior interest in the other person's happiness. By adding this clause Hume does not rule out the possibility that you can pity someone you care about. You can feel a compassionate concern for a friend, as long as you do not feel this concern because you had a prior desire for her happiness or a prior aversion to her misery. Neither is the definition intended to rule out the possibility that you can feel concern for someone because you have such a desire or aversion. Hume is perfectly clear that concern can be caused in this way (see T 2.2.9, 382ff.); it is just that he, for some reason, does not want to call it 'pity'. In the *Treatise*, a concern caused by a prior care or interest is instead called 'benevolence'. It is described as "a desire of the happiness of the person belov'd, and an aversion to his misery" (T 2.2.6, 367, T 2.2.9, 382).[9]

How then is the concern of compassion caused, if not through love or friendship? Hume's answer is that it is caused through sympathy. This is a process, or mechanism, through which a person can acquire a passion (or a belief) simply through entertaining an idea of this passion (or belief) in someone else. The idea can be reached either through observing the behavior of the other person, or through acquaintance with the situation that he finds himself in (T 2.1.11, 317; T 3.3.1, 576). What then happens is that the idea is "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 any original affection" (T 2.1.11, 317).

Hume's notion of sympathy has been described and discussed elsewhere, so I shall not linger on it here (see, e.g., Árdal 1989; Mercer 1972; Herdt 1997; Baier and Waldow 2008). For our purposes it suffices to note that the process of sympathy works regardless of whether or not the sympathizer cares for the other

9 Hume notes, however, that love is, strictly speaking, not necessary for benevolence to arise. A more impersonal interest in another's happiness, such as we might have for a business-partner, can also produce benevolence, see T 2.2.9, 382ff. (At T 2.2.9, 387, Hume also uses the term 'benevolence' to denote a concern caused through sympathy.).

person or has any other kind of emotional interest in the happiness of this person. Hume does not make this explicit in the *Treatise*, but it is evident from his treatment of pity: Since pity is said to be caused through sympathy, and since pity is defined as a concern not caused by any friendship, it follows that sympathy does not depend on friendship.

Hume's notion of sympathy is of course similar to Spinoza's notion of imitation of affects. This is also something that has been noted and discussed before, so I shall not dwell on it (see Cassidy 1979; Klever 1993). More importantly for our purposes, Hume holds that pity is always caused through sympathy. This is different from Spinoza who saw imitation of affects as being one of two possible causes. Another difference is that whereas Spinoza believed that imitation of another person's sadness is a sufficient and direct cause of pity, Hume had a slightly more complex view.

As we saw in section 2, for Spinoza imitation of another person's sadness is sufficient for pity. As I then pointed out, this claim is problematic, since, according to Spinoza's own standards, an imitation of another's sadness would be just as likely to give rise to hate. Hume is not only dangerously close to running into the same problem, he is also very well aware of this risk. Right after pointing out that "[t]here is always a mixture of love or tenderness with pity", he notes:

> But it must be confess'd, that this mixture seems at first sight to be contradictory to my system. For as pity is an uneasiness […] arising from the misery of others, pity shou'd naturally, as in all other cases, produce hatred […]. (T 2.2.9, 381)

It is somewhat unfortunate that Hume makes this point in terms of pity. Given that pity is a concern for another's misery it is hard to see why it should give rise to hate. What he should have said is rather that since sympathy with respect to another's pain produces pain and uneasiness, such sympathy should naturally give rise to hate. That is the problem he is facing, and that is of course the same problem that Spinoza was faced with.

This is a problem for Hume because he has a view of hate that is very much similar to that of Spinoza. According to Hume, hate is a sensation of uneasiness that is always directed at someone other than oneself (T 2.2.1, 329). In itself, hate just is a particular kind of uneasiness, but since it is always directed at another person, the uneasiness that constitutes hate is always conjoined with an idea of another. As for causes, hate is usually caused by a separate sensation of pain or uneasiness, which, in turn, is caused by some quality that we take to belong to another person (T 2.2.2, 336).[10] Thus, if you experience an unpleasant sensation coupled with the idea of another person, or some quality in this person, as being the cause of this sensation, then you will come to experience hate

10 Although Hume, in T 2.2.1 and T 2.2.2, writes as if hate is always caused in this way, it is clear that hate brought about through sympathy is not.

towards this person. This is taking Spinoza's definition of hate – "sadness accompanied by the idea of an external cause" – and turning it into an account of how hate is caused.

