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SOPHIE GROUCHY DE CONDORCET  
ON MORAL SYMPATHY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

by

KARIN BROWN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Philosophy  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1997

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## Abstract

SOPHIE GROUCHY DE CONDORCET  
ON MORAL SYMPATHY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

by

Karin Brown

Advisor: Professor Virginia Held

Sophie Grouchy de Condorcet (1764-1822) translated Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments into French and added eight letters on the subject of moral sympathy which she attached to the second volume of her translation. The translation and letters were published in Paris in 1798. The letters contain criticism of Smith as well as Mme Condorcet's own views of moral and political philosophy.

In order to present Mme Condorcet's originality in comparison to her contemporaries, after a general introduction in Chapter One, I provide the French background in Chapter Two. I present the three Enlightenment thinkers: Condillac, Helvetius and Cabanis who influenced Mme Condorcet in their sensationalistic philosophy (explaining the entire scope of intelligence and morality as originating in sensations) and their ideas on progress. In Chapter Three I present Adam Smith's theory of sympathy as a basis for moral judgment.

Chapter Four contains Mme Condorcet's theory of moral sympathy. She traces the origin of sympathy to our first sensations of pleasure and pain. Sensations of pleasure and pain are first felt at the hands of our caretakers, hence sympathy, Mme Condorcet claims, "begins in the crib". As pain is a recollectable phenomenon, sympathy means feeling pain upon seeing another person suffer. Mme Condorcet is able to explain the nature and scope of sympathy in a way that Hume or Smith did not.

In Chapter Five I present Mme Condorcet's views regarding the role of reason and sentiments in moral theory. Instead of the usual dichotomy between these two faculties, Mme Condorcet argues that both are essential to the formation of a moral agent. Morality originates in non-reflective moral feelings and is sustained and developed through rational understanding. Chapter Six contains her theory of progress in which Mme Condorcet analyzes the sources of injustice and crime in society and she argues that injustice and crime stem from unfair social institutions and legislation. Mme Condorcet, as opposed to Smith, claims that economic inequalities will always lead to oppression of the poor by the wealthy. She advocates redistribution of wealth. Development of sympathy would contribute to the alleviation of social injustices.

### Acknowledgements

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I would like to thank Marx Wartofsky for his help and encouragement in pursuing this dissertation and to express my sorrow for his untimely passing.

I would also like to thank Maxime LaFantasie and the Fales Library of New York University for allowing me to handle and photograph Mme Condorcet's translation of Adam Smith's book. The book is rare, and the Fales Library owns an original copy from 1798.

I would further like to thank Elian Golay, my French teacher, for her help with French texts and with difficult points in translation. I would also like to thank Barbara Edwards and Michael Chang for their extensive help in editing my dissertation.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my uncle, Amiel Brown, for always encouraging and supporting me, and to my husband, Michael Chang, who has sacrificed much of his own work to enable me to achieve mine.

I would also like to thank my sister, Natalie, for her love and support.

As I am closing this dissertation, I lament the loss of both my parents but acknowledge that they would have been very proud to be here today.

To my mother, my husband and my uncle

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

#### Why Would a Twentieth Century Reader Study Sophie Grouchy de Condorcet?

Sophie Grouchy de Condorcet (1764-1822) translated Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments into French and added eight letters on the subject of sympathy which she attached to the second volume of her translation. The translation and the letters were published in Paris, 1798. Her translation was the third and best French translation of Smith's work. The significance of Mme Condorcet and her letters on sympathy can be seen both from a historical and a philosophical point of view. The following are a few points of interest in reading about Mme Condorcet:

One, from a historical point of view Mme Condorcet is an important Enlightenment figure. She was the wife of Antoine-Nicolas Marquis de Condorcet, and as such, was involved and active in the social circles of her time. She exercised a marked influence on her husband but also stood on her own with regard to intellectual activity and originality. In looking at both his and her works, one cannot help noticing a similarity in philosophical argumentation and approach. Certain ideas appear in both their texts. There is no doubt that M. And Mme Condorcet were a significant part of each

other's intellectual life. Her social role, during the Enlightenment, is mainly manifested through the salon she had in Paris. The salons, which existed both before and after the revolution, were gathering places, where people usually met twice a week, and in which intellectual activity took place. Through this social institution, women took an active part (though not an official part) in the social and political life. Several women, (Mlle. de Lespinasse, Mme de Staël, Mme Necker, Mme Helvetius and others) including Mme Condorcet, constitute a part of this historical period of Enlightenment and revolution.

Two, from a point of view of women's history, Mme Condorcet is an example of an active and fruitful woman who was left out of subsequent philosophical discourse. She took an active part in philosophical discourse and during her time her work was noticed and appreciated. Her neglect was due to the fact that she was a woman, and not because her work was not suitable to be included in the history of philosophy. Women, in her time, tended to write in the form of letters rather than in the form of publishable manuscripts. In addition, as a woman, Mme Condorcet never held a public position; subsequently she was not considered an important person to research or read.

Three, from a philosophical point of view, her letters constitute an interesting Enlightenment text. In some ways the letters well represent current Enlightenment trends of

thought, and in others Mme Condorcet provides an original point of view not thought of by other Enlightenment thinkers. Both Mme Condorcet and her husband argue for advanced reform concerning democracy, human rights and social equality. The letters on sympathy are a good text in the history of liberal thought.

Four, both Hume and Smith wrote on sympathy, though a bit earlier, but still considered in the same period of time. If one is interested in eighteenth century moral philosophy, and given the fact that the letters on sympathy do not fall short in philosophical significance, Mme Condorcet should be read along with Hume and Smith. Moreover, the truth of the matter is, as I intend to show, that Mme Condorcet's letters are superior in philosophical insight with regards to sympathy. Her views are original and add new dimensions to the theory of sympathy, not found in Hume and Smith.

Five, her views on sympathy are relevant to current philosophical debate. The letters include philosophical ideas that have been thought to be only recently developed. I will mention here two aspects of Mme Condorcet's thought (although I think there are more) that are major issues in contemporary philosophical discourse. The first is her view concerning reason and sentiments which is relevant to current debate concerning emotions in ethics and epistemology. Antonio Damasio, in his book Descartes' Error, argues that emotions are an important component of reasoning. He challenges the

view, prevalent in philosophy, that there is such a thing as pure reason. Damasio is a doctor, not a philosopher, although he is well versed in philosophy. His argument, then, rests on empirical observations of patients who are emotionally impaired - patients who suffer brain damage in areas of the brain that are responsible for the functioning of emotions.<sup>1</sup> These patients score very well in IQ tests, and are able to conduct an intelligent conversation. Their rationality and intelligence are intact. Yet, they are unable to make any practical decisions concerning their lives. Their social skills are compromised as they are often very rude or cruel. Their functioning is impaired since they are unable to hold a job or a steady relationship. In summarizing the effects of similar types of brain damage (I am generalizing based on several patients depicted in this study), it is fair to say that these patients are unable to perform any practical rational activity, let alone behave morally. Damasio attributes the malfunction to lack of emotions and argues that certain aspects of the process of emotions and feelings are indispensable to rationality. Damasio cogently sums up his position:

This is Descartes' error: ...the suggestion that reasoning, and moral judgment, and the suffering that comes from physical pain or emotional upheaval might exist separately from the body.

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<sup>1</sup>In studying people with various types of brain damage, Damasio observed that damage in certain areas of the brain left the patients unable to function socially. These patients report not feeling pleasure, pain or any emotion at all.

Specifically: the separation of the most refined operations of mind from the structure and operation of a biological organism.<sup>2</sup>

Damasio sees the mental aspect of people, and with it the moral aspect, as embedded in physiology. We will see a very similar approach in Mme Condorcet's letters. She will argue that morality both originates within the physical body and is also embedded in it. An emotional or moral reaction, to her is always accompanied by a physical reaction.

There are two points to consider here. One is an empirical observation that reason, in fact, depends on emotions for proper functioning. Mme Condorcet, like Damasio on this point, will argue that moral reasoning emerges out of emotional experience and cannot exist without moral sentiments. Sentiments are an integral part of moral reasoning. The second point is a value judgment, on her part, that both reason and sentiments are important to the constitution of a moral agent. The same issue, with a different terminology, is very lively today. Instead of reason and sentiments, the modern version of the debate applies the concepts of justice and care. At this point Mme Condorcet is close to recent works in feminist ethics that argue that an ethic of care is as important as an ethic of

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<sup>2</sup>Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotions, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: G.P. Putnum's Sons, 1994), 249-50.

justice.<sup>3</sup> Mme Condorcet anticipated contemporary thought on this point that creating a dichotomy between reason and sentiments or between justice and care only impoverishes and does not enhance moral thinking. Mme Condorcet, so long ago, thought about these two aspects, empirical and moral. She will argue that reason, without sentiments, is empirically wrong and useless to moral reasoning.

The second aspect of Mme Condorcet's thought that is relevant to contemporary debate is her approach to the moral value of family relations and parental experience. Contemporary woman philosophers such as Virginia Held, Sara Ruddick, Annette Baier, Alison Jagger, Susan Moller Okin, and many more, argue that the application of women's experiences to moral thinking has built a new, different ground for moral theory. The task of explaining what is meant by women's experiences, how they differ from men's experiences, and what are the implications to moral theory, is vast and complex. I will not undertake this task here. I will only mention one aspect of this theory that appears in Mme Condorcet's thought. In a feminist view of morality, family relations are perceived as moral rather than natural. Virginia Held writes:

The whole area of relations between parents and children was characteristically conceptualized as belonging to the natural, empirical given, rather

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<sup>3</sup>Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice; Justice and Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*, Virginia Held Ed.; Susan Moller Okin, *Justice Gender and the Family*; Joan C. Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*.

than to the domain of morality. But how could this be? The practice of mothering involves almost constant moral concern and deliberation.<sup>4</sup>

Virginia Held continues to develop the implications of viewing family relations as moral (such as viewing morality as geared towards solving real problems in real situations, applying principles of care and compassion to the public sphere as well and using methods of solving conflicts through non-violence). Although Mme Condorcet does not argue explicitly that parental experience gives rise to different ideas about morality, she applies her own maternal experience to the formation of her theory. Mme Condorcet argues that sympathy arises out of the first ties between a parent and a child. By doing so, she identifies the tie between a parent and child as a moral tie, and not as a merely natural one. In addition, similarly to Virginia Held and other contemporary feminists, Mme Condorcet thinks that sympathy is an important component of both private and public morality.

In locating the origin of sympathy within the realm of the care an infant receives and in arguing that both reason and sentiments are important to moral theory, Mme Condorcet anticipated philosophical issues developed two hundred years after her time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality: Transforming Culture, Society, and Politics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 88.

<sup>5</sup>Hume also argues that both sympathy and reflection are important aspects of moral deliberations. I will argue that Mme Condorcet's views are original even with regards to Hume's

### A Short Biography

Sophie de Grouchy Marquise de Condorcet (1764-1822) was born to a noble family in a chateau outside of Paris. Her mother, who took a special interest in her education, provided her with a very good and well rounded education. Sophie was a very bright and talented child. In addition to academic studies she received painting lessons from Mme Vigée-Lebrun (a famous painter herself) who thought young Sophie was gifted. In 1784 Mme Condorcet was sent to a monastery, Neuville-les-Dames. Sending a young woman of nobility to a religious order was customary at that time, and was often done for financial reasons. Young women received a stipend from the monastery which would later be their dowry. Mme Condorcet reported being miserable and asked to come home. Her parents refused since they needed the money for her dowry. Eventually she fell ill and returned home for that reason. Mme Condorcet seems to have been an atheist and expressed her discontent with religion. In 1786 she married Marie Jean-Antoine-Nicholas Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794). They were twenty three years apart in age. M. Condorcet fell in love with Sophie and accepted the marriage without a dowry. At the time he was the Secretary of the Academy of Science in Paris. He was a mathematician, a political theorist and a philosopher. He was also one of the youngest encyclopedists

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in Chapter Five.

along with Diderot and D'Alembert. Quite surprisingly he was a feminist ahead of his time, for he argued for complete equality between the sexes. He argued for women's right to vote and hold public positions. As difficult as it is to evaluate a person's influence, there is no doubt that Sophie was a source of inspiration; she contributed to his ideas and writings throughout their marriage. Boissel Thierry,<sup>6</sup> her most recent biographer, suggested that Sophie was more enthusiastic about reform and more extreme in her political views than her husband, thus she pushed him further in expressing his views and in his political activities which eventually led to his arrest. She attended the Lycée, which was an institution for higher education for women, where she was instructed by her husband, among other teachers, in sciences, mathematics and history. Mme Condorcet was a beautiful, intelligent and vivacious woman. Her husband admired her and was very much in love with her. They were an intellectually and politically active couple. They befriended Thomas Paine and Sophie translated into French all of Paine's written correspondence and his speeches to the national assembly.

