

Studies in History and Philosophy of Science 35



Henry Martyn Lloyd *Editor*

# The Discourse of Sensibility

The Knowing Body in the  
Enlightenment

 Springer

# The Discourse of Sensibility

STUDIES IN HISTORY  
AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

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VOLUME 35

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Henry Martyn Lloyd  
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# The Discourse of Sensibility

The Knowing Body in the Enlightenment

 Springer

*Editor*

Henry Martyn Lloyd  
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and School of History, Philosophy, Religion and Classics  
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ISSN 0929-6425

ISBN 978-3-319-02701-2

ISBN 978-3-319-02702-9 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-02702-9

Springer Cham Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013956511

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*To Jo, with love and thanks for your constant  
generosity and support.*



# Acknowledgements

I cannot remember this project beginning in any real sense. Rather it slowly emerged as an increasingly coherent project over a long period of time. Its first significant incarnation was as a special stream in the Australasian Society of Continental Philosophy annual conference which was held at the University of Queensland in December 2010. I would like to thank my co-conveners for indulging me as I inserted what was essentially a pet project into a much larger event: Marguerite La Caze, Michelle Boulous Walker, Chad Parkhill, and Andrew Wiltshire. I would next like to thank the participants of that stream and I would like to specifically name those who for diverse reasons are not authors represented in this volume: Romana Byrne, Jonathan Lamb, Jennifer-Jones O'Neill, and Annette Pierdziwol.

My thanks to Stephen Gaukroger.

Thank you to the authors who have contributed to this volume. Particularly I am gratified that so many senior scholars supported a project conceived of by someone only just beginning their career. I thank them for their trust, and for their indulgence in allowing me to 'learn on the job'. Of these authors I would like to thank Alexander Cook and Peter Otto who assisted me with my own writing.

From the beginning, this project has been supported by the Centre for the History of European Discourses at the University of Queensland. The Centre was a major sponsor of the 2010 conference and beyond this has given me a great deal of support in many other ways over many years.

I would particularly like to thank two inspirational scholars. First, Peter Cryle for his many years of judicious advice and constant support. And second, Anne Vila. If I were forced to nominate a point when this project did in fact begin I can think of no better occasion than the moment when Peter handed me Anne's *Enlightenment and Pathology: Sensibility in the Literature and Medicine of Eighteenth-Century France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998). He did this because he thought it would be useful to guide my own research and because he wanted to show me interdisciplinary intellectual history at its absolute best. In both these aspects the book continues to inspire me and I am not alone in this; as even a cursory reading of this volume will show much of the research presented herein builds on Anne's text.



Anne was the obvious choice to invite as keynote speaker for the 2010 conference and she was a wonderfully congenial guest. Across the life of this project both she and Peter have continued to be indefatigable resources and guides: I thank them.

Finally, thanks to Kim Hajek for picking me up and carrying me the forty-second kilometre.

Brisbane, Australia, 2013

Henry Martyn Lloyd

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# Chapter 1

## The Discourse of Sensibility: The Knowing Body in the Enlightenment

Henry Martyn Lloyd

**Abstract** This chapter introduces the problematic addressed by this volume by contextualising the object of study, the eighteenth-century's body of sensibility, and the discourse within which this object was constructed. It was in terms of this knowing body that the persona of the eighteenth-century knowledge-seeker was constructed. This chapter has two major purposes. First, in order to situate the individual chapters in their broader intellectual context, it outlines four major components of the discourse of sensibility: vitalist medicine, sensationist epistemology, moral sense theory, and aesthetics, including the novel of sensibility. Second, this essay elaborates those general claims collectively supported by the chapters, drawing together what they contribute to questions of the emergence of the discourse, and key elements at stake within the discourse itself. Four major themes are apparent: First, this collection reconstructs various modes by which the sympathetic subject was construed or scripted, including through the theatre, poetry, literature, and medical and philosophical treatises. It furthermore draws out those techniques of affective pedagogy which were implied by the medicalisation of the knowing body, and highlights the manner in which the body of sensibility was constructed as simultaneously particular and universal. Finally, it illustrates the 'centrifugal forces' which were at play within the discourse, and shows the anxiety which often accompanied these forces.