Contrary to Spinoza, Hume does not attempt to solve the problem by claiming that sympathy with respect to another person's pain cannot give rise to hate. Instead, he openly admits that in some cases it does (T 2.2.9, 385, 387). The way he proposes to solve the problem is by claiming (i) that in certain other cases it produces pity, and (ii) that there is a significant difference between these cases. Put shortly, the claim is that hate and pity are connected with two significantly different ways of sympathizing with another person.

The difference is that whereas sympathy with respect to only the pain of another gives rise to hate, sympathy with respect to both his present pain and the joy that he will experience upon being relieved of his pain causes pity. The latter kind of "double sympathy" tends to occur when the other is the victim of a grave suffering, or when we sympathize strongly with his pain (T 2.2.9, 387.). Thus Hume writes:

> When the uneasiness [of another] is either small in itself, or remote from us, it engages not the imagination, nor is able to convey an equal concern for the future and contingent good, as for the present and real evil. Upon its acquiring greater force, we become so interested in the concerns of the person, as to be sensible both of his good and bad fortune; and from that complete sympathy there arises pity and benevolence. (T 2.2.9, 388)

Now, as we have already seen, benevolence can be defined as a concern for the misery of a loved one (or anyone in whose happiness we have an interest). It is a desire for this person's happiness and an aversion to his pain. Like any other desire and aversion, it is usually caused by impressions of pleasure and pain in the person feeling it:

> [B]enevolence is an original pleasure arising from the pleasure of the person belov'd, and a pain proceeding from his pain: From which correspondence of impressions there arises a subsequent desire of his pleasure, and aversion to his pain. (T 2.2.9, 387)

Pity is a passion "running parallel" with benevolence, in that it also consists in a desire of another's happiness and aversion to his pain. Given Hume's claim that desire is caused by pleasure, and aversion by pain, he is then forced to uphold the view that pity is caused by an experience of both pleasure and pain (T 2.2.9, 387).

It is a testament to Hume's genius that he manages to fit his explanation of pity with his account of the emergence of benevolence. Still, I think one must conclude that there is a gap in the explanation. Even if there is a difference between a single and a double sympathy, it remains to be explained why the latter kind should give rise to a desire to help another person. It would be natural to

suppose that the impressions of pain and pleasure in the sympathizer would motivate him to take steps to remove his own pain and to secure his own pleasure, but why should it motivate him to act with the aim of helping the other? Why should my pain (and pleasure) give rise to a desire to relieve you of yours?

As we saw earlier, Spinoza attempts to answer this last question by saying that whatever is the cause of your pain is also a reason of my pain, and since my pain motivates me to remove this cause, it so happens that I become motivated to act in ways that are beneficial to you. This explanation – if true – would certainly make it intelligible why pity motivates me to act in ways that are good for you, but, since it depicts my compassionate helping as ultimately based in my desire for my own well-being, it falters on that account.

Hume faces the opposite problem. He asserts that pity is an other-regarding desire, and he does not even attempt to explain it in terms of any egoistic desires. On the other hand, his explanation of how and why sympathizing with another's pain (and pleasure) can give rise to this other-regarding desire leaves something to be asked for. What he says is simply that it is an empirical fact that the thought of a loved one in pain gives rise to pain (and the thought of her future relief produces pleasure), and that this pain (and pleasure) subsequently gives rise to a desire to help. He then asserts that it is another empirical fact that *whenever* a person experiences pain at another's pain (and pleasure at his or her future pleasure) the bare similarity between this state and that of the person loving the other, is sufficient to give rise to a desire to help.

