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ABSTRACT: Sophie de Grouchy discusses tragedy, or more broadly, “spectacles of suffering,” at length as part of her theory of sympathy and human psychology. Yet her account of tragedy, centered around an appeal to our “need to be moved,” is elusive, and there has been relatively little discussion of it in the secondary literature. I reconstruct this account by placing it in the context of Grouchy’s general physiological approach to human psychology, and, in particular, her discussion of the development of our faculties. Given this background, we can see the need to be moved as expressing the fact that we require strong emotions, both as adults and in childhood, in order to develop and maintain our capacities for feeling. I also argue that this kind of account constitutes a break with the standard eighteenth-century approach to tragedy, which is governed by the assumption that our experience of tragedy is overall pleasurable.

Sophie de Grouchy on Tragedy and the ‘Need to be Moved’

The focus of Sophie de Grouchy’s *Letters on Sympathy* is her account of sympathy and its role in the development of our moral psychology. Yet at the end of Letter II, Grouchy turns to the question of why we seek out “narratives of the most awful misfortunes and the most heartbreaking situations,” despite knowing that the “sight ... of pain” will itself hurt us (*LS* 72–73).¹ This question opens an extended aside in which Grouchy discusses what is known as the *problem of tragedy*: the problem, so prominent in eighteenth-century thinking about art and affect, of explaining why people willingly engage with art that depicts the suffering of others and so will tend to inspire putatively painful emotions like sorrow, melancholy, pity, and fear.

Grouchy's discussion of tragedy has received little attention from historians of the philosophy of tragedy, and there have been no sustained attempts to reconstruct Grouchy's answer to the problem of tragedy.² In a way, this is not surprising. For Grouchy's answer to this problem is, at first glance, either elusive or disunified or both; she goes on to list a number of possible answers to the problem of tragedy, each ostensibly unrelated, without being clear which of them she endorses or how important they each are. Nor is it at all clear how Grouchy's discussion here relates to the rest of her project.

This is unfortunate. For though it is not immediately apparent, Grouchy in fact offers an account of tragedy that is both novel, systematic, and powerful. For Grouchy, we seek out the sight of suffering in tragedy because it satisfies a deeply held human 'need to be moved.' Though Grouchy does not give a detailed account of this need, I suggest that we can make sense by placing it within Grouchy's philosophical psychology. The rough picture I want to propose is that, for Grouchy, experiencing painful emotions through sympathy with the sight of others suffering plays a crucial role in a healthy emotional life, a role similar to the one played by exercising one's muscles in a healthy physical life. It is such painful emotions that develop and maintain our capacity to feel, or what Grouchy calls the *affective sensibility*. The sight of suffering, therefore, is central to the life and development of the human animal, including especially the development of our sympathetic capacities.

This account of tragedy is unique within the history of philosophy; I know of neither historical nor contemporary analogues. It thus represents a sophisticated and overlooked contribution to the philosophical discussion of tragedy. But it is also distinctive in another way, namely because it amounts to at least a partial break with the conception of the nature of the problem of tragedy otherwise dominant in the eighteenth century. Grouchy rejects the

assumption, common-place in eighteenth-century aesthetics, that our engagement with tragedy is to be explained by positing a distinctive tragic pleasure. For Grouchy, it is not the presence of a special pleasure, but rather the fulfilling of a certain need, that draws us to tragedy. In this way, her account of tragedy also represents an alternate approach to tragedy to the dominant one in the eighteenth century, an intellectual path open at that historical conjuncture but ultimately not taken.

The essay proceeds as follows. Section 2 introduces Grouchy's discussion of tragedy and places it within the context of eighteenth-century discussion of tragedy. In section 2, I reconstruct Grouchy's account of the need to be moved by drawing on her general account of the development of both our bodily and moral faculties. In section 3, I explain why Grouchy thinks that the sight of suffering, as a source of fellow-feeling with pain, is particularly important for satisfying this need. I argue for the systematicity of Grouchy's account in section 4, where I show that two of the other accounts of tragedy Grouchy presents in Letter II are in fact best understood as part of her account of the need to be moved, rather than as independent explanations of our engagement with tragedy. Finally, in section 5, I argue that Grouchy's account of the need to be moved breaks with what I call the hedonic conception of tragedy, both at the level of how it characterizes the experience of tragedy and at the level of what it takes to be philosophically significant about tragedy.

1. The Problem of Tragedy in Grouchy's *Letters on Sympathy*

1.1. Tragedy in Eighteenth Century Philosophy

To understand Grouchy's discussion of tragedy, it is helpful to place it within the context of eighteenth-century discussion of tragedy more generally.

Grouchy's account of tragedy draws from two distinct eighteenth-century ways of understanding what is philosophically distinctive about tragedy. One prominent tradition, perhaps most notably exemplified by the French tragedian Jean Racine, focuses on the *ethical* function of tragedy. In the preface to *Phèdre*, Racine defends tragedy as a "school where virtue was no less well taught than in the schools of the philosophers." Here, tragedy accomplishes this educational function by way of showing the appeal of virtue and the odiousness of vice; as Racine puts it of *Phèdre*, it is a play in which virtue is "celebrated" and "vice is everywhere painted in colours which render its deformity recognizable and hated" ("Preface," 23).

More well-known to contemporary philosophers, perhaps, is the tradition that focuses on the *affective* character of tragedy. In this tradition, what is distinctive about tragedy is the fact that, in engaging with tragedy, we seek out what is ostensibly painful to us, namely the sight of others suffering. For the participants in this tradition, which include both French philosophers like the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos and Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, as well as British ones like Edmund Burke, Joseph Addison, and David Hume, an account of tragedy revolves around solving *the problem of tragedy*: the problem of explaining why we are so pulled to the sight of others suffering.

The standard way of understanding the problem of tragedy, here, centers around our *motivations* in engaging with tragedy, and the way such motivations connect to pleasure and pain. In general, people do not seek out overall painful experiences. But people *do* seek out tragedy, which has its core something putatively painful: the sight of others suffering. A solution to the problem of tragedy is an account of tragedy that resolves this tension. It must therefore fall into one of two camps: it either shows that our experience of tragedy is in fact overall

pleasurable, or it gives some explanation of why we might in this case seek out overall painful experiences.³

Eighteenth-century writers propose a variety of such solutions. Some focus on our distance from the suffering depicted in tragedy. Fontenelle, for example, argues that the pain of sorrow is diminished and softened into pleasure by the thought that the suffering we witness is fictional (OT 260). By contrast, others argue that ordinarily painful feelings can, in certain circumstances, result in an overall pleasurable experience. On Du Bos's account, the pain we feel in response to the sights of others suffering alleviates our boredom and thereby brings us a pleasurable feeling of relief (*Reflections*, 106–110). On Hume's account, the craftsmanship of the tragic artwork converts normally painful impressions like sorrow into pleasurable ones (OT 262).⁴ Likewise, though Adam Smith does not directly give an account of the problem of tragedy, some commentators have seen an account of tragedy in his thought that mutual sympathy is itself pleasurable; in sympathizing with the pain of the tragic hero, I feel the pleasure of a kind of human solidarity.⁵

All of these solutions fall into the first of the two camps introduced above; they explain our engagement with tragedy by claiming that our experience of tragedy, despite appearances, is overall pleasurable. This is not simply a common feature of how these philosophers propose to solve the problem of tragedy; it is part of how they understand the problem in the first instance. So, for example, Addison puts the problem of tragedy as the problem of explaining “how it comes to pass, that we should take delight in being terrified or dejected” by an artistic representation, and he frames his answer as a reflection on “the Nature of this Pleasure” (“A New Principle,” 568). Du Bos, too, introduces his enquiry into tragedy as an attempt to “explain the origin of the pleasure” we take in artworks, even though “the actions depicted in poetry or

painting would have made the humanity in us suffer, if we had really seen them” (*Reflections*, 94). Most explicitly, perhaps, Hume claims that the problem of tragedy just is the problem of explaining the “unaccountable pleasure” that the viewers of a good tragedy find in “sorrow, terror, anxiety, and other passions, which are in themselves disagreeable” (OT 258). In all of these cases, there is a shared assumption that the problem of tragedy is to be solved by showing that the experience of tragedy is overall pleasurable, and in particular by positing a pleasure distinctive to the experience of tragedy.⁶

I call this approach to the problem of tragedy the *hedonic conception of the problem of tragedy*. Behind it are two principal sources. The first is a background picture of human motivation, shared by writers like Hume, Burke, and Addison, on which we are primarily or exclusively motivated by the prospect of getting pleasure and avoiding pain.⁷ This picture does not strictly *imply* that we would never seek out overall painful experiences, since we might still do so to avert even greater pain or for the sake of some future pleasure. But it does leave relatively few resources for explaining why we would seek out overall painful experiences and so naturally motivates the hedonic conception. The second source is a picture of aesthetic value on which the value of a work of art lies in its ability to afford us pleasurable experiences. On this picture, then, insofar as there is aesthetic merit in tragedy, it must lie in some pleasure contained in the experience of tragedy.