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## 1.1 Introduction

Famously—infamously—the Enlightenment thinker is associated with ‘reason, truth-telling, and the will to bring about social and political reform’, and is not typically associated with feeling or embodiment.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly possible to locate, in this period, both celebrations of pure reason, paradigmatically of course Kant, and enthusiastic supporters of rational or ‘enlightened’ governance, paradigmatically the *philosophes*. But the Enlightenment is also known for its association with emotion. It is thus equally possible to locate moments which celebrate effusive or lachrymose emotion and which are little concerned with reason: the sentimental novels of the 1770s and 1780s, perhaps. Accordingly, it is possible to speak of both a ‘rationalist’ Enlightenment, which has been taken up principally by ongoing traditions of philosophy, and a ‘sentimentalist’ Enlightenment, which has principally been taken up by studies of literature.<sup>2</sup> The Enlightenment of ‘reason’ and that of ‘sentiment’ are separated from each other by the structure of the contemporary Academy. Alternatively, they are invoked together in the form of a defining paradox: ‘reason and sensibility’ becomes a disjunctive conjunction. Caution needs to be exercised here; there are good reasons to suppose that taking these two moments as both paradigmatic and mutually exclusive little represents the way in which the period understood itself. During the period, intellectual pursuits were envisioned as having a distinctly embodied and emotional aspect, and the persona of the knowledge-seeker was considered in terms that drew together mind and matter, thought and feeling.

The essays collected in this volume work to reconstruct that very particular object of eighteenth-century thought, the body of sensibility, and the discourse within which it was constructed. The discourse of sensibility was very broadly deployed across the mid- to late-eighteenth century, particularly in France and Britain, on which national contexts this collection will focus. Sensibility was central to the period’s aesthetics, epistemology, medicine, natural sciences, and social and philosophical anthropologies. The Enlightenment’s knowing body was the body of sensibility; it was in these terms that the persona of the eighteenth-century knowledge-seeker was constructed.

To invoke the term ‘discourse’ in this way is to invoke deliberately a broadly Foucauldian framework. As explicated in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, to engage with the past in terms of its ‘discursive formations’ is to destabilise the established types by which historians have traditionally navigated, including ‘categories, divisions, or groupings’, established ‘unities’ such as the book and the *oeuvre*, or contemporary structures such as ‘politics’ and ‘literature’.<sup>3</sup> Foucault invokes four central features which together can be used to mark the presence of what he calls a

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<sup>1</sup>Vila, Chap. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Frazer 2010, 1–15.

<sup>3</sup>Foucault 2004, 25–28, 31.

‘discursive formation’; two of these are particularly useful for delineating the methodological scope of this collection.

First, and of particular importance for this volume, is the feature that Foucault considered as ‘being the most likely and easily proved’: that ‘statements different in form, and dispersed in time, form a group [i.e. a discourse] if they refer to one and the same object’.<sup>4</sup> More precisely, a discourse can be identified by ‘the interplay of rules that make possible the appearance of objects during a given period of time’.<sup>5</sup> Rather than relying on the notion of an already given, singular, or unified object, Foucault’s key innovation was that a discourse had the effect of unifying what may otherwise have been taken to be a disparate series of objects. The example Foucault invoked here involved the various characteristics brought together under the ‘category of delinquency’.<sup>6</sup> The point was this: a key feature of a discourse was its unifying function, its bringing together of a variety of dispersed historical phenomena to form an object. For this collection, the object in question is the body of sensibility, while the discursive formation which constituted that object is the discourse of sensibility. Accordingly, as I discuss below, a significant focus of the essays collected here is what Foucault would call a ‘system of dispersion’<sup>7</sup>: the dispersal, the ambiguities, the ‘centrifugal forces’ (to invoke Alexander Cook’s phrase) which operated within the discourse of sensibility, and which nonetheless all contributed to constructing the body of sensibility.

The second feature of a Foucauldian discourse with particular relevance to this volume is that relating to the formation of concepts.<sup>8</sup> Once again, in question are the unifying and constitutive functions of a discourse, but now the focus is on that series of concepts, otherwise apparently disparate, which it draws together (or creates). For this collection, the primary term is ‘sensibility’—it may be defined provisionally as the physiological power of sensation or perception, of sensitivity, and of affective responses—a term which was a central notion from the first half of the eighteenth century, but which was rarely used before then.<sup>9</sup> The term ‘sensibility’ drew into it several others, including: ‘sentimental’, ‘sentiment’, ‘sense’, ‘sensation’, and ‘sympathy’. These terms will be central to this introductory essay, where they will be discussed in turn in the next section, and to the volume as a whole. They are to be read, as they were used in the period, with a good deal of imprecision; as will become clear, the terms bleed into one another such that they are perhaps best described as a family of concepts, rather than as clearly demarcated individuals.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Foucault 2004, 35.