The gap that remains is one of which Hume was very much aware. Although he does not comment on it when discussing the relationship between sympathy and pity, he does so when he points to the link between love and benevolence. Here he openly admits to having no explanation for why love gives rise to a desire for the loved one's well-being, or why hating someone gives rise to a desire for this person's ill-being. In fact, he goes so far as saying that he cannot see any reason why it could not be the other way around:

> Love and hatred might have been unattended with any such desires, or their particular connexion might have been entirely revers'd. If nature had so pleas'd, love might have had the same effect as hatred, and hatred as love. I see no contradiction in supposing a desire of producing misery annex'd to love, and of happiness to hatred. (T 2.2.6, 368)

So while Hume accurately depicts compassion as an ultimately altruistic concern for another person, he cannot really make intelligible why an experience of pain should give rise to such a concern.

4. Schopenhauer and the Experience of Another's Suffering

The problem of combining altruism with intelligibility finds an ingenious, albeit somewhat extreme, solution in Arthur Schopenhauer. As will be shown in this section, Schopenhauer starts out from similar premises, and with the same aims as Spinoza and Hume: He also believes (i) that compassion can motivate a person to act in ways that are helpful to others, and (ii) that it does so by being linked to an experience of pain and suffering. What is special about Schopenhauer, however, is that he describes compassion as being linked, not to a personal pain, but to the pain and suffering of someone else. According to Schopenhauer, to feel compassion for another person is to experience her suffering. In this way Schopenhauer can explain why the experience of pain gives rise to an altruistic desire to help another, but, of course, he does so at the cost of claiming that it is possible to experience the suffering of someone else.

Schopenhauer's most detailed treatment of compassion can be found in his *Prize Essay on the Basis of Morality* (OBM). In this book, Schopenhauer sets out to demarcate actions of positive moral worth, and to explain how such actions are possible. Put shortly, his claims are (1) that it is only actions that aim exclusively towards the well-being of someone else that have positive moral worth (OBM: 197 and 198; see also WWR 1: 367), and (2) that it is compassion, and only compassion, that can drive a person into performing such actions.

To see how Schopenhauer reaches the second claim, we need first to consider his view on human motivation. This is neatly summarized in § 16 of *On the Basis of Morality*. Here Schopenhauer presents a number of premises, some of which he treats as axioms, that form the foundation for his argument that compassion is the only thing that can motivate a person to perform actions of moral worth. Understanding these axioms is a crucial key to understanding Schopenhauer's account of compassion.

The first axiom states that "[n]o action can happen without sufficient motive; no more than a stone can move without a sufficient push or pull" (OBM: 198). This is a reflection of Schopenhauer's determinism. According to him, everything that happens in the empirical world – the world that we experience with our senses – is causally determined. For every event there is a cause, and the same holds for human willing and human behavior.[11]

On the Basis of Morality does not contain any explanation of the term 'motive'. In *On the Freedom of the Will* (OFW), however, 'motive' is reserved for a certain type of cause of human and animal behavior. Here Schopenhauer distinguishes between three types of causes: (1) "cause in the narrowest sense of the word"; (2) stimuli; and (3) motives. The first type of causes are mechanical,

11 Bodily behavior is, according to Schopenhauer, an objectification of willing. This means that there can be no willing unless there is also a bodily behavior (WWR 1:100).

efficient causes, that "effect the alterations in all *lifeless*, i.e., *inorganic* bodies." (OFW: 53) The second types, stimuli, are responsible for changes in living organisms considered as living. Thus, sunlight, water and nutrients are the stimuli that cause a plant to grow. Motives, finally, are a type of causes that can only be found in perceiving and thinking organisms. This is "causality that goes through *cognition*." (OFW: 54) A motive is a perception, thought or belief, that presents the world in a certain way, and that causes an animal or a human being to behave in different ways. Interpreted along this line, the first axiom would then say that no action could take place without a cognition or representation of the world as being in a certain way.