1.2. Pluralism and Systematicity in Grouchy’s Account of Tragedy

Grouchy introduces her discussion of tragedy by addressing her interlocutor with a question:

Perhaps you have asked yourself, my dear C***, why, in spite of the painful impression diffused by the sight or the idea of pain in our organs, we like to recall

the pains we have experienced, those we have witnessed; and not being satisfied with the emotions we obtain from real troubles, we seek new ones in the narratives of the most awful misfortunes and the most heartbreaking situations, born only from imagination. Why do all the affectionate and lively souls, on whom the impression of pain is more unwavering and stronger, like to revive this impression by seeking out those who are unhappy, listening closely to the very details of their misfortune, reading novels and tragedies. (*LS* 72–73)

Grouchy's question here is clearly a version of the problem of tragedy, as discussed by Du Bos and Hume; her concern is to explain why, given the painful nature of tragedy, we nonetheless seek it out. But it is already clear from Grouchy's framing of the question that she sees the phenomenon to be explained as broader than many earlier writers. As Spyridon Tegos has observed, Grouchy's notion of tragedy includes both artistic representations of calamities and real-life ones; for her, the puzzling phenomenon includes not just that we read "novels and tragedies," but also that we tend to recall past pains, and that we seek out "those who are unhappy."⁸ I will therefore use 'tragedy' as a shorthand for the sight of suffering generally rather than tragic artworks specifically, unless explicitly noted.

Yet even further, Grouchy does not limit her discussion to suffering that follows a specific narrative structure. Many tragedians and philosophers of tragedy in the eighteenth-century, such as Racine, see tragedy as constrained by rigid rules, deriving from Aristotle's *Poetics*, concerning plot and character. On these rules, tragedy, roughly, must be concerned with reversals in fortune befalling characters of ordinary virtue and high status. But Grouchy seems to place no such restrictions on tragedy; for her, the general question is why we seek out "the sight" or "idea" of pain, or what she elsewhere calls "the spectacle ... of suffering" (*le spectacle des*

douleurs) given how much such spectacles pain us (*LS* 91). The relatively small discussion of Grouchy's account of tragedy in the literature has mostly focused on her account, in Letter IV, of why we pity kings.⁹ For this reason, these accounts, despite their sophistication and ingenuity, apply only to a more restricted set of phenomena: namely, our responses to the suffering of those of high status.¹⁰ But an account of tragedy, for Grouchy, would have to be one that answers the question of why we seek out spectacles of suffering as such.

On first blush, it is not clear that Grouchy has an account of tragedy in this sense. In response to the problem posed by our attraction to the spectacle of suffering, Grouchy offers a list of several explanations of why we willingly engage with such spectacles. For example, Grouchy thinks that the habitual repetition of the same impressions leads to boredom, which she takes it is a particularly unpleasant state, "among the cruelest of sicknesses which can inflict the human heart" (*LS* 74–75). We thus desire novel emotions in order to prevent ourselves from succumbing to boredom. This desire explains some of our engagements with tragedy; we prefer the distraction of sorrow or misery inspired by tragic art to boredom (*LS* 74). I call this the 'relief from boredom account of tragedy.'

Similarly, Grouchy proposes, as explanations for our engagement with tragedy, the fact that we have a desire to "concern ourselves with others' trouble" (the concern account), the fact that we have a desire to make our ideas about the suffering of others more distinct (the curiosity account), and finally, the fact that the pleasure we take in the tragedy will "counterbalance," "erase," and "outlast" the painful sensations (the predominance of pleasure account) (*LS* 73–76). Though Grouchy does not name any philosophers here, several of these explanations are clearly versions of the canonical solutions of the problem of tragedy I outlined earlier. The relief from boredom account, for example, is closely related to Du Bos's solution to the problem of tragedy

in terms of the pleasurable alleviation of boredom. The thought that our pleasure in the artistry of the tragedy erases the painful sensations, likewise, is similar to Hume's conversion account of tragedy.

For this reason, it is tempting to think that what is primarily novel about Grouchy's response to the problem of tragedy, beyond her broad conception of the phenomena that raise this problem, is her pluralism: that is, that she accepts several, complementary explanations of our responses to tragedy, each of which may not apply to all cases of engagement with tragedy.¹¹ Such pluralism stands in contrast to thinkers like Hume or Du Bos, who seem to take their explanations of tragedy as alternatives and thus rivals. On their accounts, there is a single principle or feature of tragic art which explains all our engagements with it. This assumption is evident, for example, in Hume's argument against Fontenelle's appeal to fictionality as the explanation of tragic pleasure. Hume's objection to this account is that we also find pleasure in tragic art that is non-fictional (OT 260). But this objection only succeeds on the assumption that an account of our engagement with tragic art must explain all instances of engagement with tragedy. By contrast, Grouchy appears to accept explanations of our engagement with tragedy which only apply to some cases of tragedy.¹²

Yet there are also signs of a more systematic strand in Grouchy's discussion. After introducing the problem of tragedy, Grouchy sums it up by claiming that we have a "need to consume all the power of [our] sensibility so [we] may enjoy it" (*LS* 75). She then goes on to introduce the various partial solutions to the problem of tragedy by saying that there are "several reasons for this need" (75). This suggests that Grouchy does not in fact see the various explanations as distinct, but rather as parts of the account of a single, central need that explains our engagement with tragedy. Indeed, Grouchy does go on to identify a particular need as the

most “potent, active, and persistent” cause of our engagement with tragedy, namely what she calls the “need to be moved [*besoin d’être ému*]” (LS 75).

The first interpretative hypothesis I want to defend in this essay is that, rather than simply being a throw-away remark, this appeal to our need to be moved represents an account of tragedy that is both *substantive* and *novel*.¹³ Moreover, once we understand the nature of the need to be moved, we are also in a position to see that at least some of the other accounts of tragedy that Grouchy canvasses are not, in fact, *independent* accounts of our engagement with tragedy but rather derivative of this need-based account. In particular, I show that this is true of the predominance of pleasure account and the relief of boredom account. In this sense, then, Grouchy’s account is also *systematic*. This does not necessarily mean that Grouchy is not a pluralist; for all of that, it might be that some of our engagement with tragedy is still explained in other ways.¹⁴ What is important to me is rather that, on my interpretation, Grouchy turns out to have a detailed and original account of our engagement with tragedy, one that ties such engagement to deep features of human psychology.

The second interpretative hypothesis I want to defend in this essay is that Grouchy’s appeal to the need to be moved amounts to a rejection of the hedonic conception of tragedy. One notable feature of Grouchy’s discussion of tragedy is that pleasure does not play a central role in it; she mentions it in only one of the many solutions she canvasses. On my reading, this is not an accident. Grouchy does not just hold, pace proponents of the hedonic conception, that tragedy is sometimes overall painful. She also rejects the view of what is philosophically interesting about tragedy contained in the hedonic conception. On her view, the point of philosophical inquiry into tragedy is not to explain how one could take pleasure in something ostensibly painful, but rather how representations of the suffering of others could play a role in a healthy human life. I will

return to this contrast in section 5, once I have laid out Grouchy's account of the need to be moved.

2. The Need to be Moved

There are two parts to Grouchy's account of tragedy: (i) the notion of the need to be moved, and (ii) her explanation of why tragedy in particular satisfies this need. I reconstruct her notion of the need to be moved in this section, before turning to the role of tragedy in section 3.

Grouchy describes the need to be moved as a universal need for emotion. Such emotions, she claims, "will increase the heart's strength, making it more supple, making it easier to receive new improvements, and thereby expanding one of its most fecund sources of enjoyment.