<sup>5</sup>Foucault 2004, 36, also 44–54.

<sup>6</sup>Foucault 2004, 47–49.

<sup>7</sup>Foucault 2004, 41.

<sup>8</sup>Foucault 2004, 66.

<sup>9</sup>Vermeir and Deckard 2012, 7–8.

<sup>10</sup>Vila 1998, 2. See also Festa 2006, 14–15; Cook, Chap. 5.



This collection works against the idea that eighteenth-century sensibility is, or ought to be, the purview of any single scholarly discipline. On the contrary, to inquire into the body of sensibility is necessarily to enter into an interdisciplinary space and so to invite the plurality of methodological approaches which this collection exemplifies. This interdisciplinarity goes beyond merely a diversity of historiographical approaches, it also reflects a feature of the discourse itself; I should stress that the discourse of sensibility, as it existed in the eighteenth century, itself operated at the nexus of diverse historical fields. The novel of sensibility has been the subject of a great deal of attention by literary scholars working in both the British and French contexts. These studies have often noted the interaction of the novel with other genres or disciplines, and have shown that sensibility was not just an aesthetic or literary phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> Anne Vila noted, for example, the place of sensibility in fields as diverse as ‘physiology, empiricist philosophy, sociomoral theory, medicine, aesthetics, and literature, all of which were included in the loose confederation of naturalistic discourses then known as the “sciences of man”’.<sup>12</sup> Markman Ellis identified seven fields within which the novel of sensibility operated, including moral sense theory, aesthetics, religion (especially latitudinarianism and the rise of philanthropy), political economy, the history of science, the history of sexuality, and the history of popular culture.<sup>13</sup> For Ann Jessie van Sant, ‘The three principal contexts in which *sensibility* was a key idea in the eighteenth century are physiology, epistemology, and psychology’.<sup>14</sup> More broadly, sensibility has increasingly interested historians of science: Jessica Riskin and Peter Hanns Reill have demonstrated at length that the discourse was not confined to aesthetics, nor in scientific terms merely to physiology or natural history, but extended to the hard sciences of physics and chemistry, and accordingly played a significant role in the scientific ‘empiricism’ of the period.<sup>15</sup>

Under the broad umbrella of contextualist intellectual history, the nine articles collected in this volume draw together the histories of literature and aesthetics, metaphysics and epistemology, moral theory, medicine, and cultural history in order to continue the project of reconstructing the eighteenth-century discourse of sensibility. To situate these individual chapters in their broader context, the first part of this introductory essay outlines four major components of the discourse of sensibility: vitalist medicine, sensationist epistemology, moral sense theory, and aesthetics, including the novel of sensibility. In its second part, this introduction draws together the discrete chapters to elaborate the general claims they collectively support, first in terms of questions of the emergence of the discourse, second in terms of what was at stake within the discourse itself.

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<sup>11</sup> See Vermeir and Deckard 2012; Packham 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Vila 1998, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Ellis 1996, 8.

<sup>14</sup> van Sant 1993, 1.

<sup>15</sup> Riskin 2002, 7; Reill 2005.

## 1.2 The Context

Historiography has generally equated vitalism—theories which understand life as sustained by some kind of non-mechanical force or power—with nineteenth-century science, Organicism, and Romanticism.<sup>16</sup> But vitalism was also very much an Enlightenment concern and contemporary scholarship has increasingly recognised the importance especially of medical vitalism for eighteenth-century thought. This has particularly been the case for studies of the French Enlightenment, where the significance of Montpellier Vitalism has been long recognised.<sup>17</sup> In the first instance, it is from Montpellier Vitalism that this collection takes its unifying term ‘*sensibilité*/sensibility’ (although it should be noted that Charles Wolfe in Chap. 8 points out that *sensibilité* is perhaps best translated into contemporary English as ‘sensitivity’). The ecstatic definition of the *Encyclopédie* took sensibility to be:

The faculty of feeling, the principle of sensitivity, or the very feeling of the parts, the basis and conserving agent of life, animality par excellence, the most beautiful, the most singular phenomenon of nature.