After their marriage their salon at the Hotel des Monnaies was a flourishing salon in Paris. Keith Michael

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<sup>6</sup>Boissel Thierry, *Sophie de Condorcet: Femme des Lumières* (Paris: Presses de la Renaissance, 1988).

Baker,<sup>7</sup> M. Condorcet's biographer, called it the most influential salon in the pre-revolutionary period. It was an international intellectual center, a salon about which it was said that English was spoken half of the time. Among the foreigners who visited the salon were Adam Smith, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine. In 1792 the Girondine party commissioned a committee to draft a constitution. M. Condorcet was appointed chair of this committee and the document drafted was entitled "La Girondine". As Schapiro notes, it was chiefly the work of M. Condorcet assisted by Thomas Paine<sup>8</sup>. Although M. Condorcet was the author of the document, he did not belong to the Girondine party. When the Jacobins took over the national convention they drafted another constitution which M. Condorcet openly attacked. A warrant for his arrest was issued by Chabot, a Jacobin deputy. M. Condorcet managed to hide for nine months, however, in 1794, M. Condorcet was arrested and imprisoned. Three days later he was found dead in his cell. It seems as if M. Condorcet committed suicide in prison (probably in order to avoid the guillotine) although it is possible that he died a natural death from exhaustion.

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<sup>7</sup>Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975).

<sup>8</sup>J. Salwyn Schapiro, *Condorcet and the Rise of Liberalism* (New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1963), 99.

In order to survive the revolution and save some of the property for herself and her only daughter, Sophie on her own initiative, divorced her husband while he was in prison. Boissel Theirry recounts that M. Condorcet was shocked and heart broken by her intention, but went along with her wishes because of the pending danger. She survived the revolution by painting portraits and making cameos. Once, when her home was about to be searched by the authorities, she offered to paint the portraits of the members of the town committee and escaped the ordeal. She also painted portraits of soldiers who had unreasonable demands on her. She accumulated a small fortune and she opened a small lingerie shop. Surely she was a very skillful and resourceful woman.

She edited M. Condorcet's collected works and published them posthumously with her introduction: Oeuvres completes de Condorcet, Publiees par Mme Condorcet avec le concours de Cabanis et de Garat, 1801-1804 21 vol. She also reedited and published separately the Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progres de L'Esprit Humain (M. Condorcet's book which he wrote while in hiding, with her encouragement). Mme Condorcet also wrote a book about education (to her daughter) which remained in a manuscript form and is lost today. In 1798 she published her translation of Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments in French and added a translation of Smith's Dissertation on the Origin of Language. She attached her eight letters on sympathy (which contain 150 pages) to the end of the second

volume. The letters were written to Pierre-George Cabanis, her brother-in-law who was a physician and a philosopher. After the time in which the letters were published, references to this work are brief and found either in histories or biographies. Today the book is rare and the work is almost unknown. Towards the end of her life she was not in good health and she died in September, 1822.

### About This Dissertation

When introducing a text such as Mme Condorcet's letters on sympathy, the first task at hand is to provide an intellectual context for the work. A proper context will give the reader a sense of philosophical or historical relevancy. Accordingly, there were two ways of writing this dissertation. One was in relation to contemporary thought, in which I would have explained in what ways Mme Condorcet anticipated certain ideas that are being developed in the second half of the twentieth century. The second was to present Mme Condorcet in the philosophical context of her time. Here the task would be to show in what ways Mme Condorcet was a product of her time and in what ways she was original and set new philosophical grounds. I chose to proceed with the second option. Let me then say a few words about my research method.

### A Note About the Research Method

I first surveyed various Enlightenment texts in order to compare Mme Condorcet's letters to other ethical works in the same period of time. I was interested in finding out whether there was a certain school of thought that Mme Condorcet belonged to. References to the British Moralists in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century are readily made, was there a group of French Moralists? If there was, I was looking to determine in what ways Mme Condorcet was in line with or a product of current trends of thought in her time, and in what ways she was original. In short, I intended to find out who influenced Mme Condorcet and how.

Both Smith's and Cabanis' influence on Mme Condorcet are obvious and easy to trace, but what about other people's influence? The philosophes that are mentioned in the text are: Voltaire, Rousseau and Vauvenargues<sup>9</sup>. However all three philosophes are mentioned with reference to peripheral points in the text. In addition, there is no particular affinity among Mme Condorcet's letters and the works of the three philosophes mentioned above. Consequently the people to whom she does refer in the letters are not mentioned in this

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<sup>9</sup>Vauvenargues Luc de Clapiers Marquis de (1715-1747) is an interesting, neglected Enlightenment figure. He argued for the primacy of the passions in moral motivation and for utilitarian considerations in moral and political theory. His major works are: *Introduction à la Connaissance de l'Esprit Humain*, and *Réflexions et Maximes* (1747).

dissertation. On the other hand Condillac and Helvetius whom she does not refer to at all seem to have had a considerable influence on Mme Condorcet's ideas. I chose Condillac, Helvetius and Cabanis to present the French background to Mme Condorcet's thought.

The letters, as I will show shortly, can be better appreciated in understanding both the French philosophical context in which Mme Condorcet was educated and the English philosophical context which she was familiar with. Let me then turn to the intellectual context of the letters.

### Intellectual Context

Sir Leslie Stephen, in his History Of English Thought In The Eighteenth Century, claims that much of the moral philosophy at that time, can be seen as an attempt to provide a non-religious foundation for morality. As religion no longer dominated academic disciplines, theology was no longer accepted as a satisfactory basis for morality. A belief in a deity that rules the world and reveals his will to men and women had previously provided an answer to most moral questions. Above all, with an external source of morality, the question of why one should be moral is contained within the concept that morality is enforced by a higher authority. Apart from the moral motivation of following God's will out of religious devotion, a God that rewards and punishes offers

additional incentives to be moral. Can an atheist match the foundation, obligation and certainty of religious moral concepts? Leslie Stephen asks:

How, to put the question less bluntly, should morality survive theology?<sup>10</sup>

Writers of the eighteenth century were writing both after the reformation and after the scientific revolution. Not only was the basis for philosophical theories no longer rooted in divine origin, but a scientific explanation was sought instead. The use of science in moral theory was more prevalent in France than in England. The search for a new foundation of morality received different expressions in France and in England. Instead of the old divine origin, both English and French theorists sought the foundation of morality in human nature.<sup>11</sup> English and Scottish philosophers reacted more to the selfish challenge presented by Hobbes and Mandeville. Both Hobbes and Mandeville provided theories of human nature as self interested. Instead, British Moralists argued that people possess natural social affections that constitute a basis for morality. Shaftesbury and Hutcheson

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<sup>10</sup>Sir Leslie Stephen, *History Of English Thought In The Eighteenth Century*, 2 vol. (New York And Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & world, Inc., 1962), 2:2. First Published 1876.

<sup>11</sup>The French Enlightenment is not a unified movement. There are many different schools of thought and it is not possible to point to one dominant trend. Yet, in what follows I will make generalizations concerning the French. When I speak about 'the French', I am referring to the philosophes that I am mentioning in this study. With regards to the British moralists, I am referring to the sentimentalist group: Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith.

argued that people possess a moral sense, while Hume postulated sympathy as a basis for a moral tendency. Butler places benevolence as a very basic disposition.<sup>12</sup> Although the British Moralists found a new foundation to morality in human nature, their theories were compatible with religious doctrines and with a deity still as the ultimate cause. In fact, Shaftesbury, Butler and Smith specifically placed God as the author of this moral human nature that they evoked. To what extent religion played a role in their theory is an open question; there is no doubt, though, that they were deists. The French tended more towards materialism and scientific explanation. While the British sought the foundation of morality in social nature, the French sought the foundation of morality in physical nature. Thus, many of the French philosophes adopted the view that morality originates in sensations of pleasure and pain, which of course originated with John Locke. Victor Cousin noted that the philosophical system that reigned in France in the eighteenth century was that all knowledge is derived from sense data (although it was by no means the only trend). John Locke was the father of the

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<sup>12</sup>1. Smith is an exception at this point, since he argued for a disposition for sympathy, but did not use it as a basis for moral motivation. 2. In the eighteenth century, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Smith, were referred to as Scottish (although Shaftesbury was English); Today they are grouped together with a few other philosophers and referred to as British Moralists.

sensationalistic school<sup>13</sup> and as such, he was extremely influential in the French Enlightenment.

In fact, run over all the sensualistic philosophes of the eighteenth century, there is not one who does not evoke the authority of Locke<sup>14</sup>

It was Voltaire who introduced Locke and sensationalism in France. Mordechai Grossman recounts that after the publication of Voltaire's *Lettres sur L'Anglais*, in which he introduces the salient features of Locke's thought, "Locke displaced Descartes in the mastery over French thought"<sup>15</sup> Condillac, Diderot, Helvétius, Saint-Lambert and Destutt de Tracy all embraced sensationalism, although Condillac was Locke's principle disciple.

Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding is primarily an epistemological essay in which he only touches on the issue of morality. However, it was the moral implications that were so attractive to the French. Locke argued that there is nothing in the mind that was not in the senses before. The

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<sup>13</sup>Victor Cousin traces the origin of the sensationalistic school to Francis Bacon, who established a method but did not create a system. <sup>2</sup>The term sensationalism denotes Locke's and his disciples view that mental content originates in sensation. Although I find the term sensualism more appropriate, I have come across it only in two authors (O.W Wight and Wilhelm Windelband). Sensationalism is mostly used in the literature.

<sup>14</sup>Victor Cousin, *Courses of the History of Modern Philosophy*, Trans. O.W Wight, 2 vol. (New York: P. Appleton and Company, 1889), 2:144.

<sup>15</sup>Mordechai Grossman, *The Philosophy of Helvetius: with a Special Emphasis on the Educational Implications of Sensationalism* (New York: Bureau of Publications Teachers College, Columbia University, 1926), 54.

mind is a tabula rasa. With such a clean start, people can be seen as a product of the environment. Condillac and Helvetius denied the existence of an innate social nature in order to argue that morality is socially constructed. They refused to accept any innate moral tendencies. Cabanis did accept innate moral tendencies, but only at the level of instincts. The French reacted more to the social and political turmoil of their time and were largely concerned with social reform. French Philosophes aimed at understanding human nature and the origin of morality, in hopes of improving both people and society. With a passion for reform, it is no wonder that Locke's views became so prevalent in France. Sensationalism became a basis for a philosophy of progress. We will see later how sensationalism served as a basis for Mme Condorcet's views on sympathy and progress.