Emotion thus seems to suit the soul as exercise does the body, and the respite that follows appears to be the only kind it enjoys" (*LS* 75). Our emotional response to tragedy, in exercising our faculty to feel, strengthens this faculty. I claim that it is this role of emotion as the 'exercise of the soul' that explains both why, for Grouchy, we have a need to be moved, and why we are drawn to emotions, including painful ones. In particular, I suggest, we can understand this view by placing it within the context of Grouchy's broadly physiological and developmental approach to understanding the human mind.

Let us start with Grouchy's talk of 'the soul.' Here, I follow Bergès and Schliesser in taking Grouchy's use of 'soul' to refer to *affective sensibility*.¹⁵ Grouchy adopts the notion of sensibility (*sensibilité*) from the empiricist and naturalist wing of eighteenth-century French philosophy, as represented by figures like Condillac, Diderot, and Helvetius, who broadly take the sensibility to be our capacity to receive sensations. Grouchy takes on this usage, though she gives sensibility an even more expanded role, taking it to be our faculty to be affected in general.

So, for example, she holds that our sensibility is involved in and makes possible not just sensory experience, but also the feeling of emotions (*LS* 77), the reproduction of remembered pains and pleasures (*LS* 61), and, as a consequence, both physical and moral sympathy (*LS* 58). Indeed, as Bergès and Schliesser note, Grouchy suggests that sensibility is not a single faculty, but rather a *network* of bodily faculties to be affected in various ways (*LS* 77). The specific sub-faculty for being emotionally affected I call *affective sensibility*.¹⁶

In addition, Grouchy goes further than many earlier representatives of this naturalist tradition in giving a broadly physiological account of not just the sensibility but human psychology in general. Though she stops shy of an explicit statement of materialism, she takes the sensibility to be a psychological faculty which, like our faculties in general, is embodied in a certain bodily “organ,” and she sees physiological study of this organ as central to understanding the nature and development of the sensibility (*LS* 97).¹⁷ For this reason, I will generally talk about it as a ‘bodily faculty.’

It is helpful here to briefly explain Grouchy’s talk of pain, pleasure, and emotions. Grouchy talks at times about pain and pleasure, at times about impressions of pain and pleasure, and at times about painful and pleasurable emotions or sensations. Moreover, Grouchy distinguishes between physical pains (the ache of a muscle or the smarting of a wound) and moral pains (the shame of dishonor), and likewise for pleasures. I read this variation in terms as reflecting the following rough account. Grouchy sometimes uses ‘physical pain’ to refer to states like aches or smarting wounds as a whole. Yet she often uses ‘physical pain’ to talk specifically about *one* element of such states, namely the mere bodily event, for example the wound or the soreness of the muscle, as opposed to the feeling. These bodily events, in turn, cause sensations in us with a certain hedonic valence. So, for example, Grouchy claims that “any physical pain

causes in its recipient a composite sensation” and talks about “the sensation produced in us by physical pain” (*LS* 59–60). These sensations are the painful or pleasurable *emotions*. Emotions are, in other words, felt physical pain and pleasure. Because such emotions are also the mental states that make us aware of the bodily events of pain and pleasure, Grouchy talks about them as impressions of pain or pleasure when stressing their intentional content.

Moral pain and pleasure, in turn, have an analogous structure. Grouchy talks of fear of dishonor as pain from imagining the “pain of a life spent in opprobrium,” and love as pleasure at “the idea, the memory, or the hope of procuring happiness through our affection to a sensitive being” (*LS* 80; 82). Here, too, the painful or pleasurable emotions can be seen as mental states that register and make us averse or positively inclined to their causes. The main difference is that, in these cases, the painful or pleasurable emotions are caused not by a mere bodily event, but rather by an *idea* of a prospective relationship with other –one of social exclusion in the case of dishonor, and one of intimate companionship in the case of love–and the sorrow or happiness we imagine such a relationship as bringing.

Let us return to sensibility. Sensibility is universal in both human and non-human animals, but it comes in various strengths. Grouchy is primarily interested in variations in the strength of sensibility not between individuals, but across a single individual’s lifetime – for example the decline in the strength of sensibility in old age (*LS* 62). In particular, Grouchy sees sensibility as a faculty that not just weakens or strengthens over time but can also be cultivated through frequent exercise. Periods of disuse lead to a weakening of sensibility, whereas frequent exercise leads to a strengthening of sensibility (*LS* 63).

The thought that exercise strengthens our sensibility and disuse weakens it follows from Grouchy’s more general view that bodily faculties are strengthened by their use and weakened

by periods of disuse (*LS* 96). I read Grouchy as here adopting a picture of bodily faculties on analogy with muscles. Just as an appropriate amount of exercise of a muscle leads to an increase in muscle mass and strengthening of the muscle, so an appropriate amount of exercise of a bodily faculty also leads to its strengthening. Similarly, just as a period of disuse of a muscle will lead to a decrease in muscle mass, so the lack of use of a bodily faculty will lead to its weakening.

Because Grouchy also thinks of our mental faculties as embodied in organs, this muscular model applies just as much to our faculties for thinking and feeling as it does to faculties for bodily movement (*LS* 97). Grouchy approvingly cites Voltaire's claim that "the soul is a fire that must be fed/*And which will die if it does not grow*" (*LS* 63, emphasis in original). In particular, the maintenance and development of affective sensibility requires that we frequently exercise it by feeling emotions. It is precisely this exercise of sensibility, I propose, that Grouchy is describing in talking about tragedy as making the soul stronger and more supple. The experience of tragedy exercises, strengthens, and maintains our affective sensibility

The need to be moved, then, can be understood as a *physiological* need: something that is necessary for the development or maintenance of a core part of our bodily functioning. As a natural, embodied faculty, our faculty for being emotionally affected decays over time; to exercise and maintain it, we need frequent emotional experiences, such as the ones provided by tragedy. We therefore need to be moved in roughly the same sense in which animals in general need exercise or a certain regime of nutrients.

But the need to be moved is also, for Grouchy, a *developmental* need. On her view, frequent emotional experience is not just necessary to prevent the affective sensibility from atrophying but also to develop it into its mature, adult form; she explicitly remarks at several

places on the kind of stunted affective sensibility found in adults who have not had the right kind of emotional experience throughout their life (see, for example, *LS* 62–64 and 90).

Properly developing our affective sensibility is also key part, for Grouchy, of our moral development.¹⁸ For Grouchy, our moral capacities are rooted in sympathy, understood as our disposition for fellow-feeling. ‘Fellow-feeling,’ in this eighteenth-century usage, refers roughly to the undergoing of an emotion *E* by a person *A* where:

- (i) *E* is the same emotion as one felt by some other person *B*, and
- (ii) *A* feels *E* because *B* feels *E*.

One of Grouchy’s central innovations is to see sympathy, and so also fellow-feeling, as in turn rooted in the sensibility.¹⁹ Sympathy, on Grouchy’s account, operates by renewing memories of pain and pleasure at the sight of pain and pleasure in others. As Olivia Bailey emphasizes, Grouchy sees this mechanism as “quasi-automatic”; at least in most cases, the sight of your pain directly leads me to feel sympathetic pain, without requiring any sophisticated cognitive or imaginative processes.²⁰ In this way, sympathy is a more or less direct consequence of our physiological capacity for painful and pleasurable emotions.

The development and strength of our sympathy, therefore, will directly depend on the development and strength of our sensibility. Moreover, since sympathy for Grouchy in turn plays a central role in the development of both moral motivation and the acquisition of moral ideas, this means that emotional exercise—and thus tragedy—is a key part of making us mature moral agents. Indeed, Grouchy explicitly recommends the exposure of children to “the sight of suffering and the example of compassion” (*LS* 64). The exposure to the sight of suffering, on her account, is a necessary part of a moral education; when Grouchy says that it is the “school of pain” that makes us “compassionate and humane,” she specifically means sympathetic pain

through exposure to sight of other's pain (*LS* 62). Without it, we would at best be able to parrot conventionally adopted moral language, but we would not amount to mature moral agents. Grouchy's discussion of tragedy, then, is not just part of the tradition that focuses on the affective character of tragedy; she also follows Racine in seeing tragedy as having an ethical function, one that involves the cultivation of virtue.²¹

But even though she recommends exposing even children to the sight of suffering, Grouchy does not see the need to be moved as entirely unproblematic. She is clear that we might sate our need for emotion with violent, hateful, or irrational feeling; one of central examples Grouchy gives of people being driven by the need to be moved is people flocking to a public execution (*LS* 91). Moreover, Marc André Bernier and Tegos have both emphasized that Grouchy is deeply attuned to the way rhetoric and demagoguery play on and enlist our emotions; the most successful public orators lead us to adopt beliefs not through rational argumentation, but through a kind of "worship or enthusiasm" (*LS* 101).²² Our appetite for emotion presumably is part of what makes us susceptible to this kind of persuasion, both insofar as it adds to the seductive power of the emotions stirred up by such orators and insofar as it draws us to feeling of enthusiasm itself.