The third axiom states another requirement on motives:

> What moves the will is solely well-being ['Wohl'] and woe ['Wehe'] as such, and taken in the widest sense of the word; just as conversely well-being and woe means 'in accordance with a will, or against it'. Thus every motive must have a relation to well-being and woe. (OBM: 198)

Here Schopenhauer is making (at least) three claims: (1) that well-being and woe are the only things that can move the will; (2) that well-being means "in accordance with a will" and woe "against a will"; and (3) that – because of (1) and, possibly, (2) – every motive "must have a relation to well-being and woe".[12]

Viewed in isolation, these claims are certainly open for interpretation. To begin with one may wonder how we should interpret the explanation of the terms 'well-being' and 'woe' that is given in (2). Secondly, one can ask exactly what kind of relation Schopenhauer has in mind in (3): In what way must a motive "have a relation to well-being and woe"?

(2) is most reasonably interpreted as saying that 'well-being' signifies the circumstance or fact that something is in agreement with a will, and that 'woe' signifies the circumstance or fact that something is against it. Put more precisely, the claim would be that well-being is the satisfaction of a will, and woe the frustration of it. This interpretation is supported both by the fact that it makes (2) intelligible, and by textual evidence. In fact, in *The World as Will and Representation*, this is exactly how Schopenhauer defines 'well-being' ('Wohlsein') and 'suffering' ('Leiden'): "We call its [the will's] hindrance through an obstacle placed between it and its temporary goal, *suffering* ['*Leiden*']; its attainment of the goal, on the other hand, we call *satisfaction*, well-being ['Wohlsein'], happiness." (WWR 1: 309)

Given this interpretation of (2) it seems most reasonable to interpret (3) as saying that if a motive, i.e., a perception or cognition, is to have the power to move the will, then this perception or cognition must be such that it either satisfies or frustrates the will. Since (1), on this interpretation, says that it is only the

12 I am now ignoring the curious claim that (2) is the converse of (1).

satisfaction or frustration of a will that moves the will, it follows that in order for a cognition to be a motive, and, hence, a cause of a willing or a behavior, this cognition must give rise to a satisfaction or frustration of the will. Hence, the theory we get is one according to which every act of willing is caused by and rooted in either satisfaction and happiness, or frustration and suffering.

However, looked at more closely it is clear that Schopenhauer takes frustration and suffering to be more basic than satisfaction and happiness. Not only did he claim that happiness consists in nothing but the absence of pain and suffering (WWR 1: §58; OBM: 202). He also held that happiness, as satisfaction of a desire, is rooted in suffering, or the frustration of a desire: "For desire, that is to say, want, is the precedent condition of every pleasure; but with the satisfaction, the desire and therefore the pleasure cease; and so the satisfaction or gratification can never be more than deliverance from a pain, from a want." (WWR 1: 319)

Happiness is dependent upon a pre-existing desire, since happiness consists in the satisfaction of a desire. However, as long as the desire is not satisfied it constitutes want, frustration and suffering. Thus, desire is the root of pleasure and pain, happiness and suffering. When a desire is satisfied it constitutes pleasure, and when it is not it constitutes pain and suffering.

Although Schopenhauer mostly writes as if suffering is dependent upon desire, at one point he actually reverses the relation. In *The World as Will and Representation* he writes, "all striving springs from want or deficiency, from dissatisfaction with one's own state or condition, and is therefore suffering so long as it is not satisfied." (WWR 1: 309)[13] This is surely an overstatement. Given that suffering is dependent upon striving, it cannot be the case that *all* striving is dependent upon suffering. If it were, things would never get started.

However, there is one type of desire that Schopenhauer clearly took to be independent of suffering. This is the will to life, which is the inner nature, or thing-in-itself, of man and everything else (WWR 1: §21 and §54; see also Janaway 1999). Hence, it seems reasonable to assume that Schopenhauer, like Spinoza, is working with a distinction between two kinds of desire: on the one hand, the basic will to life, which is independent of suffering, and which is the desire without which there could be no happiness or suffering in the first place; and, on the other hand, particular acts of willing and striving which are caused by frustrations of the will, and which presumably are directed towards different particular states or events.

