

Holmes, B. (2021) “Pain, Power, and Human Community: Empathy as a ‘Physical Problem’ in Pseudo-Aristotle and Beyond”, in K. Lu Hsu, D. Schur, and B. Sowers (eds.), *The Body Unbound: Literary Approaches to the Classical Corpus*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 13-56.

This article reframes the history of sympathy and empathy in ancient Greek philosophy and its modern European reception through the figuration of “contagious affect” in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Problems* 7.7 as a “physical problem,” that is, a problem for experts in nature. The passage in *Problems* asks why “we suffer together” with people in pain; the reference to torture implicitly marks the sufferers as enslaved. *Problems* 7.7 proposes material effluences and natural kinship as mechanisms to explain the problem. Engaging the work of Kimberly Juanita Brown, Saidiya Hartman, and Susan Sontag, the article argues that this passage does not advance an ethics of universal personhood, but instead surfaces a gendered anxiety about the circulation of affects visible, too, in Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Politics*. It concludes that the “we” in *Problems* 7.7 underscores the divide between the viewer and the sufferer rather than bridging it, instrumentalizing the pain of the enslaved as a tool for achieving mastery of contagious affect through a philosophy of nature.