This susceptibility, while dangerous, is not always a bad thing for Grouchy. Tegos notes that whereas many Enlightenment thinkers associate such enthusiasm with irrationality and factionalism, Grouchy sees it in a more neutral light, as something that can be used for the ends of virtue and liberty even as it can also collapse into fanaticism and mob violence. What decides whether enthusiasm becomes "violent" or not, for Grouchy, is the institutional and legal set-up of the surrounding society.²³ The proper development of our sensibility therefore requires social

institutions that provide the necessary context for healthy emotional development and expression.

3. Tragedy as the “Exercise of the Soul”

For Grouchy, we have an important bodily and developmental need, namely the need to be moved, which is sated by the kind of emotional experiences provided by tragedy.

Yet this does not, on its own, explain why we seek out the kind of spectacles of suffering found in tragedy *in particular*, as opposed to other sources of emotion. For all that Grouchy has said so far, the need to be moved could be satisfied by any kind of emotion, including pleasurable ones. So, it is not clear why Grouchy would grant special importance to the pain of witnessing suffering, as opposed to, say, the pleasure of beautiful art or the alternating thrill and terror of dangerous physical stunts. In particular, there are two things that here need to be explained: (a) why, in seeking to satisfy the need to be moved, we seek out painful rather than pleasurable emotions, and (b) why, in seeking to satisfy the need to be moved, we are drawn in particular to the sight of the pain of others, such as is provided by tragedy, rather than other sources of painful emotions.

The answer to both problems lies in Grouchy’s claim that it is not just the feeling of *any* emotion that will strengthen and maintain affective sensibility. Grouchy suggests that the atrophy of our affective sensibility results not just from the lack of use of the affective sensibility, but also the repeated undergoing of the same regimen of emotions. By contrast, maintaining our affective sensibility requires feeling “alien emotions” that will distract us from our “habitual impressions” (*LS* 73). The proper exercise of the affective sensibility, then, requires the feeling of a variety of emotions, including ones that are not part of our regular emotional life. Here, one

can again understand this by appealing to the analogy between bodily faculties and muscles. Any single muscle, say the biceps, can be developed and maintained by repeating a single exercise, say bending one's lower arms. But developing and maintaining a *cluster* of muscles, such as one's arm muscles, requires a variety of different uses of one's legs to assure that all of the muscles are properly exercised. The affective sensibility, as our capacity for feeling many different kinds of emotions, can be understood as similar to such a complex cluster of muscles. Feeling the same emotions over and over again will cause other parts of the affective sensibility, ones responsible for feeling other emotions, to atrophy and weaken.²⁴

Similarly, I read Grouchy as holding that the proper exercise of affective sensibility requires the feeling of emotions of a certain power. As in the case of the muscles, the stimulation of affective sensibility must be of a certain intensity before it will strengthen and maintain it.²⁵ This therefore requires feeling emotions that are powerful enough. At the same time, however, Grouchy claims that over-stimulation of sensibility is painful and causes us to avoid impressions, thereby defeating the goal of exercising sensibility (*LS* 63). Proper exercise of affective sensibility, therefore, requires a regimen of emotions which includes both (i) a variety of emotions and (ii) emotions which are powerful but not too powerful.

These two conditions on the exercise of affective sensibility explain our attraction to painful emotions over other kinds of emotion. For Grouchy thinks that there is an asymmetry between painful and pleasurable emotions. First, Grouchy takes the view that pleasurable emotions are usually weak, while painful emotions are comparatively powerful (65; 99). Hence, our need for powerful emotions will generally only be met by feeling painful emotions. Second, Grouchy claims that painful emotions are much more variable than pleasurable emotions (*LS* 75). That is, there are more *distinct* kinds of painful emotions than pleasurable emotions. Hence, our

need for feeling a diversity of emotions will also more often be met by painful emotions, and so it is primarily painful emotions that will serve to properly exercise the affective sensibility.

The variety requirement, I suggest, also explains why we might specifically seek out tragedy over other sources of painful emotion. In her original statement of the problem of tragedy, Grouchy notes that the attraction to tragedy comes in part from the insufficiency of our own painful emotions: “not being satisfied with the emotions we obtain from real troubles, we seek *new* ones in the narratives of the most awful misfortunes and the most heartbreaking situations, born only from imagination” (*LS* 72–73, emphasis mine).

The reason tragedy helps with this insufficiency is, I take it, because it inspires painful emotions by means of fellow-feeling. Recall here that, though Grouchy is responding to discussions of the problem of tragedy, the problem she is interested in is in fact broader; she is seeking to explain not just our engagement with art tragedies like *Othello* or *Antigone*, or even art that inspires painful emotions more broadly, but spectacles of suffering in general. What unifies these cases for her, I take it, is the fact that both inspire painful emotions *in the same way*: namely, through fellow-feeling with the painful emotions of others. It is through fellow-feeling with my unhappy friend or the victim of the executioner that these spectacles inspire painful emotions in me, just as it is through fellow-feeling with the protagonist of a tragic novel that the novel inspires feelings of sorrow in me.

We can then read Grouchy’s thought here as follows. Leaving out emotions felt through sympathy, even relatively rich emotional lives are characterized by substantial repetition. This might be because they are limited to the range of emotions provoked by the individual’s particular circumstances and relationships, or for some other reason. The exercise of sensibility, however, requires feeling a rich diversity of emotions. Fully satisfying the need to be

moved therefore requires us to go beyond our own emotional lives. Fellow-feeling with the emotional lives of others is what allows us to do this; in sympathizing with others who feel painful emotions that are new to us, we too feel those emotions.²⁶ So, properly exercising our affective sensibility requires seeking out new emotions through sympathy with the emotional lives of other people, in other circumstances and relationships. It is insofar as tragedy, and spectacles of suffering more generally, provide this kind of opportunity for fellow-feeling that they play a central role in satisfying our need to be moved.²⁷ In fact, the importance of fellow-feeling here also provides an additional explanation of why we seek out *painful* emotions to satisfy our need to be moved, as Grouchy several times notes that our fellow-feeling with pain is much stronger than our fellow-feeling with pleasurable emotions (*LS* 65; 99).

The thought that fellow-feeling is central to tragedy is not novel to Grouchy; Hume, for example, describes spectators of tragedy as “pleased in proportion as they are afflicted; and never ... so happy as when they employ tears, sobs, and cries to give vent to their sorrow, and relieve their heart, swoln with the tenderest sympathy and compassion” (*OT* 258).²⁸ But the idea that fellow-feeling is the source of the distinctive *appeal* of tragedy is an innovation of Grouchy’s. For Grouchy, tragedy plays a central and perhaps even unique role in human life because it confronts us with “alien emotions” (*LS* 75); it is through tragedy in particular that we can exercise and strengthen our soul because it is through tragedy in particular that we are put in contact with an emotional world that is not only outside of our own but also powerful enough to push at and expand the limits of our emotional capacities.²⁹ On Grouchy’s account, it is precisely such a confrontation that is required to maintain and develop our ability to feel.

One qualification is important here, namely that it is crucial that the sight of suffering be sufficiently striking. For Grouchy claims that what we feel through sympathy with painful

emotions is, in most cases, the “general impression of suffering” (*LS* 60). This is a painful emotion that pervades the entire body and accompanies the “local impression of suffering” which is felt in the particular bodily organ affected by the cause of the suffering (*LS* 59).³⁰ The general impression of suffering is also a sensation that Grouchy claims is the same for many different local impressions of suffering. But this means that, as long as some local impression of suffering is part of our regular emotional life, our regular emotional life will also contain the general impression of suffering. Since most people do have local impressions of suffering as part of their regular emotional life—the pain of small bruises, minor disappointments, and so on—this kind of sympathy will not satisfy the diversity requirement.