In this respect, Schopenhauer and Spinoza differ from Hume. Even so, it should be clear that there is a basic similarity among Schopenhauer's theory of

13 One can note that Schopenhauer here says that all striving springs from 'dissatisfaction with *one's own* state or condition' (my emphasis). As we shall see later, this is a claim that he takes back in *On the Basis of Morality*.

human motivation and those of both Spinoza and Hume. All three claim that what instigates a person's desires, and what motivates her to act, are, in most cases, if not all, experiences of pain and suffering, or pleasure and joy. Since Schopenhauer also shares the view that compassion has the power to motivate a person to act, like them, he is led to the view that compassion is somehow linked to suffering.

Schopenhauer also shares the view that compassion can motivate a person to act in ways that are helpful to others. In fact, he takes the view that compassion is the only thing that can give rise to genuinely altruistic actions, i.e., what Schopenhauer takes to be actions of positive moral worth. These are actions that aim exclusively towards the well-being of someone else (OBM: §15, and 198), or, as we now can see, given the claim that well-being consists in nothing but the absence of pain and suffering, actions that aim exclusively towards the prevention or elimination of another person's pain or suffering (cf. OBM, 200). Hence, for an action to be of moral worth it cannot be aimed towards the well-being of the actor. Similarly, for compassion to be able to produce actions of moral worth, it cannot motivate the bearer of the emotion to act for the sake of preventing or eliminating a suffering of her own.

Schopenhauer then finds himself in a situation closely similar to those of Spinoza and Hume. Since he believes that compassion has the power to motivate a person to act, he must claim that compassion is linked to an experience of suffering. And, since he, like Hume, also believes that compassion can give rise to altruistic actions, he faces the challenge of providing an account of the suffering of compassion, which explains how the experience of this suffering can produce such actions.

Schopenhauer takes for granted that altruistic actions are possible. The question he asks is how they are possible. How is it possible to be motivated to act solely for the purpose of preventing or eliminating the suffering of someone else? How is it possible for me to act solely for the sake of another man?

His first answer is that for this to be possible, "*his well-being and woe* must *be my motive immediately* [*unmittelbar mein Motiv* sein], just as *my own* is in the case of all other actions." (OBM: 200) This generates some further questions: (1) What does it mean for something to be "my motive immediately"?; and (2) How is it possible for another's well-being and woe to be my motive in such a way? Schopenhauer does not provide an explicit answer to (1), but his answer to (2) contains some clues as to what he had in mind.

Here is what Schopenhauer writes in response to (2):

> [H]ow is it at all possible for the well-being and woe *of another* to move my will immediately, i.e. in just the way that only my own otherwise does, that is, for it to become my motive directly […]? – Obviously only by that other's becoming *the ultimate end* of my will, just as I myself otherwise am: by the fact that I will *his*

> well-being and do not will *his* woe, and that I do so quite immediately, as immediately as I otherwise do only *my own*. But this presupposes necessarily that in the case of *his* woe as such I directly suffer along with him, feel *his* woe as otherwise I feel only mine [*sein* Wehe fühle wie sonst nur meines], and so will his well-being immediately as otherwise I will only mine (OBM: 200).

Hence, in order for the other's well-being and woe to be "my motive immediately" I have to experience his suffering. If I experience his suffering in the same way I experience my own suffering, then I will be motivated to relieve him from his suffering in the same way my own pain motivates me to remove it. It seems reasonable to assume that Schopenhauer believed that my experience of my suffering usually (or perhaps always) motivates me immediately. Hence, if I experience another person's suffering in the same way, then this suffering will motivate me immediately.

It should be noted that it could be slightly misleading to speak about something *motivating* me immediately. As we have seen, according to Schopenhauer, *motives* are cognitions, and cognitions alone are not sufficient to drive a person into action. Cognitions can only motivate me, i.e., drive me into action, if they first give rise to suffering and frustration. In this sense not even the thought of my own suffering or my own well-being can motivate me immediately. It can do so only mediately or indirectly, through first giving rise to suffering in me.