### About the Letters

Mme Condorcet wrote eight letters on sympathy. The first six letters contain her views on sympathy, and the last two present her theory of progress. The letters on sympathy provide criticism and add depth to Smith's moral theory. The reviewer Boijoslin<sup>16</sup> suggested that the letters added an

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<sup>16</sup>Quoted in: Barbara Brooks, "The Feminism of Condorcet and Sophie de Grouchy", Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, (Oxford: The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, 1980), 354.

important dimension to Smith's somewhat superficial analysis of sympathy. Her criticism is addressed to Smith's lack of attention to the origin of sympathy. Although sympathy is at the heart and base of his moral theory, Smith took the existence of this disposition for granted and did not try to provide an argument for its existence or explain its origin. Mme Condorcet took the challenge of tracing sympathy to its first causes. She found the causes of sympathy in our first physical sensations of pleasure and pain. Physical experience, in her work, plays a major role in explaining how sympathy arises in the first place and how it is provoked throughout one's life. Cabanis (her brother-in-law, to whom she wrote the letters) wrote in his book On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man:

"...Smith carried out an analysis that was full of wisdom, though incomplete for his lack of success in relating it to physical laws; and which Mme Condorcet by simple yet rational considerations has been able in great part to draw out of the vagueness in which the Theory of Moral Sentiments had left it.<sup>17</sup>

In Mme Condorcet's writing we see a culmination of the two traditions, Scottish and French. Her work is original as she adds a new dimension to the theories developed by these two traditions. She writes on the physical origin of morality and she provides a moral theory based on sympathy. Picavet in

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<sup>17</sup>Pierre-Jean George Cabanis, On the Relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man, Translated by Margarit Duggan Said (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 598.

his book Les Idéologues, (even though it was written in 1891, it is still a major work on the French philosophes), noted:

It is in reading the chapters of Smith that Mme Condorcet wrote her own work to trace the line which separated the two traditions, French and Scottish, or perhaps unite them.<sup>18</sup>

I intend to show in what ways Mme Condorcet combined ideas from the French and Scottish tradition and in what ways she was original. For this purpose, in Chapter Two, I will first provide a background in the French Enlightenment. We will see how Mme Condorcet's ideas on the physical origin of morality emerge from the writings of Condillac, Helvetius and Cabanis and how she was able to go much further in explaining moral development and functioning by applying considerations of sympathy. In Chapter Three, I will proceed to present the views on sympathy of Adam Smith, by whom she was influenced and of whom she was critical. A close comparison of Mme Condorcet's views on sympathy and Smith's will reveal the depth and superiority of her views.

In Chapter Four I will present Mme Condorcet's account on sympathy showing how she combined ideas that were explained in the previous two chapters. On the topic of the physical origin of morality, she adds her view that sympathy, though originating from the first sensations of pleasure and pain, develops through the care we receive in infancy. Sensations

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<sup>18</sup>Francois Joseph Picavet, Les Idéologues (Paris: F. Alcan, 1891), Reprinted: New York: Arno Press Inc., 1975, 116.  
My translation.

of pleasure and pain cannot be isolated from the human contact (which is the context in which they are evoked) to account for morality. It is the sensations of pleasure and pain felt at the hands of our caretakers that give rise to sympathy. Hence, even though sympathy is physically based, it is not possible without the care we receive and return to others. On the view that morality is embedded in social affections such as sympathy, Mme Condorcet adds her view on the physical origin which enables her to provide an argument for the emergence of sympathy rather than just assume it exists, as Smith does.

In Chapter Five, I explain Mme Condorcet's view concerning reason and sentiments. While influenced by Smith's views on the moral sentiments, Mme Condorcet goes far beyond Smith in their applications. She presents the moral sentiments in an original and different light, showing how sentiments that are usually thought of as particular or context specific, can be general and abstract. Generality and abstraction that serve in moral theory to enable a uniformity of moral codes, behavior, or ideas, are requirements that are usually thought to be fulfilled by reason. For Mme Condorcet, a general and abstract sentiment can be applied (just as a general rule of reason can) to different actions to determine whether they are right or wrong. In addition to keeping the primacy of emotions, Mme Condorcet affirms that reason is of no less importance. Hume and Smith, for instance, did not

think that reason can generate any moral concepts; reason can merely point and direct us to a goal that was already nonrationally chosen. Mme Condorcet argues that sentiments alone cannot explain the entire scope of moral knowledge and behavior, and thus she puts forth a moral theory that combines both reason and sentiments. While the rationalists downplay the role of sentiment in moral theory, and the sentimentalists do not make much use of reason, Mme Condorcet shows how, in considering both reason and sentiments, one is not more important than the other. We will see shortly how she bridges the gap between the two schools of thought: rationalists and sentimentalists.

In Chapter Six I provide Smith's and Mme Condorcet's theory of progress. Progress for Smith is measured in terms of economic growth. Economic growth is enabled through unhindered reliance on self-interest (I will show that, contrary to common misconception, Smith did care about justice and everyone's welfare). Mme Condorcet argues for a theory of progress that entails social equality, and for a just society which is a society without great economic or class discrepancies.

## Chapter Two

### The Physical Origin of Morality in the French Enlightenment

Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac (1715-1780)

Locke, in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, claimed that all knowledge derives from experience, but experience, he qualifies, is both external and internal experience: sensation and reflection. Sensation includes all input from sense organs. Reflection is the perception of the operations of the mind such as: thinking, doubting, believing, knowing and willing. These mental faculties could not have originated from outside, thus Locke labels them an 'internal sense'. Locke's empiricism is compatible with the assumption that mental capacities are innate. The mind adds no new content, all ideas had to originate in sensation. However, the mind is a tabula rasa only with reference to ideas, and not with reference to mental capacities.

Condillac continued beyond Locke and carried Locke's theory to an extreme. He not only rejected innate ideas, as did Locke, but he rejected innate capacities as well. He presented a theory of extreme sensationalism, in which he argued that judgment, reflexion, desire and passions (among many other mental capacities) are 'transformed sensations'.

In his Traité des Sensations, Condillac set out to prove that all knowledge and the materials of knowledge are derived from sensation.<sup>1</sup>

Condillac invites us to imagine a marble statue void of all ideas and capacities.<sup>2</sup> The interior is blank, the exterior is very much like ourselves, that is, it contains the five sense organs. The marble exterior is a device to temporarily shield all senses except the sense of smell. Thus, Condillac aims at showing how many ideas and capacities can arise from the sense of smell alone. He proceeds to uncover the senses one by one and continues to demonstrate what is perceived through them. Since his theory lies at the basis of so many enlightenment texts, I will demonstrate how his sensationalism works, but only with regards to the sense of smell. Condillac continues to consider the senses both separately and together and shows how the statue becomes a living social being. Condillac demonstrates how both intelligence and morality originate in sensations. He chose to begin with the sense of smell since it appears to

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<sup>1</sup>Condillac first wrote Essai sur l'Origine des Connaissances Humaines, (1746) in which he stayed close to Locke's argument in the Essay. His full departure from Locke appears in his Traité des Sensations (1754).

<sup>2</sup>In his "Dedication to Madame La Comtesse de Vassé", Condillac recounts that he owes much of the Treatise on Sensations to her, and he credits her with several original ideas. The Treatise is a result of a conversation with her, thus, in the dedication, when speaking about the marble statue, Condillac uses the plural pronoun 'we', we imagined a..and so on.

contribute least to the cognition of the human mind. Shortly we will see that Condillac's slate is not as clean as he wishes it to be. There has to be an internal starting point for anything to register. Thus Condillac deems a principle of development which is sensations of pleasure and pain. Pleasure and pain, he reminds us are not principles external to sensations.

The principle determining the development of its faculties [the statue's] is simple. It is comprehended in the sensations themselves, for these being naturally pleasant or unpleasant, the interest of the statue will be to enjoy the one kind and reject the other. Now we are able to explain the operations of the understanding and the will.<sup>3</sup>

The only requirement then, is that the internal organs will be sensitive to pleasure and pain. The rest is embedded in these sensations, since pleasure and pain, in and of themselves, already possess distinguishing characteristics. As soon as impressions are made on the sense organs, the statue is capable of feeling them. This capacity to feel the impressions, Condillac labels attention.

At the first smell our statue's capacity of feeling is entirely due to the impression which is made upon its sense organ. This is what I call attention.<sup>4</sup>

Attention then is the result of impressions made on the sense organs. Attention, in this view, necessarily follows from

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<sup>3</sup>Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, Trans. Geraldin Carr (London: The Favil Press, 1930), xxxi.

<sup>4</sup>Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, 4.

sensations of pleasure and pain. Condillac continues to explain that the statue has no conception of better or worse at this point since it has no knowledge of possible better circumstances. In trying to show how 'clean' the statue is, not having any conception of another situation or a desire to change, Condillac makes the following statement:

But the statue, which in the first instance is only conscious of itself in the pain it is experiencing, is not aware that the pain can cease and become something else, or that there can be no pain at all.<sup>5</sup>

When did the statue acquire consciousness?<sup>6</sup> At the outset of the argument, there are two problematic points. It is not clear how attention arises from sensation, plus consciousness seems to underlie attention.

In what way do mental capacities arise? Once an odor has been introduced, Condillac uses the example of a rose; the smell does not disappear as soon as the rose had been removed. The smell "is not wholly forgotten ...for the attention retains it". The retention of an odor by attention is memory. Memory can be feeble or vivid. A vivid memory resembles the

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<sup>5</sup>Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, 5.

<sup>6</sup>In the above quote the French reads: "*mais la statue qui au premier instant ne se sent que par la douleur même qu'elle éprouve*". Geraldine Carr translated 'se sentir' as 'is conscious'. I agree with her, since this is certainly the correct meaning of the sentence. However, it is possible to translate 'se sentir' as feel, and the sentence would then read: "the statue only feels the pain it is experiencing". One could argue against me that Condillac did not attribute consciousness to the statue at this point, therefore my criticism would be invalid.

present. When memory recalls things as if they were taking place in the present, it becomes imagination.' Dividing the attention between a memory and a present sensation yields the act of comparing. Judgment is endemic to comparison. The statue cannot pay attention to two different smells without perceiving that one is not the other. A judgment is the perception of a relation between two compared ideas. The statue can compare an unpleasant present smell, to a pleasant past smell. Upon this recollection of a better state, a need for the pleasant smell arises. Desire is attention paid to a need, and a passion is a dominant desire. Thus passions, love and hate for instance, follow from desire. Need, desire and passion are simply modifications of pleasure and pain.

We see then, that Condillac is trying to show that just from the interest that the statue has to enjoy pleasure and avoid pain, the statue can classify impressions according to quality and time at first, and then develop comparison, judgment, and other mental faculties.

Judgment, reflexion, desires, passions, etc., are only sensations differently transformed. Because of this we thought it necessary to suppose that the soul receives directly from nature all the faculties with which it is endowed. Nature gives us organs in order to shew us, by means of pleasure and pain, what to seek and what to avoid. But

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'Hobbes in the Leviathan, endorses the same view with regards to imagination. Memory and imagination are but one thing. Like Hobbes Condillac is trying to show that the mind does not create any new ideas. In addition, In his earlier work, An Essay on the origin of Human Knowledge, Condillac argues that speech is what accounts for the development of reflection. Hobbes endorses the same view.

there it stops. It leaves to experience the task of making us contract habits, and of finishing the work which it has commenced.'

When Condillac argues that mental capacities are 'sensations differently transformed', he means that attention and memory, for instance, are a result of sense impression. Somehow, attention and memory are endemic to sensation or at least an immediate result. While it is possible that without sensation memory would be void (Locke would agree with this), it is not clear how the statue can retain a past impression without having had memory first. Even though Condillac states that in his view mental capacities arise only after sensation has been introduced, it seems that sensation evokes mental operations rather than gives rise to them. His basic blunder is assuming consciousness or more precisely neglecting to demonstrate how consciousness arises. Following the logic of his argument, consciousness should arise as soon as impressions are perceived. But what faculty perceives the impressions? This will be Cabanis' criticism as we will see next. There is tension in Condillac's text between his view that mental processes immediately follow sense impression, and his assumption that attention underlies them. Without attention none of the operations (comparison, judgment, imagination) could arise. Thus, memory, comparison, judgement are as much a product of sensation as of attention.

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'Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, xxxii.

The ethical implications of Condillac's sensationalism provide a fertile ground for a philosophy of progress. The only operating force in human beings is self-interest based on sensations of pleasure and pain. A desire of pleasurable objects and an aversion to painful ones gives rise to a need to satisfy these desires.