Yet there are, for Grouchy, specific cases in which the sight of pain can revivify even the local impression of suffering. This happens, Grouchy claims, when “the memory or the idea of the pain strikes us vividly” (*LS* 61). As an example, she gives a case of a woman who, upon reading an extremely detailed account of lung disease, came to feel the pain of congested lungs herself (*LS* 61). If that is right, then in such cases pain felt through fellow-feeling might genuinely satisfy the novelty requirement. Of course, the case of sympathy with a lung disease is presumably rare, but this kind of phenomenon is not. One can imagine much more ordinary cases of suffering that “strike us vividly”: a particular contortion of the face or tone of voice, say, that grabs one’s attention and serves to bring home, in its full power, the depth and specificity of someone’s pain. This suggests that Grouchy, then, is not just thinking of *any kind* of spectacle of suffering as satisfying our need to be moved; rather, our need is met specifically by those spectacles that present suffering to us in such a clear and vivid way that we feel its particular character in fellow-feeling and not just a general impression of pain.

This also, I think, provides one explanation of why we frequently seek out tragedy in art. One notable feature of Grouchy's view is that the role of tragedy here is distinctively *non-aesthetic*; though Grouchy frequently talks of novels, poems, and other works of art, her account of the role they play in our life makes no special reference to their status as artworks, and non-artworks not only can but for Grouchy do play the same role.³¹ Yet the claim that the pain of others, to engage our sympathy fully, must "strike us vividly" provides one way to understand the significance of the fact that many tragedies *are* artworks: the aesthetic elements of the tragedy serve to make the pain particularly clear and vivid to us.

4. The Alleviation of Boredom and the Feeling of Emotional Strength

For Grouchy, then, we are drawn to tragedy because it satisfies a fundamental need of ours, namely the need to be moved.

Grouchy seemingly presents this account of our engagement with tragedy as one of many accounts, even if it is the most important. Yet, I propose, many of these other accounts are in fact not *alternate* or *independent* accounts of our engagement with tragedy, but rather descriptions of how the need to be moved manifests itself in our conscious emotional life. Hence, Grouchy's apparently heterogenous list of possible solutions in Letter II turns out to conceal a systematic account.

In particular, I think the need to be moved is in the background of the relief from boredom account and the predominance of pleasure account. To see this connection, consider Grouchy's general account of how we are motivated to exercise our bodily faculties. Grouchy claims that, in general, the exercise of our faculties cannot simply be motivated by the desire to improve these faculties. This is because, on Grouchy's view, the level of cognitive sophistication

required to understand that our exercise of our bodily faculties improves them is not innate, but rather something that must itself be achieved in the course of developing those faculties (98). Hence, there must be a less reflectively demanding drive which can motivate us to exercise our bodily faculties prior to the acquisition of such cognitive sophistication.

Here, Grouchy thinks that we are led to exercise our bodily faculties by a natural and automatic pleasure which accompanies their exercise. Such a pleasure has two components: it is felt both as a general sensation of “healthy existence” which pervades the entire body and as a local sensation in the particular bodily organ exercised (*LS* 97). So, for example, Grouchy claims that walking, especially after a long period of rest, leads us to feel both a pleasure in our legs and a general feeling of healthy well-being.

Similarly, a lack of exercise is accompanied by a painful feeling. Grouchy claims, for example, that “a long period without receiving new ideas is ... unpleasantly tiring,” and that “the total absence of any sentiment” will “lead to painful numbness” (*LS* 97). Just as the exercise of faculties is accompanied by a pleasurable feeling of healthy existence, so the *lack* of exercise of faculties is accompanied by a painful feeling of languishing, decline, or weakness.

These twin sources of pleasure and pain act as incentives for us to exercise our bodily faculties, particularly in childhood when we are unaware of the benefits of such exercise. Given that the affective sensibility is also a bodily faculty, its exercises are presumably likewise accompanied by a natural and automatic pleasure and its disuse by a natural and automatic pain. I will argue in section 5 that Grouchy thinks we additionally have a non-hedonic motivation for satisfying our need to be moved, and so these pleasures and pains are not *necessary* to make us seek out tragedy. But they might nonetheless be important motivations for doing so.

In fact, I think we find precisely such pleasures and pains spelled out in Grouchy's discussion of what appear to be *alternate* solutions to the problem of tragedy. So, for example, in Grouchy's discussion of the relief from boredom account, she portrays boredom precisely as a painful emotion felt from the lack of exercise of affective sensibility. Even though boredom can have a number of causes, many people, Grouchy claims, are "only tormented by boredom because they have not enough reason or courage to exert their minds, or are not sufficiently experienced or enlightened to realize that the mind is like one of these instruments that overload and tire the hand that carries them without using them" (LS 74). Boredom, in other words, is an unpleasant state that arises from the lack of use of our mind in general.

Moreover, Grouchy claims that a desire to relieve ourselves from this unpleasant state is part of what explains our attraction to emotion in particular: "The human heart is, in some ways, drawn to what moves and stirs it: it senses that alien emotions will distract it from the habitual impressions it finds painful or insipid, that will preserve it from boredom" (LS 75). I therefore take it that boredom is the negative hedonic incentive that motivates the exercise of the affective sensibility. Grouchy's version of the relief from boredom account of tragedy is therefore not a *separate* account of our engagement with tragedy than the need to be moved account. Rather, boredom for Grouchy is the painful feeling which accompanies the lack of satisfaction of the need to be moved, and which compels us to fulfill this need.

Grouchy's account of the *pleasure* that motivates us to exercise the affective sensibility, in turn, we find in her discussion of what I call the predominance of pleasure account of tragedy. Here, there are two distinct pleasurable emotions associated with the exercise of affective sensibility. First, Grouchy thinks that the non-use of our bodily faculties is generally painful. Yet there is a kind of non-use of our bodily faculties which is pleasurable, namely the one that

follows intensive use of our faculties (*LS* 97). This plausibly extends to the case of the affective sensibility too; in discussing the pleasure of tragedy, Grouchy talks about “the respite that follows” the exercise of our affective sensibility as “the only kind it enjoys” (*LS* 75). The use of our affective sensibility, in other words, makes possible a kind of contented or satisfied emotional rest: a way of being emotionally at peace that does not turn into the pain of boredom.

Second, Grouchy thinks that, in general, proper exercise leads to the feeling of our faculties increasing in power, and that this feeling of growing power is pleasurable (*LS* 96). Presumably, then, there is also a pleasurable feeling of our affective sensibility growing in strength. This is exactly what we find in Grouchy’s discussion of the pleasures of tragedy as one possible explanation of our engagement with tragedy. In contrast to earlier theorists like Hume and Burke, who emphasize the pleasure we find in the artistry of tragedy, Grouchy instead centers the pleasures of “enriching our imagination, our memory with images and new ideas, of being moved in a way that is new to us and that sometimes makes us greater, makes us grow in our own eyes” (*LS* 76). This is, I take it, precisely the feeling of our affective sensibility growing in strength. The central pleasure in tragedy, for Grouchy, is the feeling of our emotional capacities growing, of feeling the limits of one’s emotional capacities being stretched and expanded.

Grouchy therefore has a distinctive view of the nature of tragic pleasure: for her, tragic pleasure involves (a) the pleasurable feeling of our emotional capacities growing in power, and (b) the pleasurable feeling of emotional ease that is possible only following intense exercise of our emotional capacities. Yet her account of tragic pleasure, like her discussion of boredom, turns out not to be an independent account of our engagement with tragedy, but rather to be derivative of her account of the need to be moved. Both the relief from boredom and the

predominance of pleasure accounts amount to descriptions of ways in which the need to be moved manifests in our conscious, hedonic life, thereby providing us with incentives for satisfying it.

5. Pain and Pleasure in Grouchy's Account of Tragedy

5.1 "The Heart is Drawn, In Some Ways, To What Moves and Stirs It"

Grouchy's explanation of our engagement with spectacles of suffering in terms of a need to be moved is notable for its distinctiveness. But it is also notable in the way it decenters appeal to a distinctive pleasure we find in tragedy; it is the sympathetic pain we find in tragedy, rather than any compensatory pleasure, that is central to her account.