Moreover, since this suffering is not cognition, it cannot be described as a motive. Given Schopenhauer's tripartite division of causes, it must instead be described as either a cause of or a stimulus for my willing and acting. Regardless of which type of cause we opt for, it would then seem as if beneath Schopenhauer's teleological theory of human actions, there lays a more naturalistic theory. Despite his defense of final causes (WWR 2: chap. 26), his own theory leads him to a position, which is practically the same as Spinoza's and Hume's.

Schopenhauer does not pay any attention to this issue. He writes as if there are no problems associated with the claim that my well-being and woe can be my motive immediately. This indicates that he has something completely different in mind when he makes this claim. My guess is that he merely means that my experience of my suffering usually and perhaps always is a direct and immediate cause of a desire in me. This could then be compared with what usually happens when I perceive that someone I care about is suffering. In such cases my perception, together with my wish that this person did not suffer, gives rise to sadness and distress in me. In this way the other's suffering causes me to suffer, which, in turn, can drive me into action. In this way, then, the other's suffering motivates me mediately, through first giving rise to pain and suffering in me.

If this is an example of how another person's suffering can be my motive mediately, it should be clear that this is not the way it works when it is my immediate motive. In such cases I do not simply perceive or believe that the other is

suffering. In such cases I do not act because the sight of the other's distress causes distress in me. What happens when the other's suffering immediately motivates me is rather that I experience his suffering directly. I experience his suffering as I normally only experience my own, and this experience of his suffering motivates me as immediately and directly as my experience of my own suffering usually does.

This raises the question why Schopenhauer believed that a person has to be immediately motivated by another's suffering in order to be able to perform actions of moral worth? Why is it not enough if you are motivated mediately or indirectly? As far as I have seen Schopenhauer never explains this. However, the simplest and most reasonable explanation is that Schopenhauer is working under the same assumption as Spinoza, namely that every action aims towards the removal of the suffering, which is its cause.

If we ascribe this thesis to Schopenhauer, it is easy to see why it is so important that actions of moral worth are immediately motivated by another's suffering. If an action is to aim solely towards the prevention or elimination of another's suffering, and if it is assumed that every action aims towards the elimination of the suffering which is its cause, then it follows (1) that actions of moral worth must be caused by another's suffering, and (2) that actions of moral worth cannot be caused by a suffering of the agent. If actions of moral worth are possible, then it must be possible for another's suffering to be "my motive immediately". (cf. Atwell 1990: 100).

Schopenhauer's next step is to claim that it is not only possible, but also quite common, for people to experience each other's pain and suffering:

> [I]t is the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*, i.e. the wholly immediate *sympathy*, independent of any other consideration, in the first place towards another's *suffering*, and hence towards the prevention or removal of this suffering, which is ultimately what all satisfaction and well-being and happiness consists in. This compassion alone is the real basis of all *free* justice and all *genuine* loving kindness. Only in so far as an action has sprung from it does that action have moral worth: and every action that proceeds from any other motives whatever has none. As soon as this compassion is alert, the well-being and woe of the other is immediately close to my heart, in just the same way, though not always to the same degree, as only my own is otherwise […]. (OBM: 200)[14]

14 Cf. the original: "es ist das alltägliche Phänomen des Mitleids, d. h. der ganz unmittelbaren, von allen anderweitigen Rücksichten unabhängigen *Theilnahme* zunächst am *Leiden* eines Andern und dadurch an der Verhinderung oder Aufhebung dieses Leidens […]." (Schopenhauer 1950: 208). Janaway translates "Theilnahme […] am Leiden eines Andern" as "sympathy […] towards another's suffering". A more accurate translation of Schopenhauer's words would be "participation […] in the suffering of another". (This is the way in which Cartwright and Erdmann translate him in Schopenhauer (2010: 213)).