It is by this artifice that pleasure and pain become the unique principle which determine all the operations of its soul, and will raise it by degrees to all the cognition of which it is capable. In order to discern the progress it can make, we have only to observe the pleasures it can desire, the pain it can fear, and the influence of each according to the circumstances.'

In this view, human nature is quite simple and should be simple to direct. If people's needs and desires are satisfied, no moral evil should follow. If evil does not exist in human nature and if it does not exist in social institutions either, it should not exist at all.

Condillac does not go so far with his theory, he had no interest in reform. We will see this point developed by Helvetius. The idea that pleasure and pain underlie moral inclination we will encounter in Mme Condorcet's work as well. When it comes to moral development, Condillac views pain as more significant than pleasure, so he deems pain 'nature's warning'. Again we will later see this point developed by Mme Condorcet.

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'Condillac, *Treatise on the Sensations*, 5.

The text is well written in terms of style and organization. In spite of its flaws, the argument is well structured. Condillac always tries to show what the statue cannot do prior to sense impression, before he shows what it can do once the sensation is acquired. However, the argument is philosophically weak. The importance of the text lies in its influence. It is the most basic and thorough attempt to prove that the entire scope of intelligence and morality can be gotten from the environment. Although Condillac himself did not advocate social reform, his (and Locke's) sensationalism provided the basis for a philosophy of progress developed by Helvetius, Turgot and Condorcet. For if moral and intellectual faculties stem from the environment, by improving the social environment, we can improve people. We will see Condillac's influence on Helvetius next. R.J. White in his book The Anti Philosophers made the following remarks:

It is sad that Condillac should only be remembered as the philosophe who ruined Locke, for in the process he made the Lockean psychology the orthodoxy of the liberal thinkers of the eighteenth century. The total environmentalism which he drew from Locke made possible the work of Helvetius and (by direct descent from Helvetius) that of Bentham and the English utilitarians... Without Condillac there would have been no Helvetius, and thereby no Bentham.<sup>10</sup>

It is the spirit of the text and its impact that are important for the history of philosophy, not the specific arguments.

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<sup>10</sup>R.J. White, *The Anti Philosophers: A Study of the Philosophes in Eighteenth Century France*, (New York: Macmillan St. Martin's Press, 1970), 44.

Claude Adrian Helvétius (1715-1771)

Helvétius' best works are De l'Esprit (published in 1758) and De l'Homme which was published posthumously in 1771. De l'Esprit was considered a scandalous book. It was condemned and burned. In De l'Homme Helvétius sharpened a few points and did not publish it in his lifetime for his own protection. Helvétius was very close to Condillac in his sensationalistic philosophy. With an interest in ethics, philosophy of education and progress, we see the full development of sensationalism and its ethical and political implications. Helvétius starts with an ethical theory that is based on sensations of pleasure and pain, generated through self-interest, and he ends with a utilitarian theory of individual and social happiness. Helvétius completes what Locke and Condillac only touched upon and his theory serves as a link to the English Utilitarians. As his main theme, Helvétius offers a theory of progress with education and legislation as cardinal means of improvement.

So far we saw in the works of Locke and Condillac that they deemed sensation as the basic and central means to attain human knowledge. The careful study of human faculties, their formations and use, is conceived as a scientific enterprise. The idea that a science of man can be formed was prevalent in the eighteenth century. With an empirical method of inquiry, the results were expected to be reliable and accurate such

that ultimately reform, progress and improvement of the human condition would be attained. In the introduction to his Treatise of Human Knowledge, Hume claims that all the sciences are dependent on the science of man since it is via the human understanding that we formulate them. Therefore, if we can understand the extent and force of human understanding and explain the nature of ideas and operation of reasoning, we can improve all other sciences. Logic, morals, criticism and politics are the four major sciences which will yield an improvement of the human mind.

There is no question of importance, whose decision is not compris'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science. In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.<sup>11</sup>

Hume proceeds to claim that the science of man is the only solid foundation for other sciences and that the only solid foundation to the science of man is the empirical method. In the same line of thought, Helvétius claims that the science of man is the foundation for ethical, political and educational theory.

For Helvétius the goal of the science of man is attaining human happiness. Happiness is dependent on the laws under which people live and on the education they receive.

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<sup>11</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: At The Clarendon Press, 1968; First Published 1888), xx.

Naturally, any improvement in education or law will increase human happiness. A formation of a good educational and legislative system presupposes an understanding of human nature. The science of man is a two fold enterprise: The study of passions and intelligence on the one hand, and education and legislation on the other.

The philosopher should, therefore, trace out the simple and productive principle of their intellectual faculties and their passions, the only principle that can reveal to him the degree of perfection to which laws and instruction can carry them, and shew him what is the power of education over them.<sup>12</sup>

Helvétius is proposing a familiar scheme: first study human nature and then determine a suitable social, political and educational structure. The science of man, then, is absolutely a necessary part of the science of government.

Mankind are, but too often, unknown to him that governs them; yet to guide the motions of the human puppet, it is necessary to know the wires by which he is moved. Without this knowledge, it is no wonder that his motions are frequently so contrary to those which the legislator expects.<sup>13</sup>

Helvétius, as a materialist, and as we see in the above quote, in treating humans as 'puppets', is in effect asking how to operate this mechanical device called a human being. With a theory that suggests the perfection of education and legislation in order to improve human happiness, Helvétius

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<sup>12</sup>Claude Adrien Helvétius, *De l'Homme: De Ses Facultés Intellectuelles, et de Son Éducation* (Londres: Chez la Societe Typographique, 1773), 44. My Translation.

<sup>13</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 45.

would like to attribute influential power to education and legislation over the formation of human character. For this reason, Helvétius intends to prove that people are born without ideas or moral traits, hence, both education and legislation can mold peoples's intelligence and moral disposition.

In order to proceed with his ambitious scheme, Helvétius needs a malleable human nature to begin with. Thus he asks the following question, which he claims is of the utmost importance:

*Are the talents and virtues of each individual, the effect of his organization, or of the education he receives?*<sup>14</sup>

A few lines down he continues:

If I can demonstrate that man is, in fact, nothing more than the product of his education, I shall doubtless reveal an important truth to mankind. They will learn that they have in their own hands the instrument of their greatness and their felicity, and that to be happy and powerful is only a matter of perfecting the science of education.<sup>15</sup>

Adopting Locke's and Condillac's sensationalism is an excellent way to prove that people are nothing more than the product of their education.<sup>16</sup> Thus Helvétius agrees that all operations of the mind are reduced to sensations. He

<sup>14</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 45.

<sup>15</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 45.

<sup>16</sup>Albert Keim, in *Helvétius: Sa Vie et Son Ouvre*, questions whether Helvétius did acquire his ideas from Condillac. Keim reminds us that Helvétius was, like Condillac, an enthusiastic disciple of Locke, therefore, he could have reached his ideas independently.

criticizes Locke for not reducing all mental operations to sensations. For this reason, Locke could not truly demonstrate that all humans are born equal. Helvétius is very thorough in his quest to prove people's initial equality, thus he raises the following problem: if intelligence is purely a product of the senses then how is it that people with different sense organs still possess an equal potential? After all, some people have an acute sense of smell or a good ear for music. The mind, Helvétius replies, is constructed by the relations objects bear to each other and to ourselves. It is the relations between the senses that account for the arousal of mental operations, not the intensity of sense impressions. Judgment is the perception of these relations. While sensation may differ among people, judgment would not. Like Condillac, Helvétius places attention and memory at the foundation of the mind, all other mental operations follow. Upon observing the development of mind and intelligence, no difference is found that can explain inequalities among people, thus Helvétius concludes:

*The inequality of minds or understandings, is the effect of a known cause, and this cause is the difference of education.*<sup>17</sup>

All people possess an equal intellectual potential. Human intelligence is entirely a product of the environment, Helvétius goes so far in his conviction as to state that even a genius is a product of education. The same holds true for

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<sup>17</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 141.

moral disposition. A child enters the world without ideas and without passions. "If we are born without passions, we are also born without character."<sup>18</sup>

At the heart of Helvétius' sensationalism (as with any sensationalism) stands his concept of corporal sensibility, which accounts for the development of intelligence and morality. Corporal sensibility is the only innate principle. "Corporal sensibility is therefore the sole mover of man".<sup>19</sup> We already saw that the basic principles of sensibility are sensations of pleasure and pain. Helvétius distinguishes between two types of pleasures and pains: bodily and intellectual. Intellectual pleasure and pain is either a memory of bodily pleasure and pain or an anticipation of it. Thus, intellectual pleasure and pain, although distinct from physical sensations, always leads back to a physical state. Remorse, for instance, which Helvétius labels an intellectual pain, is nothing more than the foresight of bodily pain we have experienced in the past. Ultimately, remorse is always reduced to a bodily sensation. A benevolent act, to give another example, provides an intellectual pleasure that is motivated by a fear of pain brought about upon seeing another person suffer. The idea of an intellectual pleasure or pain enables Helvétius to link moral actions, such as a benevolent act, to physical sensations. We will see later that the point

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<sup>18</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 324.

<sup>19</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 171.

about intellectual pleasure and pain, their link to physical pain and moral actions, is developed by Mme Condorcet to a more sophisticated theory.

Helvétius is both a psychological and an ethical hedonist. Physical sensations are both the springs of actions and the moral goal. We are motivated by sensations of pleasure and pain and we perform certain actions in order to avoid pain and increase pleasure. For Helvétius, corporal pleasure and pain, followed by desire and interest, constitute the basis for individual, social and political life. Desire is the main principle of action. Helvétius holds that we owe any development in arts and sciences to the motive of desire. Agriculture, for instance, developed because of hunger and architecture developed for weather protection. The arts developed to fulfill a desire for pleasure and to avoid fear of disgust. Without desire, men would be destitute of any cultural edifice.

Pleasure and pain are, and always will be, the only principles of action in man. If heaven had provided for all his needs; if the proper nourishment for the body had been, like air and water, a natural element, man would have been forever wrapped in sloth.<sup>20</sup>

Helvétius adds that money, fame and honor, do not have an intrinsic value; they are desired merely for the pleasure they cause. Upon reading this hedonistic ethical theory, it is important to remember Helvétius' grand scheme. His main goal

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<sup>20</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 191.

is to prove a complete equality among people. Thus he assumes that there is nothing innate but a faculty of sensation. Anything else, such as passions, ideas, social disposition and moral actions, has to follow from this one principle of corporal sensibility.

With regards to sensationalism and intelligence, Helvétius stayed very close to Condillac's theory. With regards to sensationalism and morality he continued to develop a moral theory generated by self-interest.

Man is sensible of physical pleasure and pain, consequently he flees from the one, and pursues the other; and it is this constant flight and pursuit that is given the name self-love...Self-love entirely makes us what we are.<sup>21</sup>

Self-love then, is an effect of corporeal sensibility. It is to the sentiment of self-love that we owe all our desires and passions. If all we have is a tendency for pleasure and pain, no other innate moral tendencies, then self-interest is the only proceeding logical principle. What else, other than self-interest can develop from a desire to attain pleasure and avoid pain?<sup>22</sup> We will see with Mme Condorcet, that although pleasure and pain play a major role in her theory, she avoids a moral theory that is based on self interest by admitting a disposition for sympathy. For Helvétius sympathy is not an

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<sup>21</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 337.

<sup>22</sup>Helvétius uses self-love to indicate a sentiment we possess, love of one self, and self-interest to indicate a motive for action.

innate disposition. In order to sympathize with another person's pain, we must have felt pain before. It is the memory of our own pain that enables sympathy for another. Our own experience is the precondition for sympathy, not an innate sentiment. Sympathy stems from pain we already felt and pain that we might feel in the future. Seeing another person suffer is an uncomfortable feeling for the memories of our own suffering return. In addition, the sympathy we feel for another person is always in proportion to the fear we have of being afflicted with the same miseries. In any way, reliving another person's misery relieves our discomfort as well. Sympathy and compassion are purely an effect of self-love. Benevolence is an effect of self-love as well. Self-love and the love of others are one and the same.

