Rob Boddice, *The Science of Sympathy: Morality, Evolution, and Victorian Civilization*. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2016. xii + 179 pp. £23.99. ISBN 978-0-252-08205-4

Rob Boddice has provided an engaging exploration of three issues that were the source of much debate in the later Victorian period: vivisection, vaccination and eugenics. Boddice's real focus, however, is on how scientific culture in the later part of the nineteenth century appropriated and deployed *sympathy*, a term the Victorians had inherited from the moral philosophers of the eighteenth century and put to work for their own ethical purposes. The driving argument of this study is that evolutionary theory — and especially the work of Charles Darwin — produced a radical and sometimes surprising re-configuring of what sympathy could mean and how it was manifested in policy and practice that was argued to benefit the social whole. This modified — or even transformed — notion of sympathy involved new elites, new locations and new procedures. It produced redrawn notions of gender and class behaviour and prompted radical reassessment of the relation between individual and state. Science, Boddice argues, is emotional, driven by its own 'taboos, duties, and sins'. By 'defamiliarizing sympathy' in its nineteenth-century context, his book aims to make us 'think critically about the meanings of sympathy and morality and the role of science and scientists in our own everyday lives' (25).

Early chapters establish the ground. Discussion of Darwin's argument, in *Descent of Man*, that sympathy is an instinct found in social animals and developed in human societies, pinpoints the complexity of the term, even within evolutionary debate. Sympathy is both instinct and habit, a feeling and an outcome of reason.

Boddice's aim is to identify a 'sympathy' specific to this scientific world and to account for its peculiar contribution to changing notions of moral value in Victorian society and culture. The advance of physiology, germ theory and racial statistics was accompanied by arguments about their ethical power, creating at the same time a 'modern scientific self' characterized as especially sympathetic. In Boddice's argument, however, this 'science of sympathy' is esoteric, little understood outside the scientific community and, as a result, destined to dwindle with little lasting trace (11, 6). 'As I cut, I do good', is the morally-flavoured incantation Boddice ascribes to the vivisector as he established his practice as ethical. The problem that persists in this lively study is whether 'sympathy' is really what is at stake. If sympathy is divested of what it was generally understood to connote — namely some form of imaginative (or indeed corporeal) identification — can it still meaningfully be sympathy? Every now and then, the argument feels haunted by Humpy Dumpty insisting that 'When I use a word […] it means just what I choose it to mean'.

Nevertheless, Boddice is right that sympathy was much discussed by scientific men (and they were mainly men) and was importantly implicated in their debates. In relation especially to arguments about vivisection, it was opponents as much as advocates that kept sympathy in view. The anti-vivisection lobby in Britain was well organized, using the mainstream press alongside dedicated publications like the *Zoophilist* (the organ of the anti-vivisection Victoria Street Society). In writing about how sympathy was endangered by the sanctioned cutting of animals, they frequently foregrounded issues of gender — in part because of the prominence of women campaigners, like Frances Power Cobbe — and nationality. In a chapter on 'Common Compassion and the Mad Scientist' Boddice rehearses some of the well-known controversies that accompanied the expansion of physiology in continental Europe

which, with the publication of the *Handbook for the Physiological Laboratory* in 1873, sparked a Royal Commission enquiry and subsequent legislation regulating the treatment of animals in physiological laboratories. National stereotypes abounded, contrasting continental callousness with an ideal of English decency and kindness, the latter imperilled by the forces of specialization, professionalization and cross-continental dialogue. Germany, leading the way in experimentalism of all kinds, was especially dangerous, given to 'unscientific carelessness' likely to be 'hurtful to the moral sense of England' (55). Through anti-vivisection campaigning, the 'mad-scientist' figure emerged as 'morally stunted, emotionally cold, and a dangerous virtuoso of cruel arts' (58). This is one of the few places where Boddice turns to literary culture, referencing the scientist figures haunting late-Victorian gothic fiction such as H.G. Wells's *Dr Moreau* (60–62). It is the emotionally neutral scientist, professional and calm, that worried Cobbe most profoundly as he presided over sights and sounds that *ought* to raise howls of anguish. Cobbe was alert to the perils of desensitization: it is the necessary commonality of 'common compassion' that scientific culture threatened.