In this way, Grouchy's account contrasts with what I have called the hedonic conception of tragedy. Recall that, on the hedonic conception of tragedy, what explains our engagement with tragedy is that our experience of tragedy is generally overall pleasurable, even if it includes some pain. Grouchy rejects this claim; not only does she not explicitly appeal to pleasure to explain our engagement with tragedy, but she suggests that we seek out tragedy when it is overall painful, and that in "a small number of cases" we even do so when engagement with tragedy is *exclusively* painful (*LS* 75).

Here is one way to understand the disagreement between Grouchy and proponents of the hedonic conception. Recall that one can explain our engagement with tragedy either by showing that tragedy is overall pleasurable, or by giving some explanation of why, in the case of tragedy, we here seek out an overall painful experience. Proponents of the hedonic tradition give explanations of the first kind. By contrast, I read Grouchy as offering the second kind of account; on her picture, what drives people to tragedy is a distinctive need, and such a need might lead us

to seek out overall painful experiences. Importantly, this is not primarily a disagreement about the general overall hedonic character of tragedy. For Grouchy does think that we often take pleasure in tragedy, and even, as I have argued in section 4, that they can provide a *distinctive* kind of pleasure (*LS* 75–76). Rather, it is a disagreement about what primarily *explains* our interest in and engagement with tragedy: a distinctive pleasure or a distinctive need. Even in cases where tragedy is overall pleasurable, it might nonetheless be the case that what is doing the primary explanatory work is still the need, rather than the pleasure.

How does the need to be moved lead us to seek out tragedy, if not by means of a desire for pleasure? One could imagine people seeking out tragedy for the reason that it improves our affective sensibility. But Grouchy is clear that few people act out of such sophisticated motives. Instead, she claims that our need to be moved manifests as a “sort of attraction to any kind of emotion, even painful” (*LS* 75). Likewise, she says that the “human heart is, in some ways, drawn to what stirs and moves it” (*LS* 75), and that the masses are drawn by a “dumb curiosity” to spectacles of physical suffering (*LS* 95). The natural way to read these claims, I suggest, is as saying that the need to be moved manifests itself as an instinctive, non-reflective pull towards what satisfies it, just as our need for nutrition manifests itself as an instinctive, non-reflective pull towards food.³² In the case of the need to be moved, this amounts to a kind of basic craving for emotion.

Now, even though Grouchy does not explain this ‘attraction’ in hedonic terms, one might nevertheless wonder whether it in fact is rooted in a desire for pleasure. Such a hedonist version of a needs-based account is found in perhaps the closest antecedent of Grouchy’s account, namely Du Bos’s relief from boredom account of tragedy. On his view, we have a need to “keep the mind occupied.” Satisfying our needs gives us pleasure—as he puts it, the “greater the need,

the greater the pleasure we feel in satisfying it” (*Reflections*, 96)—and so it is this pleasure of satisfying our need to occupy the mind which draws us to tragedy.³³ Hence, our pursuit of tragedy is on his account rooted in a desire for pleasure, and role of the need is just to make tragedy pleasurable to us.

But there is little basis for reading such an account into Grouchy. This is already suggested by her description of our instinctive pull towards emotion as “dumb.” For insofar as a desire for some object is based on the desire for pleasure, it minimally requires an expectation that that object will cause pleasure. But if so, then it already involves some level of reflection and can hardly be described as “dumb.”

More conclusive, however, is a passage that initially might be read as evidence that Grouchy accepts the hedonic conception. Grouchy says that “it is because the point of tragedy is in great part to make our sympathy for the misfortunes of others seem pleasant to us by stimulating our sensibility progressively, and not by suddenly confronting it with the heartbreaking sight of physical pain—a sight we cannot stop thinking about if it moves us, and which turns into ridicule if it doesn’t” (*LS* 91).

Leave aside, for the moment, Grouchy’s claim that the “point of tragedy” is to make “our sympathy for the misfortunes of others seem pleasant to us” by only gradually presenting us with the sight of suffering. Note, instead, that Grouchy thinks even when this effort fails—that is, even when we end up “suddenly confronting” the sensibility “with the heartbreaking sight of physical pain”—the sight of suffering is nonetheless “a sight we cannot stop thinking about if it moves us.” Hence, even in a case where tragedy is stipulated not to be pleasurable, Grouchy still claims that we experience a powerful and overriding pull towards it, and that we do this simply in virtue of it moving us. But if this is true, our attraction to emotion cannot be rooted in a desire for pleasure.

Instead, the role of pleasure and pain in our engagement with tragedy is primarily supplementary. This is, I claim, what Grouchy means by her talk of the “point of tragedy.” For it is crucial that Grouchy, in this context, is talking about tragedy in the restricted sense of fictional representations of suffering and not about the general phenomenon of spectacles of suffering; her comment about the “point of tragedy” immediately follows a discussion of the difficulty of creating convincing “imitations” of physical pain on the stage (*LS* 91). I therefore read her as making a claim about the advantage tragedians have in creating *artificial* spectacles of suffering, rather than a general claim about why we seek out sights of suffering. Part of the point of creating artificial spectacles of suffering is to make it easier for us to satisfy our need to be moved, by controlling both the intensity and the suddenness of pain found in such spectacles. Here, pleasure and pain serve as complementary sources of motivation, ones that either reinforce or counter-act other sources of motivation. For even when our goal is not pleasure or the avoidance of pain, their presence can nonetheless affect how easy it is for us to remain engaged in the experience or activity; pleasure acts as a natural incentive to remain engaged in an experience or activity, whereas pain creates a motivational counter-pressure for us to disengage. Spectacles of suffering contain inherent repelling motivational pressures in the form of sympathetic pain. The point of creating ‘artificial’ spectacles of suffering, then, is to soften these counter-pressures: to make the otherwise intense experience of tragedy more bearable and so to make it easier to satisfy our need to be moved. But it still remains the case that in a broader sense the ‘point’ of such spectacles of suffering is not the pleasure we get from them.

5.2 Two Ways of Giving an Account of Tragedy

For these reasons, I think Grouchy sees our attraction to tragedy as generally and most fundamentally explained not by a calculus of pleasure and pain, but rather by a non-hedonic craving for emotion. Yet note that even when we are motivated by the prospect of pleasure and pain, whether they are primary or supplementary sources of motivation, there is still a sense in which appeal to the need to be moved is more basic. For, as I have shown in section 4, it is the need to be moved that explains *why* we take pleasure in tragedy; the alleviation of boredom and the feeling of growing emotional strength are hedonic manifestations of the need to be moved.

This points to a further, *methodological* disagreement between Grouchy and the proponents of the hedonic conception, one that concerns what it is to give a fully satisfying account of our engagement with tragedy. For note that Grouchy's claim that the most fundamental explanation for our engagement with tragedy is the need to be moved is not, in the first instance, a claim about our *motivation* for seeking out tragedy. Rather, it is a claim about what tragedy answers to in our basic constitution. Hence, this claim is in principle compatible with such a need manifesting itself in a number of different ways in our actual motivation, including as motivation by the prospect of pain and pleasure. What matters, for Grouchy, is that such motivation is ultimately explained by the need to be moved.

The most fundamental disagreement between Grouchy and proponents of the hedonic conception is therefore not whether we are motivated by the pleasure in tragedy to seek it out. Rather, it is whether an appeal to such pleasure, or in general to anything at the level of human motivation, is *sufficient* for a fully satisfying explanation of our engagement with tragedy. Central to Grouchy's overall philosophical psychology is the thought that a proper explanation of a general human behaviour or disposition requires demonstrating its "first cause" (LS 58). It is not entirely clear exactly what constitutes a "first cause" for Grouchy. Yet I take it that part of

Grouchy's thought here is that the full explanation of some human behaviour or disposition involves showing the role this behaviour or disposition plays in the course of the natural life and development of the human animal. This is the case in the explanation of the first cause of sympathy that is the task of Letters I–IV. Yet it is even more explicit Grouchy's discussion of the first cause of laughter in Letter IV. Here, Grouchy's account of the "first cause" of laughter involves showing how laughter at the unexpected stems from the fact that unexpected events give vigorous exercise to the developing faculties of children (*LS* 95).³⁴

This kind of explanation, I take it, works by showing how a certain behaviour or disposition follows from our basic nature, either by being part of our natural functions as a certain kind of animal or by being a downstream consequence of such functions, as in the case of laughter. It is therefore teleological in one sense but not another. It is teleological in that it presupposes the idea that humans have some 'natural' function. Here, I take it, Grouchy is thinking of our natural function not as given by an essence or something similar, but rather by our general physiological constitution as a certain kind of animal with certain kinds of bodily faculties. But this kind of explanation is not teleological in that it does not explain the behaviour or disposition by the fact, simply, that it is good or useful for us. For there are many things, like our use of medicine or higher education, that might be good or useful for us but are not part of our natural function or its development and so cannot simply be explained by reference to our basic nature.

