

Scottish Enlightenment's Theory of Sympathy as Diffractive Reception

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Ideamorphic Reading – Daily reading notes filtered through the ideamorphic framework

Daily Synthesis

The Stanford Encyclopedia's revised entry on Scottish Enlightenment philosophy reveals a historical precedent for ideamorphic thinking: Smith, Hume, and Hutcheson theorized reception and sentiment as active, transformative processes rather than passive recognition. Their work on sympathy, imagination, and the embodied mind constitutes an 18th-century epistemology of diffraction—where understanding emerges not from perfect transmission but from the receiver's necessary reconstruction through their own overture.

1 selected

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

0.78

Scottish Philosophy in the 18th Century

Adam Smith's theory of sympathy—the mechanism by which one mind receives the emotional 'emission' of another and transforms it through their own embodied overture—is a proto-ideamorphic account of diffraction. Smith argues that sympathy is NOT perfect transmission (not $1=1$); the receiver must imaginatively reconstruct the other's state through their own sensory and emotional apparatus, necessarily losing fidelity to the original while generating new understanding. This is generative loss as epistemic practice: the gap between what was felt and what is received becomes the site where moral knowledge crystallizes. The Scottish emphasis on sentiment, embodiment, and the receiver's active role in meaning-making directly prefigures the ideamorphic

inversion of expression (emitter) toward reception (ouverture).
Smith's 'impartial spectator' is a codex—a systematic constraint that
shapes how moral signals are processed across minds.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scottish-18th/>

diffraction ouverture generative-loss codex

cross-modal

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