In the living body, sensibility is the property of certain parts to perceive impressions of external objects, and to produce, as a consequence, movements proportional to the degree of intensity of that perception.<sup>18</sup>

Diderot, elsewhere in the *Encyclopédie*, defined sensibility simply as that which opposes death<sup>19</sup>; the term became synonymous with the ‘vital principle’.<sup>20</sup>

In brief, the Montpellier vitalists’ influence began in the late 1740s and 1750s. Determined to undermine the ‘ordinary’ medicine of their day, Bordeu, Venel, and Barthez (among others) moved to Paris. They went ‘to school alongside Diderot, d’Holbach, and Rousseau at the Jardin Royal’, and loosely joined forces with the *philosophes*, ‘Bordeu in particular [making] a powerful impression on the Encyclopaedist circle’.<sup>21</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, Montpellier vitalists were active in Parisian medical journalism and publishing, in the court, and in the salons, particularly d’Holbach’s. Though they never ‘sought to lead the *philosophes* in their campaigns against religious and philosophical tradition [...] there can be no doubt that they left their mark on the Holbachian coterie’.<sup>22</sup> Their influence on the

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<sup>16</sup>Packham 2012, 1.

<sup>17</sup>Vila 1998; Rey 2000; Williams 1994, 2003.

<sup>18</sup>‘*la faculté de sentir, le principe sensitif, ou le sentiment même des parties, la base & l’agent conservateur de la vie, l’animalité par excellence, le plus beau, le plus singulier phénomène de la nature.*

*La sensibilité est dans le corps vivant, une propriété qu’ont certaines parties de percevoir les impressions des objets externes, & de produire en conséquence des mouvemens proportionnés au degré d’intensité de cette perception’.* Fouquet 1765, 38. My thanks to Kim Hajek for assistance with the translations.

<sup>19</sup>Diderot 1755, 782.

<sup>20</sup>Wolfe and Terada 2008, 540.

<sup>21</sup>Williams 2003, 147.

<sup>22</sup>Williams 2003, 131. More generally, see Williams 2003, 124–138, 147; Rey 2000, 2–3; Vila 1998, 45–51.

*Encyclopédie* is significant, particularly the contributions of Ménuret and Fouquet to the 1765 volumes.<sup>23</sup>

The importance of vitalism in the Scottish Enlightenment has been less recognised in contemporary scholarship, though we may note the recent study by Catherine Packham, who has drawn attention to the extent of vitalist medical thought in Edinburgh.<sup>24</sup> Two figures are of particular note here: Robert Whytt, notably for his 1751 *An Essay on the Vital and Other Involuntary Motions of Animals*, and George Cheyne for *The English Malady*.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of Packham's study was to link vitalism to emerging literary trends and the novel of sensibility; in doing so, she paralleled Anne Vila's 1998 study on the French Enlightenment. It remains the case, however, that the significance of vitalism for the history of Anglophone philosophy remains under-appreciated. And while the impact of vitalism on figures such as Adam Smith and David Hume has been noted, it has not yet received wide attention.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps the most significant feature of vitalist medicine was its rejection of mechanist or corpuscularian theories of matter, which it was felt could not account for phenomena associated with living matter.<sup>27</sup> Broadly, the vitalists sought to bridge the mind-matter dichotomy, positing in living matter the existence of active, self-activating, or self-organising forces with their origin in the active powers of matter itself.<sup>28</sup> It is generally understood that there were two major sources for vitalist medical thought. First, the new physiological model of the body which emerged in the 1740s and 1750s in the experimental physiology of Albrecht von Haller, and his twin concepts of irritability and sensibility.<sup>29</sup> Haller sought to develop an empirically grounded understanding of organic structures and their functions. His chief concern was to demonstrate experimentally the existence of irritability, understood as the capacity of muscular fibres to contract upon stimulation. He distinguished this motile property from that of feeling, which he called sensibility and which he linked to the nervous fibres and associated with the soul. This distinction was not respected by the vitalist tradition, which merged the two and increasingly took sensibility to be a singular property with two aspects.<sup>30</sup> Though indebted to Haller, the *montpelliérains* did not inherit his experimentalism, but preferred instead observation and reflection.<sup>31</sup> The second major source of medical vitalism was the animism of Georg Ernst Stahl, who described the living

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<sup>23</sup> Williams 2003, 123. For more on this see Lloyd, Chap. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Packham 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Packham 2012, 5–7. See also Packham 2012, 103–121; Wolfe, Chap. 8.