The love of others is never anything else in man than an effect of self love, and consequently of his corporal sensibility.<sup>23</sup>

Self-love is the sole basis of morality. Helvétius criticizes the English philosophers and especially Shaftesbury and his moral sense theory. An assumption of a moral sense or any innate moral sentiments is unfounded and not necessary. If it is possible to demonstrate that moral traits arise from sensations, why assume an additional faculty? (This is a common argument among empiricists). Helvétius carries his main theme; as the sole motivating principle is self-love, two points follow: A. moral disposition should not vary among

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<sup>23</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 470.

people, B. with such a minimal starting point, human character is open to environmental influence.

It is therefore to this sentiment [self-love], variously modified according to the education we receive, the government under which we live, and the different situations in which we are placed, that we are to attribute the amazing difference in the passions and characters of men.<sup>24</sup>

Now that Helvétius founded morality on self-love, he has to continue with an ethical and political theory that can use self-love rather than find it an impediment. This he finds in utilitarianism.

Helvétius' concept of utility is a logical progression from his sensationalism and from his self-interest based ethical views. Since he denies people any innate moral ideas or altruistic tendencies, and relegates all moral motivation to self-interest, utility becomes a criterion for moral value.

When, at last, this term [good] is taken in a more extensive sense, and applied to morality, and the actions of men; we find, that it then necessarily includes the idea of some public utility, and to agree here about what is good, we must previously agree about what is useful.<sup>25</sup>

Helvétius then, defines good in terms of utility. He treats justice and virtue in the same manner. As a moral theory Helvétius' utilitarianism follows from his sensationalism, and as a political theory utilitarianism follows from his concept of self-interest. Utility explains both private and

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<sup>24</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 337.

<sup>25</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 228.

public morality. The next task at hand is to prove the relation between the individual and society.

Since the public is a collection of individuals, collective interest is a collection of personal interests.

Every individual judges of things and persons, by the agreeable or disagreeable impressions he receives from them; the public is no more than an assemblage of all the individuals; therefore it cannot fail of making its interest the rule of its decisions.<sup>26</sup>

With this individualism, the best social order is one in which personal interest is fulfilled in as many people as possible.

The role of the legislator is to create a legal system under which public and private interest coincide. Under a well formed society self-interest and public interest are in harmony.

The actions personally advantageous to these virtuous men, are so truly just, that they tend to promote the general welfare, or, at least, not to lessen it.<sup>27</sup>

In order to reach the goal of public utility, Helvétius reaches his utilitarian principle, a formulation that is very close to Bentham's greatest happiness for the greatest number:

It would be necessary to refer them all [laws] to one simple principle, such as that of the public utility; or, that of the greatest number of men, subject to the same form of government: a principle more extensive and more fruitful than imagination can conceive: a principle that includes all the morality and all the legislation, of which many men

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<sup>26</sup>C.A. Helvétius, *De l'Esprit: or Essays on the Mind and its Several Faculties* (London: W. Lewis, 1809), 37. Translator's name unavailable.

<sup>27</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 40.

discourse without understanding them, and of which the legislators themselves have yet but a very superficial idea, at least if we may judge from the unhappiness of almost all the nations upon earth.<sup>28</sup>

Public utility then, is the goal of morality and legislation. Notice the similarity to Bentham's formulation of the principle of utility:

The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work: it will be proper therefore at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever; and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.<sup>29</sup>

Although the idea of utility is not original to Bentham, he is usually considered to be the first utilitarian. The idea of utility appeared in the theories of Hutcheson, Hume and Priestly among many others. However, Bentham was the first philosopher that used the principle of utility as grounds for his philosophical systems of morals and legislation. While other philosophers may have recognized the appeal of utility in ethics, Bentham formed the principle of utility as a philosophical system. At the outset of his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Bentham explains

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<sup>28</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Esprit*, 135.

<sup>29</sup>Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and legislation*, Ed. J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 11.

that the principle of utility is both factual and normative. People are governed by considerations of pleasure and pain, which are, Bentham argues, both what people do and ought to do. The principle of utility is the foundation of every action of individual and government, of private and public morality. This criterion, of public utility as including all morality and legislation is found in Helvétius as well. In reading Helvétius's *De L'Esprit*, it becomes evident that Helvétius, and not Bentham, was the first utilitarian. Even though this has passed uncredited by many historians of philosophy, it has not been uncredited by Bentham. Bentham credited Helvétius with first forming the principle of greatest happiness for the greatest number.<sup>30</sup> Sir Leslie Stephen recounts that "upon country trips which he [Bentham] took with his father and step-mother, he used to lag behind studying Helvétius' *De l'Esprit*."<sup>31</sup>

Helvétius developed Locke's and Condillac's sensationalism into a moral and political theory. (Locke did not stay loyal to sensationalism with regards to his political theory.) In place of Locke's intuitive power of reason to discern natural law, Helvétius introduced the principle of utility. Helvétius attributes a tremendous responsibility to

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<sup>30</sup>Quoted in: Kingsley Martin, *French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of Political Ideas from Bayle to Condorcet* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962), 177.

<sup>31</sup>Sir Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians*, 3 vols. (New York: Reprints of Economic Classics, Augustus M. Kelley Publisher, 1968), 1:177.

the legislator in molding moral character. He could only do so with citizens that are born without a moral disposition. Helvétius intended to base morality of human nature only to show that in effect morality stems from education and government. His aim is to argue that progress, which he evaluates in terms of happiness, can be achieved only when the legislator realizes that public welfare should be the goal of any laws passed. The more power Helvétius attributes to external forces, the more progress can be achieved.

Opinions regarding the originality of Helvétius as a philosopher vary. Mordechai Grossman does not attribute an originality to Helvétius:

As an original thinker Helvétius would not rank high. Probably there is not a single important idea presented by Helvétius which was not also presented by his contemporaries. But it is precisely in this that the importance of Helvétius lies. He was the epitome of his age.<sup>12</sup>

Irving Louis Horowitz, on the other hand, notes,

Helvétius was an original and important thinker, linked to his age and yet anticipating a future, more democratic and enlightened time.<sup>13</sup>

Horowitz labels the neglect of Helvétius in the past two hundred years, versus the elaboration on Bentham and Mill, an incompetent scholarship.

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<sup>12</sup>Mordechai Grossman, *The Philosophy of Helvetius*, 54.

<sup>13</sup>Irving Louis Horowitz, *Claude Helvetius: Philosopher of Democracy and Enlightenment* (New York: Paine-Whitman Publishers, 1954), 27.

Whether Helvétius initiated ideas or merely expounded on them, he was no doubt an influential philosopher. Both Horowitz and Albert Keim<sup>34</sup> (Helvetius' biographer), attribute extensive influence to Helvétius. Horowitz suggests that from Helvétius' utilitarianism two schools of thought developed; a "right wing" of nineteenth century British Utilitarianism, and a "left wing" of scientific materialism of Marx and Engels.<sup>35</sup> We will see some of Helvétius' ideas of progress developed by Antoine Condorcet in Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain; and we will encounter Helvétius' emphasis on legislation in Mme Condorcet's letters on sympathy.

#### Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis (1757-1808)

On December 5, 1795, Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis was elected to the new class of Moral and Political Sciences of the French National Institute. Martin M. Staum<sup>36</sup> recounts that at one of the sessions, Cabanis exhorted his friends to establish the "science of man and society". That was indeed

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<sup>34</sup>Albert Keim, *Helvétius: Sa Vie et Son Œuvre* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1970).

<sup>35</sup>For more about the relation between Helvétius and Marx, see: G.V. Plekhanov, *Essays in the History of Materialism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1967).

<sup>36</sup>Martin M. Staum, *Cabanis: Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy In the French Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3.

his goal. Cabanis belonged to a group of philosophes called the Idéologues. He and the Idéologues aimed at establishing a science of man which would unite analysis of ideas, physiology and ethics. Destutt De Tracy invented the term "ideology" designating a science of ideas. Tracy denounced metaphysical assumptions as a method to investigate thought, and embraced Locke and Condillac's empirical method instead. He intended to study how ideas are formed, expressed and combined. The Idéologues, as a group, are quite neglected in English literature. They were politically active in fighting for constitutional government, civil and legal rights and basic universal education. Even though there is no consensus as to how many philosophes belonged to this group, we can at least mention Marie Jean Condorcet, Antoine L. Lavoisier and Pierre S. Laplace.<sup>37</sup> Cabanis studied medicine but did not practice. Between 1796-1802 he wrote: Rapport du Physique et du Moral de l'Homme, which he published in 1802. The book presents an extensive and detailed attempt to map the relations between different physiological events and the formation of character and ideas. It is written in the form of twelve memoirs.

Cabanis is a materialist; the study of man and everything about him is physical. The science of man is a physiological

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<sup>37</sup>The most extensive work on the Idéologues is: François Picavet, *Les Idéologues* (New York: Arno Press, 1975, Paris: Félix Alcan, 1891).

study. Naturally the study of morality is contained within physiology as well.

...physiology, analysis of ideas, and ethics are but the three branches of a single science, which may justly be called the *science of man*.<sup>18</sup>

What we have encountered so far in theories that suppose a physical basis for morality, becomes in Cabanis a detailed study of the relations between the physical and the moral aspects of man. He believed that the study of the physical body holds the key to moral and intellectual perfectibility. In line with the optimism of the period, Cabanis believed that the proper study of man and his faculties would yield a better understanding of human needs and reveal the optimal conditions for extracting his full moral potential. In the eighteenth century, as a part of a materialistic trend, there was a surge of works exploring the relation between the moral and physical in man, such that Cabanis' work is not unique in this sense.<sup>19</sup>

Cabanis raises the question of why the science of nature progressed but not the science of man. Every ethical theory assumes a theory of human nature as its basis and claims to

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<sup>18</sup>Pierre-jean-Georges Cabanis, *On the Relations Between The Physical And Moral Aspects Of Man*, 2 vols., ed. George Mora, trans. Margaret Duggan Saidi (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 33. Translated from French, *Rapport Du Physique Et Du Moral De L'Homme* (2nd. ed; Paris: Crapart, Caille, And Ravier, 1805), 2 vols.

<sup>19</sup>For more on this issue see Sergio Moravia, "'Moral'-'Physique': Genesis and Evolution of a 'Rapport'", in *Enlightenment Studies in Honor Of Lester G. Crocker*, ed. Alfred J. Bingham and Virgil W. Topazio (Oxford: The Voltaire foundation at the Taylor Institute, 1979).

understand human nature. Separating the physical from the moral gives rise to an ethical theory with a metaphysical basis, which constitutes a shaky foundation. The reason that the science of nature progressed, and not the science of man, is that morality was separated from medicine. Locke and Condillac, who saw experience of sensation as the foundation of morality, could not explain this foundation. Just what exactly is sensibility? With respect to morality, Condillac could name the foundation of morality but not explain what its nature is. With regards to human understanding, his theory is compatible with the assumption that sensibility presupposes an immaterial faculty of perception. What Condillac missed is that he did not describe morality and intelligence as a physiological process. Later on we will see that Mme Condorcet applies the same type of criticism to Smith's concept of sympathy, which assumed the disposition but did not explain its nature since he overlooked the physical aspect.

Thus we see that as a materialist Cabanis believed that the study of man is contained in a physiological study, and as a doctor he combined medicine and ethics to form one study. Cabanis revered Hippocrates as the father of this approach of combining medicine and philosophy. Hippocrates studied the history of illness and traveled to many places to learn about the effects of physical conditions, such as climate, land, air and water and their effect on man. Even though Hippocrates' views are in need of modifications, (for his system did not

benefit from the advent of modern science yet) he and the ancients, Cabanis claims, were on the right track.