One of the most interesting aspects of this book is its treatment of the spaces and locations central to this 'science of sympathy' — especially the experimental physiological laboratory. The chapter on vivisection focuses on these 'theatres of emotional control' (75). Its 'rules, its ethos, its specialized detachment, its equipment, and its special arrangement of space' were designed to bar sentimentalism while protecting a more profound emotional sensibility connected to end-goals (76). The lab was meant to de-sensationalize (rather than de-sensitize): specialization, repetition, routinization and tedium were crucial to its day-to-day activities, as were training and practice (79-80; 91). These modern spaces and procedures codified the practices of

professionals trained to ‘feel’ in a special way. Another, rather different but intriguing, issue that surfaces from time to time is how scientific practitioners ‘navigated’ (the term derives from William Reddy’s *The Navigation of Feeling*) different modes of emotional response in very different spaces — between, for instance, laboratory, lecture room, home parlour and club (22). The book’s normally detailed and textured research is a little thinner here, though. This perhaps is a consequence of brilliantly illuminating work on the same material that has already been undertaken by the historian of science Paul White.[1]

The book is slightly unbalanced in its topic treatment. Boddice has previously written extensively on attitudes towards animals and the vivisection debate is given substantial space. By contrast, Chapter 5, dealing with the vaccination controversies, runs only to 13 pages. Acknowledging that the history of compulsory medical intervention has had much attention, Boddice instead turns to a comparison of four prominent evolutionists (Darwin, Herbert Spencer, Thomas Henry Huxley and Alfred Russel Wallace) in order to chart their divergent positions (two are pro vaccination, for different reasons; and two are anti, again for different reasons). While Boddice helpfully identifies the diverse positions emerging from major disagreements about the moral implications of Darwinian evolution, the meaning of ‘sympathy’ again becomes attenuated in the process. The chapter title is ‘Sympathy, Liberty, and Compulsion’, and while the latter two terms seem prominent and obvious, sympathy struggles to stay in view even as a redefined term. At times it appears to mean something like ‘a moral stance that judges an individual’s responsibilities in terms of an agreed wider social good’. There have always been gestures that bracket off the moral implications of an action for the sake of a greater benefit, but that it is *sympathy* that remains prominent and in some real sense at play is harder to demonstrate.

More successful is the final chapter on eugenics. Francis Galton's promotion of eugenics as a 'new religion' is presented as an emotional process, an '*evolution* of the emotions' required for the public good (121–122). There is a fascinating argument here that foregrounds Galton's 'emotional' rhetoric about the 'virile', 'hopeful' and 'noble' creed of eugenics. For Galton (as for other evolutionists) the moral quandary facing modern society is that '[c]ivilization contained the seeds of its own demise', as moral imperatives work to check the 'process of elimination' that rids a society of the 'unfit' (117). Sympathy as it functions in such societies is a kind of unintended consequence of the original social instinct. Darwin himself believed this was an inevitable bind: kindness towards the most vulnerable hampers and damages the process of natural selection, but to refuse such kindness risks an even more serious form of damage. Galton believed the quandary could only be tackled by men of special qualities — 'men who deemed themselves more "fully evolved" than the mass' (119). It is chilling to read Galton explaining to his protégé, Karl Pearson, that he felt sympathy with 'those simple childlike natures' who look for a 'crutch' 'in the faiths of mankind's infancy', but adding: 'It aids them, but it would be of no service to you and me' (130). They are different, and eugenic policy — the practice of what Galton deemed 'rational' selection — had to be managed by an elite class of professional men. Boddice helpfully identifies the emotional undertow of a eugenic discourse that reifies reason.[2]

This book is explicitly situated within the thriving disciplinary area of the history of emotions. Boddice's methodology draws on some of its key figures and ideas, like William Reddy's language of navigation and emotional regimes, and Thomas Haskell's notion of a 'recipe knowledge' that sees new combinations of known elements extending limits for possible actions (14–15; 8–9). Prominent in

citations is work by younger scholars like Thomas Dixon, who heads the Centre for the History of Emotions at Queen Mary, University of London, and the historian of science Paul White. *The Science of Sympathy* is a welcome contribution to this still-emerging body of scholarship that has brought real illumination to the scientific cultures of the nineteenth century in particular. But whether it really manages to identify and illuminate a distinctive new quality of sympathy is more in doubt. In his 1913 work, *The Nature of Sympathy*, the German philosopher Max Scheler detailed four different divisions of the types of sympathizing; writing nearly a century later, in 2009, the literary historian Jonathan Lamb detailed six distinct and discernible modes of sympathy at work in the eighteenth century.[3] Sympathy was always diverse and difficult to pin down. The sentiment which often accompanied sympathizing in Victorian culture was, throughout the century, attacked by those who saw themselves equipped to see a greater good in its (invariably manly) control. Rather than finding a sympathy distinct from that 'known, either before or since', we might acknowledge that sympathy was a highly-overburdened concept and that the Victorian evolutionary science of the later nineteenth century played an important part in ending its moral centrality.

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[1] See, for example, Paul White, 'Darwin Wept: Science and the Sentimental Subject', *Journal of Victorian Science*, 16, 2 (2011), 195-213.
[2] The picture changes with women's interventions. See Angelique Richardson, *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century: Rational Reproduction and the New Woman* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[3] Max Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*. Translated from the German by Peter Heath. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954); Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy* in the Long Eighteenth Century (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).