<sup>26</sup> See Cunningham 2007; Packham 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Reill 2005, 5, 33–70. See also Wolfe, Chap. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Reill 2005, 6–7. See also Gaukroger 2010, 387–420. For a detailed analysis of vitalist theories of matter, see Wolfe, Chap. 8.

<sup>29</sup> Boury 2008; Vila 1998, 13.

<sup>30</sup> See Wolfe, Chap. 8.

<sup>31</sup> Vila 1998, 46; Boury 2008, 530.

body in terms of an innate or internal force.<sup>32</sup> Boissier de Sauvages followed Stahl's lead in his lectures in Montpellier; Bordeu and Barthez were his students.<sup>33</sup> It is important to note, however, that the *montpelliérains* distanced themselves from the metaphysical aspects of Stahl's doctrine even as they agreed with his insistence on the singularity of life.<sup>34</sup> Rather than making strong metaphysical claims, they 'preferred ambiguous or disjunctive hypothetical statements when speaking about the relationship of emergent properties to those on which they supervene, as we would put it today'.<sup>35</sup> In this, there is an explicit affinity with Newtonian understandings of gravity<sup>36</sup>; the relevant biological/vital property is treated epistemologically; it is in this sense, that Charles Wolfe can speak of vitalism without metaphysics.<sup>37</sup> The tendency to avoid strong metaphysical claims regarding the precise nature of the vital force is part of what facilitated the wide spread of the discourse of sensibility over the eighteenth century.<sup>38</sup>

Vitalist medicine's understanding of the body of sensibility drew heavily upon, and interacted with, sensationist epistemologies. Although Locke did not make it a significant aspect of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, concentrating instead on philosophical analysis of the problem in the manner of Descartes, the effect of his epistemology was to introduce the sensing or sensitive body to the problem of knowledge; Locke opened the door which allowed the problem of knowledge to become a question for philosophical medicine.<sup>39</sup> Locke's influence is multifaceted and contested, and 'it is difficult to overestimate the historical importance of Locke's theory of belief for the eighteenth century'.<sup>40</sup> Developing out of Lockean epistemology and taken up broadly in the Scottish Enlightenment, sensationist epistemology was widely influential in France, where it was adopted and systematised by Condillac, among others.<sup>41</sup> 'Sense' and 'sensation' were the key concepts here. Famously, Locke argued that the mind is initially blank and that all knowledge came in the first instance from the senses.<sup>42</sup> Sensations were associated (though not exclusively) with simple ideas: light and colour, which came through the eyes, noises which arrive only through the ears, and so on.<sup>43</sup> There is, however,

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<sup>32</sup> French 1990. See also Reill 2005, 9–10, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Martin 1990; Cheung 2008, 495–496, 502.

<sup>34</sup> Vila 1998, 43; Cheung 2008.

<sup>35</sup> Kaitaro 2008, 583.

<sup>36</sup> Wolfe and Terada 2008, 542.

<sup>37</sup> Wolfe 2008.

<sup>38</sup> Packham 2012, 4.

<sup>39</sup> Vila 1998, 44; Suzuki 1995, 336–337. Suzuki argues that Locke became heavily influential on medical discourses in the late eighteenth century, though not earlier. See also Vermeir and Deckard 2012, 9, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Kuehn 2006, 391. See also Tipton 1996, 69–70.

<sup>41</sup> Brown 1996, 12; Kuehn 2006, 399; Knight 1968, 8–17.

<sup>42</sup> Tipton 1996, 74–75. See also Vermeir and Deckard 2012, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Locke 1690/1849, 63.

an important qualification to make here. Notwithstanding his attack on innate ideas or principles, Locke, in fact, held that there were two sources of knowledge, namely sensation and reflection, with reflection derivative from sensation. Locke defined reflection as ‘internal sense’, and ‘what internal sensations [...] produce in us we may thence form to ourselves the ideas of our passions’.<sup>44</sup> This ambiguity between ‘sensing’ and ‘thinking’ was also present in Malebranche, for whom ‘judgements and inferences, just like ideas themselves, are not *made* so much as *perceived*: they are themselves pure perceptions’.<sup>45</sup> The thinking body and the sensing body began to merge.