At the heart of Cabanis' system stands his concept of physical sensibility. He conceives life as a sequence of movements that are made by the impressions received by the different organs. Sensibility is the connection between the body and the mind. The mind is a function of the nervous system. Cabanis is famous for his statement that "the brain secretes thoughts just like the liver secretes bile". Sensibility then, which enables the mind to perceive internal and external impressions, is at the center of human life:

Without the sensibility we would not become aware of the presence of external objects; we would not even have a means of perceiving our own existence, or rather we would not exist. But from the moment at which we feel, we are.<sup>40</sup>

Sensibility does not belong exclusively to the brain, but results from internal organs as well. (This approach can be seen in Mme Condorcet's work as well.) The material body has the ability to generate sensations as well, through which the nervous system can influence other organs including the brain. Thus the production of ideas, emotions, and wishes that give rise to moral activity is produced by the physical body. Here lies his polemic against Condillac; in overlooking everything that is internal Condillac missed the heart of morality. Since we are capable of receiving impressions from an internal

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<sup>40</sup>Cabanis, *On the relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 51.

source, morality is embedded in instincts. For Cabanis sensation is not sufficient to account for a newborn reaching for his mothers' breast, or for maternal instincts. It is absurd to assume that a newborn is a tabula rasa. The human body already in the fetal stage is comprised of impulses and needs. Morality is innate. Cabanis rejected a psychological analysis for a physiological one. He emphasized hereditary traits, the states of internal organs, dreams, illusions, depressions, unconscious impulses and many other internal precesses that he took to be more significant than mere sensation from an external source. "...the ethical is only the physical nature considered from certain particular points of view."<sup>41</sup> For the reason then, that morality stems from the body, its organs and internal processes, morality therefore, is a proper subject matter for medicine.

The study of physical man is interesting both for the doctor and for the moralist and is almost equally necessary for both. In striving to discover the secrets of the organization, in observing the phenomenon of life, the doctor tries to recognize in what consists the state of perfect health, what circumstances may disturb this equilibrium, what means may maintain or restore it. The moralist endeavors to go back to the more obscure operations that constitute the functions of the intelligence and the conditions of the will. Here he looks for rules that are to direct life, and for roads that lead to happiness.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>Cabanis, *On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 50.

<sup>42</sup>Cabanis, *On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 7.

With the goal of arriving at the concept of the moral man, Cabanis intends to study the conditions that are most conducive to the function of morality. He undertakes a detailed study of physical conditions such as climate, sex, age, mental and physical sickness and shows how they affect our sensibility, which influences the formation of ideas including moral ideas. As I do not intend to trace the specifics of his arguments concerning all the physiological aspects that influence men. I will demonstrate Cabanis' view with only one of these aspects: sex. We will see how this "progressive" approach of being able to attain the key or secret to creating a moral man, at the same time served to exclude women because he thought they were inferior.

Cabanis, before proceeding in the fifth memoir, reaffirms that he stays loyal to the empirical method of the cold observation of facts even on a topic that is as emotionally charged as is this one. He proceeds to note and enumerate the differences between men and women; both physical differences such as bone structures, muscles and sex organs, and character differences in which he attributes fragility, weakness and lack of stability to women, and vigor, strength and endurance to men. He then proceeds to relate the two, claiming the behavioral differences stem from the physical ones. He traces differences among men and women from childhood through puberty to adulthood where the differences are most pronounced. In childhood it is already noticeable that little girls are

occupied with making good impressions and the art of conversation and in their play they prepare for the role nature has planned for them. Women possess softer fibers and less vigorous muscles which give rise to disgust of violence and a tendency toward sedentary occupations. Men, on the other hand, in light of their strength wish to give an expression to it, the life of force, courage and danger suits them. The feeling of weakness in women inspires less confidence which, in turn, causes women to seek protection and support from others. Women should lead a sedentary life that does not require use of muscles, rather they occupy themselves with small objects. In addition, the acute sensibility and the muscular weakness in women renders them more fit for their role of conceiving, gestating, lactating and providing child care. Men and women share common characteristics that are related to human nature but they differ in anything that is related to sexual differences.

Cabanis argues that the moral differences between the sexes stem from the different physical characteristics. At the base of all physical differences between men and women lie the sexual organs which generate all other differences.

It is first of all certain that regardless of the way this may come about, the fleshy fibers are weaker and the cellular tissue more abundant in women than in men. Second, it cannot be doubted that it is the presence and influence of the uterus and the ovaries that produce this difference.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Cabanis, *On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 221.

As the sex organs are of glandular nature, the liquid they secrete affects the brain. What about proof or at least an explanation of how this is supposed to work? Cabanis cannot offer any explanation let alone a proof. Cabanis is aware of this, nevertheless, he insists:

We are not yet, and perhaps never will be capable of determining by what special action the genital organs influence other organs;...But this influence is obvious; it is incontestible."

This is a good example of the view that biology is destiny for it is demonstrated in all its absurdity when this crude materialism is fully expressed.

Cabanis places sympathy at the core and base of morality, (here I think we can see Mme Condorcet's influence on Cabanis). Sympathy is a physical phenomenon as well. As parts of matter have a natural tendency to be attracted to one another so do living organisms. Thus, sympathy falls within the domain of the instinct. The goal of instincts is the preservation of the animal. The two strongest sympathetic impulses are love and maternal tenderness. Sympathy is derived from an assumption of a faculty of feeling in the other. Cabanis labels this "a feeling of the MOI" which means attributing a self or an ego to another. It is the presence of a MOI that attracts us or repels us from one another. Cabanis does recognize that sympathy develops to become a reflective sentiment. As we develop, instincts become

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"Cabanis, *On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 220.

associated with operations of intellect. Cabanis distinguishes between instinctual sympathy and moral sympathy; moral sympathy is a product of reflection and not merely physical instinct. Considered from this point of view, sympathy is far from the primitive animal attraction which serves as its basis. Sympathy is related to instinct, as thoughts are related to sensations. In both cases, a physical phenomenon gives rise to a mental and a moral phenomenon. We will encounter this approach, in a more sophisticated form, in Mme Condorcet's letters on Sympathy. This is another example, in this period of the Enlightenment, of an attempt to provide a solid foundation for morality which is founded in human nature.

The controversy here, between Condillac and Cabanis, is the foundation of human rationality and morality. Locke and Condillac adopt a psychological approach versus the physiological approach of Cabanis. Locke, in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, argues against rationalism which he conceives as a theory that advocates innate ideas. Thus he first devotes book one of the Essay for the refutation of innate ideas. He then proceeds to establish his empiricism as an alternative. Even though Locke demonstrates how all knowledge derives from experience, his view ultimately leads to a rational view of morality. Moral considerations result from the operation of reflection on sense data. Good and evil are complex ideas made by the mind from the simple ideas of

pleasure and pain. Empirical origin is compatible with a rationalistic ethic. The contents of the mind and personality may have been created through sensations, but they operate through reflection. This explains the odd section in book IV of the Essay where Locke suggests that morality is capable of demonstration analogous to mathematical proof. Locke's theory of natural law is also rationalistic. What Cabanis did, that Locke and Condillac could not do, is establish a nonrational basis for morality embedded in the instinct of sympathy. Sensations alone do not provide reasons for action while instinct and sympathy do.

Cabanis' view that mental life is physiologically based is much closer to modern day theory. Sergio Moravia notes: "This is one of the texts that represents a landmark, at least in the history of psychology."<sup>45</sup> Cabanis saw mental illness as inherent in the nervous system. The use of anti-psychotic or anti-depressant medication is prevalent today. Practitioners who use medication to treat mental illness, do not conceive mental illness as begotten from the environment; they see mental illness as physiological malfunction, for the most part, a genetical disposition. Modern psychiatry, for the most part, rejects Locke and Condillac's environmentalism in favor of materialism.

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<sup>45</sup>Cabanis, *On the Relation Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, Introduction, xxx.

## Conclusion

In Mme Condorcet's work we will see the influence of the two traditions, British and French. The French argued for a physical origin of morality and the British argued for social affections as the origin of morality; Mme Condorcet will combine both.

We saw that Condillac, Helvétius and Cabanis developed Locke's sensationalism further, to explain how morality originates in sensations of pleasure and pain. Condillac and Helvétius elaborated on the idea that the experience of pain underlies moral inclinations. Mme Condorcet will apply this concept to the explanation of the origin of sympathy. The experience of pain, rather than the imagination as we will see is the case with Smith, will become an element that enables sympathy. We saw that Helvétius and Cabanis drew a distinction between physical sensations and emotions, and claimed that the two are interconnected. The distinction between physical and emotional pain and the link between them, for Mme Condorcet will serve to explain the emergence and workings of sympathy. Sympathy will arise from physical sensations and will be accompanied by them. By adding a physical origin to the conception of sympathy, Mme Condorcet will end up with a richer more complete conception of sympathy. We will see how her conception of sympathy is more plausible than the one we will encounter in Hume and Smith.

By adding a disposition of sympathy to the physical origin of morality, Mme Condorcet will be able to avoid the self-interest based morality that we saw with Condillac and Helvétius. After having presented the French background, let us turn to the British next.

### Chapter Three

#### Adam Smith on Sympathy

##### Smith and Sentimentalism

In presenting Smith's views as background and basis of comparison to Mme Condorcet's letters, I am interested in evaluating how successful Smith was in building a moral theory on the basis of sympathy. Later I will apply the same criterion of evaluation to Mme Condorcet's letters. Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments is his main ethical work. Scholarship on this work is relatively limited and can be divided into two schools of thought. Some scholars read the Theory of Moral Sentiments (henceforth TMS) as a moral theory and others read it as a theory in moral psychology or sociology. Scholars who read TMS as a moral theory, find it to be circular or contradictory and claim that Smith has failed to provide a coherent or adequate moral theory. Praises of this work appear from those who read it as a theory in moral psychology. Edward Westermarck noted: "For my own part I maintain that Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is the most important contribution to moral psychology made by any British thinker."<sup>1</sup> More recently, Glenn Morrow, T.D Campbell, and Ralph Lindgren interpret Smith's theory as a

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<sup>1</sup>Westermarck Edward, *Ethical Relativity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), 71.

social theory of ethics and claim that lack of appreciation for this work stems from overlooking the social aspect of the theory. The question arises then, what kind of theory does Smith present in his TMS, or what is his place in the history of ethics?

William Frankena divides ethical theory into descriptive, normative, and meta-ethical.<sup>2</sup> A descriptive or empirical inquiry explains the moral phenomenon out of a theory of human nature. Such a theory is not considered moral theory proper, but more of a moral anthropology, psychology or sociology. Normative inquiry, on the other hand, is evaluative or prescriptive and is the proper object of a philosophical moral discussion. A descriptive theory, Frankena suggests, only bears on ethical questions, whereas a normative theory provides ethical guidelines.

Is Smith's theory normative or descriptive? In reading Smith, we have to ask if he provides ways to evaluate and judge motives for actions. Does he provide criteria to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil? Can he assert normative judgments? If we can provide positive answers to these questions and construct a moral theory out of Smith's writings, what kind of a theory would it be?

Smith is a sentimentalist and the answers to the above question is within the scope of sentimentalism. The issue

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<sup>2</sup>See: Frankena William, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

with which I intend to grapple in evaluating Smith, is whether sentimentalism can be a normative, universal and obligatory theory, and thus fulfill the expectations of a moral theory. I argue that sentimentalism can be a moral theory and I will show its strengths and weaknesses.

The term 'sentimentalists' can be loosely used to refer to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, and Smith, since all of them believed that certain natural affections or passions constitute the basis for morality. However, Shaftesbury and Hutcheson provide a theory that is based on an assumption of a moral sense. Hume in his discussion of the artificial virtues, includes utilitarian aspects of judgment that are not based on sentiments. Smith is the only one, in this period, who attempted to provide a theory that is based solely on sentiments.

The question of whether morals are motivated and evaluated by reason or sentiments was prevalent in the eighteenth century although not exclusive to that time. Ethical theories were roughly divided into intellectualists (today referred to as rationalists) and sentimentalists.<sup>3</sup> Today, even though this field has become more branched and carefully defined it still makes sense to refer to those general categories of rationalism and sentimentalism as basic categories that underlie more specific types of theories. D.D

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<sup>3</sup>For more on this issue see: Selby-Bigge, *British Moralists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897).