On the hedonic conception, explaining our engagement with tragedy means showing that tragedy is overall pleasurable. For Grouchy, by contrast, explaining our engagement with tragedy means explaining what function tragedy plays in the life of an animal like us. Moreover, Grouchy does not just think of this function in synchronic terms, as the role tragedy plays for us

at a certain stage of our life, but in diachronic terms, as the role tragedy plays for us in the course of our development through various stage of life. Here, one can think of this difference as a difference in the level at which the explanation is being given. The hedonic conception asks, *from the perspective of the individual*, why they seek out tragedy. It therefore expects an explanation in terms of what is motivationally relevant for the individual, which in the eighteenth-century context will generally be pleasure and pain. Grouchy, by contrast, is asking a question at the level of the *species*, namely what kind of creature we are such that we are naturally drawn to engage with tragedy.³⁵ From this perspective, positing a distinctive pleasure in tragedy does not go deep enough; we will still want to know why it is that we are such as to take pleasure in tragedy. A full answer to this question will involve tying engagement with tragedy to a central function of human animal life, like the development, maintaining, and strengthening of the affective sensibility. From this perspective, the role of pleasure and pain, in turn, will turn out be *derivative*; pleasure and pain are primarily cognitively undemanding incentives that draw us to what is necessary or important for our biological functioning, and facts about which things are painful or pleasurable to us will generally be posterior to facts about our nature as a certain kind of organism.

Grouchy's rejection of the hedonic conception of tragedy, in other words, reflects not so much a rejection of earlier views about the nature of human motivation or the hedonic character of tragedy as a *methodological* difference in her view of what a satisfying account of tragedy amounts to. Her key innovation is not to reject the role of pleasure of tragedy, but rather to decenter it. One need not buy into the specifics of Grouchy's account or her physiological approach to psychology to side with her in this disagreement. For one might think that the question of what tragedy does for us, what function images of other people's pain play for

creatures like us, is the central question to ask about tragedy even if one does not go on to answer it in a physiological key, but instead in terms of specific social-historical practices, moral psychological mechanisms, or some other register entirely.

6. Grouchy and The History of the Philosophy of Tragedy

There is much that is novel about Grouchy's discussion of tragedy: her pluralism, her notion of a 'need to be moved,' her account of tragic pleasure, and her distinctive conception of what is at stake in the problem of tragedy. Yet Grouchy's account of tragedy did not, for a variety of reasons, prove historically influential; like the rest of her work, while it was appreciated by her contemporaries, it was generally forgotten both by her philosophical successors and by historians of philosophy.³⁶ It thus represents a peculiar, if not exactly unusual, episode in the history of philosophy: intellectual innovations left by the wayside of history, only to be re-invented, in parts, by later thinkers. It is hard, and perhaps fruitless, to imagine how the intellectual history of tragedy might have differed had Grouchy's contributions been properly appreciated. But I hope to at least have rendered apparent, for modern readers, the power of her account of tragedy: that what draws us to tragedy is the way tragedy expands, by pushing at the limits of, our ability to feel.

Moreover, Grouchy's discussion of tragedy also forms an important part of her general project. Giving a proper account of this connection is outside the scope of this paper, but let me by way of conclusion gesture at it. In the *Letters* Grouchy seeks to develop both (i) a developmental account of human moral psychology and (ii) a republican vision of society and its basic institutions. The account of tragedy is a natural part of the first project, since tragedy explains how we come to develop and maintain our capacity for sympathy. But it is also, for that

reason, an important part of the second project. For Grouchy's picture of the free citizen is itself deeply developmental; as Bergès has argued for Grouchy, freedom involves a kind of moral and emotional maturity. Here, "maturity" is meant not simply as a metaphor: for Bergès, Grouchy sees "moral development as emotional development," starting from one's early childhood attachments to one's wet-nurse and culminating in adult concern for "the moral and physical wellbeing of every member of the human race" (*LS* 108). For this reason, a just society must be responsive to our basic emotional nature; its institutions must not only promote the moral and emotional development of human beings, but must also guard against the pathological forms such emotional development can take. This, then, also includes the development of our sensibility; one constraint on what just institutions look like, on Grouchy's picture, is that they must be such as to allow for the healthy satisfaction of our need to be moved. Tragedy, in other words, is part of the fabric of the just society.³⁷

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¹ All page references to the *Letters on Sympathy* are to the page number in the Bergès and Schliesser translation.

² This is despite a small but growing literature on Grouchy, which focuses mostly either on her account of sympathy or the social and political philosophy she builds on top of it; see, e.g., Bergès, “From Sympathy to Social Reform,” Douglass, “Egalitarian Sympathies?,” Illert,

“Republic of Sympathy,” Lustilla, “Moral Progress,” and Schliesser, “The Politics of Sympathy.” Some scholars have recognized the significance of Grouchy’s discussion of tragedy, but they have not given a detailed account of her solution to the problem of tragedy; see, for example Bergès and Schliesser, “Introduction,” Tegos, “Sympathie morale,” and Yücel, “Paradox of Tragedy.”

³ My presentation of the problem of tragedy here is influenced by Aaron Smuts’s model in “Art and Negative Affect,” 42. Smuts presents the problem of tragedy, or ‘putatively painful art,’ as a trilemma among three plausible claims: that people do not seek out overall painful experiences, that ‘putatively painful art’ is overall painful, and that people knowingly seek out ‘putatively painful art’ with largely accurate expectations about how painful it is. I depart from Smuts’ presentation only because I think that the trilemma framing hides the force of the problem; it is relatively easy to reject one of these three claims and so dispel the threat of contradiction, but harder to build a positive account of why one would seek out putatively painful art.

⁴ There is substantial interpretative controversy over the nature of this conversion. For an overview of the debate, see Merivale, “Mixed Feelings,” 262–263 and 266–268.

⁵ Siraki, “Adam Smith’s Solution,” 217–222.

⁶ Importantly, the shared assumption is not, as Malcolm Budd puts it, that the experience of tragedy is *exclusively* pleasurable (in “Tragic Emotions,” 93). Some writers, such as Addison, did think that our experience of tragedy was exclusively pleasurable; see Siraki, “Smith’s Solution,” 215. But Burke, for example, clearly rejects this idea, as he claims that our experience of tragedy is “blended with no small uneasiness” (I.14). On some interpretations, Hume equally rejects this idea (see, for example, Neill, “Unaccountable Pleasure,” 343). Generally, philosophers who see our responses to tragedy as involving fellow-feeling will have a difficult

time holding that our experience of tragedy is exclusively pleasurable. References to Burke's *Enquiry* are to section and paragraph (e.g. I.14).

⁷ Hume is not a psychological hedonist since he does not think that we are *exclusively* motivated by pleasure and pain, but the non-hedonic sources of motivation he contemplates—for example, our desire to punish our enemies and benefit our friends, as well as hunger and lust (*T* 2.3.9.8)—are unlikely to explain our engagement with tragedy. References to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, cited as *T*, are to book, part, section, and paragraph (e.g. *T* 1.2.2.1).

⁸ Tegos, "Sympathie morale," sect. 5, par. 2 *et passim*

⁹ See Bergès and Schliesser, "Introduction" and Tegos, "Sympathie morale."

¹⁰ In particular, Bergès and Schliesser give an account that relies (a) on Grouchy's claim that we sympathize less with protagonists who are very different from us, and (b) her claim that "if we have more compassion for their misfortunes than for those of others, it is only because kings who seem to have been preserved from misfortune by their elevation strike us as more sensitive to them" ("Introduction," 90). In other words, we feel *less* sympathetic pain but *more* compassion for characters of high status than we otherwise would. Nonetheless, as will become apparent, I agree with Bergès and Schliesser when they claim both that tragedy serves a didactic purpose for Grouchy, and that Grouchy denies that we always take pleasure in tragedy.