The increased importance that sensationist epistemology accorded ‘sense’ and ‘sensation’ gave impetus to the move to ground morality in a *moral* sense.<sup>46</sup> In broad terms, against those holding that morality was based either on self-interest (Hobbes, Mandeville, and later in France, Helvétius), or on reason (Cudworth), moral sense theorists held morality to be founded on a disinterested moral ‘sense’ or ‘sentiment’.<sup>47</sup> As the tradition developed, so too did ideas of how the moral sense worked. The Earl of Shaftesbury, generally taken to mark the start of the tradition, was a moral realist: he understood the moral sense to pick out real characteristics in another person. This made easy work of the notion of a disinterested moral sense; moral judgements operated as any other sense perception and consequently allowed immediate and disinterested awareness of moral properties.<sup>48</sup> We can see here that the movement between the terms ‘sense’ or ‘sensation’, and ‘sentiment’, understood as feeling and moral judgement, was not accidental.<sup>49</sup> In Shaftesbury and the moral sense tradition following him, there was a strong relationship between moral and aesthetic judgements, as both were understood to be immediate and disinterested.<sup>50</sup> However, Shaftesbury’s moral realism was weakened by subsequent moral sense theorists. Where, for Shaftesbury, the moral sense responded to a platonic notion of the harmonious and virtuous soul of the other, Hutcheson held that what the moral sense approves of in the other was benevolence.<sup>51</sup> In the culminating work of the

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<sup>44</sup>Locke 1690/1849, 144. It is worth noting that the meaning of Locke’s ‘internal sense’ easily blended into that of ‘sentiment’ understood in terms of the passions, for example in the context of the sentimental novel; there was a certain fluidity in the key concepts within the discourse of sensibility.

<sup>45</sup>Taylor, Chap. 4.

<sup>46</sup>As well as being a feature of scholarship on vitalism, the relationship between moral sense theory and the sentimental novel has been much discussed. See Mullan 1996, 249; Mullan 1988; Keymer 2005, 578–579; Brewer 2009, 22; Ellis 1996, 9–14. Though the scope of his book is much broader than the narrower themes discussed here, see too, Lamb 2009. See also Vermeir and Deckard 2012, 22.

<sup>47</sup>Norton and Kuehn 2006.

<sup>48</sup>Irwin 2008, 354, 362, 419; Norton and Kuehn 2006, 946.

<sup>49</sup>van Sant 1993, 7.

<sup>50</sup>Irwin 2008, 355; Radcliffe 2002, 456.

<sup>51</sup>Radcliffe 2002, 463. On the relationship between Shaftesbury and Locke, see Yaffe 2002, 425.

moral sense tradition, Adam Smith's 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments*,<sup>52</sup> 'sympathy' was the key concept.<sup>53</sup> That is, whether a trait was a virtue or a vice depended on whether one responded to it sympathetically, with fellow feeling, or with a reproduction of the feeling. Imagination was the central moral operator for Smith; it allowed one to place oneself in the other's situation and so feel for them sympathetically; thus Smith was able to explain the moral sense without invoking an independent dedicated faculty.<sup>54</sup> The link to the sentimental novel is clear, and literature takes a central place in Smith's *Theory*.<sup>55</sup>

A similar development of ideas occurred in France. Etienne Simon de Gamaches's 1708 *Le Système du cœur* outlined the operation of sympathy in much the same way as Smith later would, while Louis-Jean LeVésque de Pouilly's 1747 *Théorie des sentimens agréables* had a significant influence on Smith. Other notable texts included Louis-Sébastien Mercier's 1767 novel *La Sympathie* and, of course, Rousseau's 1782 *Confessions*, in which sympathetic feeling was a highly prominent theme.<sup>56</sup> As for direct appropriation of the Anglophone moral sense tradition, Diderot was an early translator of Shaftesbury,<sup>57</sup> the *Encyclopédie* article 'Sens moral' quotes Hutcheson directly,<sup>58</sup> and on its publication, Smith's *Theory* received an immediate reaction in France.<sup>59</sup> Thus, *Encyclopédie* articles such as 'Sensibilité, (Morale)' and 'Sympathie, (Physiolog.)' are highly continuous with Smith, even if his name is not mentioned directly.<sup>60</sup> A final link in the chain is *Les Lettres sur la sympathie* by Sophie de Grouchy (1798), a new translation of Smith's text, accompanied by an extensive commentary. For de Grouchy, sympathy was not a product of the imagination, but instead something felt or sensed (*sentir*); sympathy became a property of matter.<sup>61</sup> The link with vitalist theories of embodiment is clear.