Raphael argues that the basis for a rationalistic moral theory is metaphysical:

...there are views that ethics contains some absolute truth, that moral values (if not other values) have a foundation in the nature of the universe or in the nature of God, not simply in human nature, which might have been other than it is. Such views have been held by some (not all) theologians and by philosophers called Rationalistic.<sup>4</sup>

Alan Gewirth attempts to base a rationalistic ethics solely on the capacity to reason. He defines reason as consisting of inductive and deductive logic. Because induction and deduction respectively achieve logical necessity, Gewirth argues, they are the only way of avoiding arbitrariness and attaining objectivity. Moral assertions, Gewirth claims, should achieve "truth that reflects not personal whims or prejudices but the requirements of the subject matter". Because of the truth and certainty of moral precepts they are also obligatory.

On the other hand, despite Hume's dictum that "reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls", the logical validity and necessity achieved by deduction and the empirical ineluctableness reflected in induction are directly constitutive of reason, and they give it a cogency and nonarbitrariness that provide a sufficient justification for relying on it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Raphael D.D. *Moral Philosophy* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 18.

<sup>5</sup>Alan Gewirth, *Reason and Morality* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 23.

Whether moral assertions are metaphysically based or rationally constructed, rationalists seek a necessary truth at the foundation of moral assertions. In effect, the division of theories into descriptive and normative rests on the truth value of moral principles. It is the fact that moral claims are true that gives rise to normative obligatory precepts. For a rationalist, an empirical justification for morality is not acceptable since no moral criterion is provided to justify the empirical observation or conclusion. One might observe that people disapprove of murder. But we can still ask: is murder morally wrong? Since the task of morality, as rationalists perceive it, is to justify moral principles, they aim at basing morality on an independent criterion that either already possesses moral content (as with a metaphysical basis), or on a moral content that can be derived. The question arises: what kind of a foundation does a sentimental moral theory provide?

While a rationalistic theory is based on metaphysical assertions, or on the capacity to reason, a sentimental theory is necessarily based on emotions which constitute a moral psychology. A moral theory that is based on psychology would be a descriptive theory as Frankena suggests. When a psychological explanation is included, as it occurs in sentimentalistic theories, the argument is seen as naturalistic. The sentiments are viewed as natural and if they do give rise to moral action the latter is incidental and

not intentional. A sentimental theory easily commits the naturalistic fallacy of not being able to explain the path from the 'is' of the feeling to the 'ought' of the moral principle. From a rationalistic point of view, sentiments need to be morally justified. Since sentiments do not have a truth value, from where do normative obligatory principles derive? In addition, D.D. Raphael sees sentiments as subjective and relative; accordingly, a theory that is based on feelings would also be subjective and relative. Thus we can draw the following comparison: a theory that is metaphysically or rationally based, through a logical analysis, will yield necessary truths. True premises yield true conclusions, thus, a normative theory can be constructed with objective, universal and obligatory moral principles. On the other hand, a theory that is based on feelings, developed through a psychological explanation, yields a naturalistic analysis. As feelings are relative and subjective, contingent, subjective and relative moral principles follow. It is this view concerning theories that are based on sentiments that I intend to challenge. I raise the question: does the fact that a sentimental theory is based on emotions prevent it from giving rise to normative and prescriptive principles? The answer, as we will see in this chapter and in Mme Condorcet's work, depends on a correct analysis of sentiments. I intend to show that Smith, and later, Mme Condorcet, are able to draw normative moral principles from an emotional foundation.

I will also briefly mention here that there is a considerable amount of prejudice in moral philosophy against the sentiments as a reliable indicator of a moral value. Generally, throughout the history of philosophy there is a tremendous reverence for reason. Passions are viewed as inconsistent and in need of control by reason. Lack of appreciation of Smith's theory stems from this general attitude in philosophy toward sentiments (and from a misinterpretation of Smith's use of reason and sentiments in his theory which I will discuss shortly). An appreciation of Smith's theory depends on a different view of sentiments. I will discuss this in greater length when we reach Mme Condorcet's views on the moral sentiments.

Notice that common attitudes towards sentimentalism are expressed by the sentimentalists themselves. Smith poses the following two questions: 1. "Wherein does virtue consist?" 2. "By what power or faculty of the mind is it recommended to us?"<sup>6</sup> Although we encounter these questions only at the end of TMS, they provide a coherent frame for his theory and indicate his approach to moral theory. Smith views the first question as the practical aspect of his inquiry. The second question and the one he spends most of his book on, he views as an intellectual endeavor only. Our opinions concerning virtue influence our notions of right and wrong. However,

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<sup>6</sup>Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Glasgow: 1759; Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 265.

investigations of our moral faculties and the way they operate, namely how we reach moral judgment, Smith labels as "a mere philosophical curiosity"<sup>7</sup>. On this point, one among many, Smith was influenced by Hutcheson and Hume, both of whom indicated the same approach. Hutcheson claimed that whether we study or analyze our moral faculties, they exist and function:

Let this also be remembered, that the natural dispositions of mankind may operate regularly in those who never reflected upon them nor formed just notions of them...There have been very different and opposite opinions in optics, contrary accounts have been given of hearing, voluntary motion, digestion, and other natural actions. But the powers in reality perform their several operations with sufficient constancy and uniformity in persons of good health whatever their opinions be about them. In the same manner our moral actions and affections may be in good order when our opinions are quite wrong about them.<sup>8</sup>

Hume compared virtue and vice to sensual qualities such as color and sound which are qualities in the mind that are projected onto objects. As such they have "little or no influence on practice"<sup>9</sup>. There are two points of interest here, One, (this point will become relevant later on in comparing this approach to Mme Condorcet's) these three philosophers take the existence of our moral faculty for granted. They endeavor to explain how moral faculties operate

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<sup>7</sup> Smith, *TMS*, 315.

<sup>8</sup>Francis Hutcheson, *Illustrations on the Moral Sense*, first published in 1728 (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971), 106.

<sup>9</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, 469.

but they do not establish how they came about. Two, they see philosophical inquiry of moral faculties and their operation as empirical in nature and as a descriptive enterprise. I will show that contrary to Smith's own description, normative aspects are included in his theory. Let us see how Adam Smith constructs a moral theory that is based on sympathy.

### Smith's and Hume's Definition of Sympathy

It is fair to say that for the most part, Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments is a theory of moral judgment based on sympathy. Naturally we first have to ask: What is the difference or the relation between sympathy and moral sentiments? They are not identical, as one might assume. Moral sentiments are specific emotions such as pity and compassion that we feel for another, while sympathy is a general fellow-feeling with any passion.

Pity and compassion are words appropriated to signify our fellow-feeling with the sorrow of others. Sympathy, though its meaning was, perhaps, originally the same, may now, however, without much impropriety, be made use of to denote our fellow-feeling with any passion whatever.<sup>10</sup>

Sympathy, then, is not identical with specific moral sentiments. Furthermore, specific moral sentiments arise from sympathy. If sympathy is not a specific sentiment what then is sympathy according to Smith?

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<sup>10</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 10.

The answer to this question is not simple for there is some controversy in interpretation (or misinterpretation) which I would like to point out. Smith's concept of sympathy is most commonly equated with Hume's. Let us first look at Hume's construction of sympathy:

No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own.<sup>11</sup>

Sympathy, then, is a capacity to receive what others communicate about their sentiments. Moreover, Hume indicates that passions such as hatred, love, courage, and resentment arise from communication with others and not only from one's own temper. For this reason Hume labeled sympathy as the animating principle of the passions.<sup>12</sup> How does this communication take place? In accordance with Hume's theory of ideas, ideas are copies of impressions, and the two are distinguished by force and vivacity only. Hence, we receive an impression of a passion which gives us an idea of it. We might receive an impression that a person is angry which would give us the idea of anger. This idea of anger is then converted through the imagination into a lively impression of anger. A lively impression of anger is in effect a feeling of anger. Thus, we can see that according to Hume, since

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<sup>11</sup>Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, L.A. Selby-Bigge ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 316.

<sup>12</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, 363.

impressions and ideas are distinguished by force and vivacity only, the idea of a passion can be so enlivened as to become like the passion itself. Hume can explain how it is that upon sympathizing with a friend who had been assaulted, we can feel anger towards the offender as well. Hence, when sympathizing with someone who is feeling pain, anger or any other feeling, Hume claims that we end up feeling an equal emotion (we will see this point about feeling an equal emotion upon sympathizing developed and better supported in Mme Condorcet's writings). Sympathy then, is possible through the ability to communicate sentiments, which, in turn, is possible through the ability to convert an idea into a lively impression. One might wonder why this communication of sentiments takes place so successfully, to which Hume answers:

Now 'tis obvious, that nature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find parallel in ourselves.<sup>13</sup>

Hume relies heavily on resemblance among people, a point which he repeats throughout the *Treatise* using different and vivid analogies. It is because we resemble each other so much that a passion can be transferred from one person to another and sympathy takes place. In book three of the *Treatise* Hume compares the vibrations of strings in a musical instrument that easily pass from one to another, to affections that easily pass from one person to another. Although the analogy

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<sup>13</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, 318.

gives an impression that according to Hume sympathy would be a direct response, he continues to qualify the analogy:

No passion of another discovers itself immediately to the mind. We are only sensible of its causes or effects. From these we infer the passion: And consequently these give rise to our sympathy.<sup>14</sup>

Here it seems that feelings, (unlike vibrations of strings), do not directly transfer from one person to another; feelings have to be inferred. Hume here is asking a question in moral epistemology: How do we come to know another person's feelings? Philip Mercer suggests that, according to Hume, the minds of men are not directly accessible to one another. Therefore, knowing how another person feels entails making an inference from an effect to a cause or from a cause to an effect. One might detect a sign of fear in a person's behavior and infer that he/she is frightened, or learn about unfortunate circumstances and infer that the person suffers. Mercer further argues, that since direct knowledge of another's state of mind is not possible, Hume relies on inductive inference in the relation of cause and effect:

...Hume emphasizes the importance of the causal relation in the sympathetic mechanism...the causal relation is a logical precondition of there being an idea of another person's state of mind at all.<sup>15</sup>

Sympathy seems to be an indirect process. Still, sympathy for Hume is a transfer of emotions from one person to another.

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<sup>14</sup>Hume, *Treatise*, 576.

<sup>15</sup>Philip Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 32.

Even though we infer the passion, we end up feeling an equal passion (the idea of the passion is converted to a lively impression that resembles the passion itself). Once we learn of another's pain, regardless of how we did so, we sympathize (most of the time; Hume does allow for exceptions). Philip Mercer summarizes Hume's concept of sympathy:

His notion of sympathy seems more akin to the instinctive response which is emotional infection...Hume thinks that 'sympathy' refers to an involuntary process over which we have no control. Since he sees sympathy primarily as a kind of infectious fellow-feeling...<sup>16</sup>

Let us turn to Smith's analysis of sympathy. Not having necessarily a specific content, sympathy is a capacity to participate in the feeling of another. According to Smith, we are naturally interested in the fortune of others, such that we react in sorrow to misfortune and we feel joy for another's happiness. Sympathy is created through an imaginary change of situation with the sufferer. Sympathy can only be achieved through the imagination, as we do not directly feel what the other person feels. We need to place ourselves in another person's situation in order to sympathize.

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation.<sup>17</sup>

Sympathy then is created by changing places with the sufferer. For Smith, the first step in moral thinking is to think about

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<sup>16</sup>Mercer, *Sympathy and Ethics*, 36.