With this account Schopenhauer can make intelligible why compassion gives rise to an altruistic desire to help. As we saw earlier, Hume claimed that my experience of my pain could give rise to such a desire. He did not, however, provide any explanation of how this works. In particular, he did not give any explanation for why this experience should give rise to a desire to help another, rather than a desire to help oneself. By claiming that compassion consists in the experience of someone else's suffering, Schopenhauer can avoid this problem altogether. If it is possible to experience someone else's suffering, and if this experience has the power to motivate me to act, then it is only natural to suppose that it should motivate me to act for the benefit of the person whose suffering I am experiencing. Hence, on this account it is no wonder why compassion should motivate a person to perform altruistic actions.

The problem is, of course, that Schopenhauer makes this intelligible by claiming that it is possible to experience the suffering of someone else. Commentators usually interpret this claim in a perfectly literal sense, taking it to say that we actually feel the other's instance of suffering (see Cartwright 1982 and 1999). One reason for doing so is that Schopenhauer frequently says that compassion is a mysterious phenomenon that can only be explained by recourse to metaphysics (OBM: 201, 218, and 245). Unfortunately, he does not provide an explicit metaphysical explanation, but he does seem to have the metaphysical theory to back this claim up. As is well known, Schopenhauer believed that everything that exists is the manifestation of one and the same will. Although people (and other things) may appear separate and distinguished from each other, this is merely an appearance due to our forms of intuition. In reality, everyone and everything is the same basic will. Hence, it would seem that there is a possibility for me to feel the other's instance of suffering.

However, for all we know, this claim is false. It is not physically possible to experience another person's instance of suffering. And even if it were possible, it is far from certain that this would save Schopenhauer's moral theory.

5. Concluding remarks

To conclude this paper I wish to summarize the main points. I have claimed that Spinoza, Hume and Schopenhauer approach compassion with the same aims and from similar starting-points, but that they, despite this, present accounts of compassion that are significantly different from one another. I have tried to develop a better understanding of these accounts by comparing them, and by testing them against some challenges that are common to them all.

Spinoza was shown to set the stage by arguing (i) that people, in most cases, are driven into action by experiences of joy or sadness, (ii) that compassion motivates people to act in ways that are helpful to others, and, consequently, (iii) that compassion is linked to an experience of sadness. He specified (iii) by stat-

ing that pity is partly constituted by a state of sadness. This, however, created some problems. The first and most important problem is that on Spinoza's view the compassionate person is portrayed as helping others because their suffering and their misfortunes causes him pain. This is problematic since it construes the compassionate person as being helpful for egoistic reasons.

In section 3 it was shown how Hume argued from the same premises, and faced the same problems. His solution to the problem of egoism was to define pity, not as a pain, but as a concern for the well-being of another. This being so, Hume still saw the experience of pain as a necessary condition for the emergence of pity. It is only by experiencing pain as a result of believing or thinking that another person is in pain, that we can come to care for him and be concerned for his sake. In this way Hume avoided the problem of egoism, but he was left with another one: Why should my experience of my pain give rise to an altruistic desire to relieve you of yours? To this question Hume had no answer.

Finally, we saw how Schopenhauer offered a drastic solution to both of these problems. He returned to Spinoza's idea that compassion consists of suffering. However, according to Schopenhauer, it was a suffering of a particular kind. Instead of describing pity as consisting in or being caused by a pain of one's own, Schopenhauer claimed that it consists in the experience of someone else's suffering. This means that, while still being true to Spinoza's starting points, Schopenhauer could avoid both problems: Compassion is not egoistic because it is another person's suffering that we experience and want to get rid of; and given that it is another person's suffering that produces our desire to help it is only natural that this should be an other-regarding and altruistic desire. Obviously, Schopenhauer's theory faces at least one other problem (can we really experience other's suffering?), but it does seem to avoid Spinoza's and Hume's.

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Abbreviations

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OBM	Schopenhauer, A.: *Prize Essay on the Basis of Morality*. In: Schopenhauer, A.: *The Two Fundamental Problems of Ethics*. Ed. and transl. by C. Janaway. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2009.
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