We are now in a position to understand the significance of aesthetics for the Enlightenment. In this period in which the novel was stabilising as a genre, the sentimental novel was the dominant literary form.<sup>62</sup> Its dominant characteristic was the presentation of delicate or refined affective states or 'sentiments', particularly of tender feelings with regard to the plight of others. This 'language of feeling' marked

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<sup>52</sup> Irwin 2008, 679.

<sup>53</sup> It was a feature, too, of Hume's moral theory. See Taylor, Chap. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Irwin 2008, 682–684.

<sup>55</sup> Fleischacker 2002, 509.

<sup>56</sup> Bernier 2010; Vervacke et al. 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Brewer 1993, 60–74.

<sup>58</sup> Jaucourt 1765a, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Bernier 2010, 1.

<sup>60</sup> Jaucourt, Louis de 1765b, c.

<sup>61</sup> Bernier 2010, 13–14.

<sup>62</sup> The sentimental novel has been the subject of much scholarly attention, including Ellis 1996; van Sant 1993; Mullan 1988; Vila 1998; Lamb 2009; Stewart 2010; Festa 2006; Barker-Benfield 1992. For a good summary of the development of the twentieth-century critical literature on the novel of sensibility, see Gaston 2010.

a concern with the interiority of the subject, both the subject as constructed within the text and the reader as positioned by the text.<sup>63</sup> For John Brewer,

The poetics of sensibility depended upon the opening up of the private realm—interior feelings, emotional affect, intimate and familial friendship, the transactions of the home, the business of the closet, parlour, even bedroom—to public view. And it also privileged intimate and personal expression as true feeling untainted by a worldly desire for wealth and fame—hence the fiction of the editor employed by novelists like Richardson who posed as those who did not so much write as bring into the world a private, familiar correspondence.<sup>64</sup>

The novel of sensibility in its Anglophone incarnation was most famously realised in two authors. First, Samuel Richardson who, especially in his 1748 *Clarissa*, ‘established “sentiment” as the very purpose of reading fiction’.<sup>65</sup> The sentimental novel was the more or less direct inheritor of the reformed domestic novel initiated by him.<sup>66</sup> Second, Laurence Sterne, particularly with his 1768 *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. For the French context, Philip Stewart traces a development from the language of passions to that of sentiment through Prévost, Marivaux, and Crébillon, before arriving at the ‘triumph of moral sentiment’,<sup>67</sup> in works by Diderot (particularly *La Religieuse*) and Rousseau (notably *La Nouvelle Héloïse*), and by the critics/satirists, Laclos and Sade.<sup>68</sup>

Of the concepts which are central to this volume, ‘sentimental’ and ‘sentiment’ are here dominant. ‘Sentimental’ was used in the older English sense of showing refined and elevated feelings. This is reflected, too, in the French, where *sentiment* ‘expresses itself figuratively through the spiritual domain, in the various perspectives of the soul considering things’.<sup>69</sup> The term came to be associated with the passions: ‘sentiment expresses itself, too, in the code of the passions, and signifies tender affection, love’.<sup>70</sup> The novel of sensibility did not just focus on the passions, but also took ‘sentiments’ to be moral precepts.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, the very term ‘sensibility’ is also significant, although here, it did not obviously carry the meaning attributed by vitalist medicine. Rather, ‘sensibility’ in this literary sense developed out of a notion of ‘delicacy’; the association was with sensuous delight, superiority of class, fragility or weakness of constitution, tenderness of feeling, and fastidiousness.<sup>72</sup> Finally, literature was considered a means by which ‘sympathy’ and the moral sense were trained, such that writing and reading became performances of affect. ‘Sentimental texts appealed to the benevolent instincts of a virtuous reader, who might be expected to suffer with those of whom he or she read’.<sup>73</sup> Literary representations were held to

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<sup>63</sup> Brewer 2009.

<sup>64</sup> Brewer 2009, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Mullan 1996, 245.

<sup>66</sup> Ellis 1996, 44.

<sup>67</sup> Stewart 2010.

<sup>68</sup> Vila 1998, 111–181, 226–258.

<sup>69</sup> Stewart 2010, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Stewart 2010, 8.

<sup>71</sup> Mullan 1996, 246.

<sup>72</sup> van Sant 1993, 3.

<sup>73</sup> Mullan 1996, 238. See also Brewer 2009, 29.