¹¹ Such pluralism is also defended by some contemporary writers on the problem of tragedy and the more general problem of art and negative affect. See for example Fileva, "Playing with Fire," 174-175 and Strohl, "Art and Painful Emotion," 2.

¹² See, for example, her discussion of the curiosity account, which will not apply in cases where we have detailed and precise knowledge of the suffering involved in the tragedy (*LS* 73–74).

Note that Grouchy's (apparent) pluralism goes beyond a more moderate pluralism, which holds that there are multiple explanations but that all of them apply to each case.

¹³ Tegos, "Sympathie morale" and Yücel, "Paradox of Tragedy" also note Grouchy's appeal to the need to be moved, but they do not give an account or explanation of this need.

¹⁴ In particular, I here leave open the question of whether the other accounts, including the concern and curiosity account, can also be reduced to the need to be moved account. I am skeptical that this is possible.

¹⁵ Bergès translates "sensibilité" both as "sensitivity" and "sensitivity." In order to make the systematic nature of Grouchy's psychology clearer, I will use "sensitivity" throughout, including in quotations where Bergès otherwise has "sensitivity."

¹⁶ I likewise take Grouchy's use of "heart" to refer to our capacity to have emotions and so to co-refer with "soul." For this use of "heart," see for example Hume (OT 258).

¹⁷ Most notably, Grouchy here departs from Condillac, who took sensitivity to be a capacity of the immaterial soul. In doing so, she is aligned with her brother-in-law Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis and the movement known as the *idéologues*, who took a physiological approach to the study of human psychology. Cabanis' central work, *On the Relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man* (1802), was composed around the same time as the *Letters*, and the *Letters* are generally read as addressed to him. For a general account of the growth of the physiological-medical approach to psychology, as well as their relations to earlier French empiricists, see Williams, *Physical and Moral*, well as Sergio Moravia's introduction to *On the Relations*.

¹⁸ Bailey, "Corruption," similarly argues that the need to be moved plays a key role in developing and exercising our sympathy, though she does not give any special role to tragedy.

¹⁹ For detailed exposition of Grouchy's account, as well as contrast with Smith's, see Bailey, "Corruption," Douglass, "Egalitarian Sympathies?," Illert, *Republic of Sympathy*, and Tegos, "Sympathie morale."

²⁰ Bailey, "Corruption", 174

²¹ This should not be taken as meaning that exposure to the sight of suffering automatically makes us more moral. In particular, the sight of suffering develops the sensibility and sympathy, which are *necessary* for moral agency but not sufficient. Without the guidance of reason and the "abstract and general" ideas of morality described in Book V, Grouchy thinks a strong sensibility often leads us to act "rashly and blindly," and that "souls that are easily moved" cannot be fully virtuous nor trusted with positions of authority (*LS* 113).

²² Bernier, "Émotions de l'âme" and Tegos, "Sympathie morale." Enthusiasm, for Grouchy, is a "passion of the soul," one that involves an "exaggerated" and passionate attachment to a situation, person, or idea. This attachment comes from imagining, in a "vague" and "indeterminate" way, all the pain and pleasure we anticipate from that thing; it is an emotional collapse of time, an experience in "one instant" of what might span "days, months, years, and sometimes an entire lifetime" (*LS* 79–80).

²³ Tegos, "Sympathie morale," sect. 5, pars. 8–9

²⁴ In fact, one might take talk of "parts" of the faculty here literally. On the interpretation of sensibility as a network of faculties, one might see the affective sensibility as also a sub-network of faculties, consisting of many different faculties for feeling different kinds of emotions.

²⁵ By the "power" of an emotion, I mean, roughly, the phenomenal intensity of that emotion *as felt by some subject*. This intensity, for Grouchy, is in part a matter of the strength of that subject's affective sensibility, and hence there is no straightforward subject-independent sense in

which one can speak of the power of an emotion. For ease of explication, however, I will frequently elide this subject-relativization.

²⁶ Since sympathy involves the renewal of remembered pains and pleasures, these emotions will generally not be new in the sense of never-before-felt, but only in the sense of not part of our emotional routine. In this sense, Grouchy agrees with Smith's dictum that "it is the impressions of our own senses only" that sympathy reproduces (*TMS* I.i.i.2). This is consistent with the analogy with the exercise of muscles; the exercise of muscles does not require regularly adding entirely novel exertions but only a sufficient variety of exertions. References to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, cited as *TMS*, are to book, chapter, section, and paragraph in the sixth edition (e.g. *TMS* I.ii.i.3).

²⁷ Could the need to be moved be satisfied by observing ordinary cases of suffering within our communities, such as the sight of homeless people on the street? Grouchy claims that when we encounter suffering and are in a position to prevent or alleviate it, this (pleasant) prospect outweighs the sympathetic pain (*LS* 62–63). Hence, it is specifically in being a spectator to pain, as opposed to occupying a more agential role, that we feel the full intensity of it in fellow-feeling. One might, then, satisfy the need to be moved through fellow-feeling with such cases of suffering, but only insofar as one no longer sees oneself as being in a position to affect that suffering – that is, insofar as one sees it as a spectacle to be beheld rather than as a calamity to intervene in. Thank you to Bas Tönissen for raising this question to me.

²⁸ For Hume, see also the discussion of sympathy and tragedy at *T* 2.2.7.4. The idea that sympathy plays this role in tragedy is even more explicit in Burke's discussion of the problem of tragedy. In discussing sympathy, Burke claims that "it is by this principle chiefly that poetry, painting, and other affecting arts, transfuse their passions from one breast to another" (I.xii).

Imitated distress, he claims, affects us just as much through sympathy as genuine distress, with the exception that we take pleasure in the quality of the imitation (I.xv).

²⁹ Illert has recently uncovered an undated manuscript fragment by Grouchy on poetry where she expresses a similar view; the power of poetry, here, lies in allowing us to feel ‘outside of yourself,’ and thereby awakening the hearts even of those who are unaccustomed to feeling (in *Republic of Sympathy*, 114). Notably, Grouchy is here talking about poetry generally, rather than tragedy in particular. Moreover, as Illert argues, Grouchy was in her later work interested in the ability of idyllic poetry to awaken our sympathy. This suggests that Grouchy with time might have abandoned her view that sympathy with suffering in particular is important in satisfying our need to be moved.

³⁰ It is unclear whether Grouchy takes the distinction between local and general impressions of pain to apply just to physical pains or also to moral pains.

³¹ Indeed, one might take this as an objection to Grouchy’s account. For Hume, a crucial part of the explanation of the distinctive pleasure of tragedy is the fact that tragedies are works of art, and as such invite a radically different response than other sources of painful emotion (see Neill, “Unaccountable Pleasure,” 342). The fact that Grouchy’s account does not appeal to this feature of tragedy, the objection goes, means that it misses out on what is really compelling about tragedy, even if it successfully identifies one *reason* to engage with tragedy.

³² This kind of account of motivation by instinctive attraction is found also in both Hume (*T* 2.3.9.8) and Cabanis (*Relations*, 90).

³³ This is an abbreviated summary of Du Bos’s account which elides his distinction between artificial and real sentiments. For a more thorough explanation, see Livingston, “Du Bos’ Paradox.”

³⁴ Why does Grouchy think that the explanation of general human behaviors or dispositions requires giving this developmental story? One hypothesis is that she thinks it is in this way we can show why those behaviors or dispositions are *general*. So, for example, she claims that is by identifying the first cause of sympathy that we can explain why “sympathy is the property of every sensible being susceptible to reflection” (*LS* 58).

³⁵ Cf. David Berman: “What kind of animal/Needs to smoke a cigarette?” Berman, “Sometimes A Pony Gets Depressed.”

³⁶ For a rigorous and detailed account of Grouchy’s relation to her contemporaries, see Illert, *Republic of Sympathy*.

³⁷ For helpful comments on drafts of this paper, I owe a debt of gratitude to Don Garrett and Anja Jauernig as well as two anonymous reviewers for this journal. My understanding of Grouchy’s account of tragedy owes much to conversations with Noga Gratvol, Aidan Penn, and Ali Rezaei and to discussion with the participants at the 2022 UCSD Modern Philosophy Graduate Workshop; in particular, I would like to thank Zack Brants, my commentator on that occasion, whose questions about Grouchy’s relationship to psychological hedonism were the impetus for section 5 of the current paper.