<sup>17</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 9.

another person's situation and imagine how he/she feels. The result is:

Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator.<sup>18</sup>

So far Hume's and Smith's conceptions of sympathy seem very similar. Glenn R. Morrow claims:

Sympathy was for Hume (in the Treatise, at least)...the capacity of participating in the sentiments of others, whereby the moral judgment becomes objective. Adam Smith used sympathy in essentially the same way as Hume did in the Treatise. It was the principle of communication by means of which the sentiments of one individual influence and are influenced by the sentiments of his fellow-men.<sup>19</sup>

William Curtis Swabey takes the same point of view: "The word *sympathy* is used by Hume and Adam Smith to signify not merely commiseration but rather a passing of any sort of feeling or desire from a person observed to the observer"<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, T.D. Campbell, in his book Adam Smith's Science of Morals,<sup>21</sup> claims that to equate Hume and Smith on their concept of sympathy is a misinterpretation of Smith. After Smith explains that sympathy is achieved through

<sup>18</sup>Smith, TMS, 10.

<sup>19</sup>Glenn R. Morrow, *The Ethical and Economical Theories of Adam Smith* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1969), 29.

<sup>20</sup>William Curtis Swabey, *From Hobbes to Kant* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), 180.

<sup>21</sup>T.D. Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1971).

the imagination, he continues to develop this concept. When we imagine another person's situation, what is it exactly that we imagine? We ask: "What has befallen you?"<sup>22</sup> Smith explains that we need to learn of the cause of the passions we are about to sympathize with. We then imagine how we would feel in the same situation. If we would not feel the same as the other person, were we in his situation, we might not sympathize. That is, sympathy is not instantaneous, it depends on our own speculated reaction to the same causes. Indeed Smith claims:

Nature, it seems, teaches us to be more averse to enter into this passion, and, till informed of its cause, to be disposed rather to take part against it...Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passion, as from that of the situation which excites it.<sup>23</sup>

Smith gives an example of witnessing a person in anger. We withhold our sympathy, Smith claims, until we learn the reason for this person's anger. If we realize that we would not feel the same in his/her situation, Smith thinks that we would not sympathize. Once we have learned of the cause of suffering, our sympathy depends on whether we would have reacted in the same way.

Campbell, who criticizes Morrow's and Swabey's approach, claims that the transfer of emotions should not be equated

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<sup>22</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 11.

<sup>23</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 11-12.

with sympathy. A transfer of emotions does take place, but in and of itself it is not sympathy.

Smith wants to make the sympathetic feelings in one person the standard by which he judges the feelings of another. If sympathetic feelings were feelings communicated from that other person, then they would invariably coincide with the feelings being assessed and there would be no absence of sympathy on which to base judgments of disapproval.<sup>24</sup>

What Campbell is saying in this quote is that if sympathy is to be a theory of moral judgment, then it is incompatible with the view that sympathy is an immediate transfer of emotions. Campbell is making a distinction between a transfer of emotions and sympathy. While Hume equates the two, Smith does not. Sympathy, according to Smith, is a capacity to participate in the feelings of another; to sympathize is a potential reaction, not a given one. If Smith thought of sympathy as an immediate transfer of emotions, then he would not be able to construct sympathy as a moral judgment. For sympathy to be an act of moral judgment, it is necessary that to perceive a passion would be different than to sympathize with it. For Hume a communication of sentiments is possible because of sympathy; sympathy is the underlying condition for the communication of the passions. For Smith sympathy depends on communication and agreement of sentiments. I do not agree with Glenn Morrow that for Smith sympathy is the principle of communication by which the sentiments of people influence each other, since this reading of Smith does not tally with his

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<sup>24</sup>Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, 95-6.

intent to construct sympathy as a form of judgement. The correct reading of Smith is that sympathy can be a principle of communication, but it is not necessarily so. This subtle difference is what enables a reading of TMS as a theory of moral judgment.

As the agreement and communication of sentiments between the sufferer and the spectator is a hard task to achieve, according to Smith, sympathy is always imperfect. Here again a fundamental basic difference between Hume and Smith affects their conception of sympathy; Hume, who stresses the similarity among people, provides us with a concept of sympathy that is easily achieved; we end up feeling an equal passion. Smith stresses the distance and differences among people, and provides a concept of sympathy that is difficult to achieve; we end up with an inferior and weaker passion than the original one. Unlike Hume, in the process of sympathy, for Smith the perception of pain is not converted into the emotion itself.

After all this, however, the emotions of the spectator will still be very apt to fall short of the violence of what is felt by the sufferer. Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceive, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned...what they feel, will, indeed, always be, in some respects, different from what he feels, and compassion can never be exactly the same with original sorrow;<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 21-22.

For Hume, in order to sympathize, we need to infer the passion. Hume's formulation is mechanical and simple. Nevertheless, we end up feeling an equal passion to what the sufferer feels. For Smith we need to imagine the same circumstances in order to sympathize. The process is lively, yet the result is that we do not end up feeling an equal passion.

### Sympathy and Moral Judgment

Smith divides moral judgment into judgment of self and judgment of others. We begin with judgment of others. How exactly is sympathy an act of moral judgment? As mentioned above, once we place ourselves in another person's situation, we judge whether we would feel the same - whether we would have the same emotional reaction to the same situation. Smith argues that in order to sympathize with a person's feelings we need to share them first. The sharing of sentiments is a precondition for sympathy. Smith elaborates on this point, claiming that to reach an agreement of sentiments is an effort both parties undertake. In order to elicit sympathy, the expression of sentiments on the part of the sufferer cannot be so strong as to pass beyond what the spectator could feel. Hence one moderates the expression of his/her passions. The spectator correspondingly makes an effort to imagine and understand what the sufferer is going through. Once sympathy

is achieved, moral judgment is embedded in the next step: if we sympathize we approve and if we do not sympathize we disapprove.

When the original passions of the person principally concerned are in perfect concord with the sympathetic emotions of the spectator, they necessarily appear to this last just and proper, and suitable to their objects; and, on the contrary, when, upon bringing the case home to himself, he finds that they do not coincide with what he feels, they necessarily appear to him unjust and improper, and unsuitable to the causes which excite them. To approve of the passions of another, therefore, as suitable to their objects, is the same thing as to observe that we entirely sympathize with them; and not to approve of them as such, is the same thing as to observe that we do not entirely sympathize with them.<sup>26</sup>

Suppose that a person feels resentment and animosity toward a friend who owes him money. Suppose further that I do not share this animosity. Smith would think that I could not sympathize with the person who is owed money. In lack of sympathy, I have no basis to approve of his feeling of resentment. Approval and disapproval are judgments of another person's feelings based on sympathy with that person. In the acts of approval and disapproval which are based on sympathy, moral judgment is embedded. It is important to notice that in Smith's view moral judgment lies in approval and not in sympathy. This point is important and will become clearer as we go along.

Smith continues to develop his concept of moral judgment to explain which feelings we consider in order to judge

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<sup>26</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 16.

people's actions. The sentiments that motivate actions can be considered in two categories: one, the motive or cause which gives rise to an action; two, the consequence at which the feelings aim. Based on the above distinction, Smith introduces two types of moral judgments: propriety/impropriety and merit/demerit. Propriety and impropriety, or more simply put, rightness and wrongness are terms that designate judgment of motives, whereas merit and demerit, or goodness and badness, designate judgment of consequences. The rightness or wrongness of an action consists in the proportion of the sentiments that motivated the action to its cause. For example, suppose that a person engages in excessive grief for having lost a friend and refuses company for a whole year. Smith would claim that the refusal of company for a whole year is excessive in relation to the event - the loss of a friend. Thus, the motive for refusing company is not justified.

When we blame in another man the excesses of love, of grief, of resentment, we not only consider the ruinous effects which they tend to produce, but the little occasion which was given for them.<sup>27</sup>

We see that judgment of rightness or wrongness of an action stems from consideration of feelings that motivated the action. Goodness and badness stem from sympathy or lack of it with consequences. Smith argues that we judge an action to be good or evil according to the sympathy or lack thereof which the recipient experiences. Smith gives the following example:

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<sup>27</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 18.

suppose that we suffered an injury, such that a person has murdered our father or son. It is the feeling of resentment on our part that gives rise to the condemnation of the action.

Basically Smith, in his discussion of approval, subjects two issues to moral judgment: motivation and consequences. Both issues concern sentiments, and they concern both the sentiments of the agent which motivated the action and the sentiments of the recipient. Approval or disapproval consists in sympathizing with the sentiments that motivated an action or with the reaction of the recipient. The judgment of actions is the consequence of judgment of feelings that gave rise to the action, or of feelings of the recipients. Smith is able to construct moral judgment as a judgment of feelings achieved through sympathy.

Since Smith uses sympathy as grounds for moral judgment, it is not possible, in his view, to sympathize with a person and at the same time disapprove of his/her actions. If we see a person lamenting violently and at the same time we do not approve of his behavior, we would not sympathize with him. Using sympathy as a means of judgment limits Smith's conception of sympathy (this will become more apparent in comparison to Mme Condorcet's concept of sympathy). Smith fails to see the complexity and extent of sympathy. He limits sympathy to judgement and does not realize that on many occasions one might sympathize with pain and suffering even if one does not approve of the cause of suffering. Suppose we

think that a friend brought his misfortunes upon him/herself, Smith would have to say that we cannot sympathize. In reality it is possible to sympathize with a person's pain but not with his/her actions. Nevertheless, Smith is consistent in building criteria for moral judgment based of feelings.

Roy Jouffroy presents the best attempt to read Smith's theory as a normative moral theory. In accordance with his own criteria of a moral theory, he would need to extract out of Smith's theory a rule by which one can determine moral qualities of actions. But first Jouffroy raises the following question: how does the phenomenon of sympathy, which is described as fact of human nature, give rise to a moral fact? The answer to his question of how we pass from a natural fact to a moral fact is crucial in determining whether Smith is successful in providing a moral theory or whether he stays within the realm of naturalism and thus provides only a moral psychology. Jouffroy replies:

...in a word, that approbation and disapprobation are not only in our reason an effect of the purely sensible phenomena of sympathy and antipathy, but in every case are an exact representation of these feelings...Our judgments upon the sentiments and acts of our fellow-beings are really only the expression of the degree of our sympathy or antipathy for these sentiments and acts.<sup>28</sup>

Jouffroy here is making a distinction between sympathy and approbation. While sympathy is only an effect of our natural

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<sup>28</sup>Roy Jouffroy, *Introduction to Ethics including a Critical Survey of Moral Systems*, Translated by William H. Channing, in two vol. (Boston and Cambridge: James Munroe and Company, 1840), 111, *My italics*.

sensibility, approbation is both an effect and a representation of the natural phenomenon of sympathy. That is, the natural facts are the different sentiments and the moral fact is the idea that they are good or bad. We pass from one to the other via approbation, which is a principle of judgment based on sympathy. Judgment lies in assessing the degree of sympathy to learn the moral worth of an action. By the act of considering and assessing emotions, Jouffroy believes that he is showing how Smith passes from a natural indication to a moral evaluation. Emotions do not directly point to a moral goal; rather, they serve as basis for considerations. The moral worth of an action is determined by the following moral properties:

Propriety, then, and impropriety, merit and demerit, are the moral properties by which affections, and consequently acts, may be estimated.<sup>29</sup>

Jouffroy continues and attempts to construct the considerations of one's sympathies as a rule to follow.

...that the goodness of an act is in direct ratio to the approbation which it receives from others, and that the best acts are those which are fitted to excite pure and universal sympathy, -a sympathy unmingled with antipathy, -the sympathy not of a few, but of every individual of the human race. Hence, gentlemen, a scale of the moral good and evil acts, graduated by this universal standard and a code of rules of conduct.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Jouffroy, *Introduction to Ethics*, 124.

<sup>30</sup>Jouffroy, *Introduction to Ethics*, 113.

Thus Jouffroy constructs the idea that we assess our sympathy with others in order to judge them, as a rule to follow; that is, in order to determine if an action is right or wrong we first have to consider our approbation or disapprobation of that action. Although Jouffroy later criticizes this rule, at this point he is merely arguing that Smith's theory renders sympathy a principle by which we make moral distinctions. This is not merely a naturalistic fact, since sympathy needs to be approved or disapproved. If we wish to read Smith's theory accurately, it is important to note that moral judgment stems from approbation and not directly from sympathy.

It is not at all clear that Jouffroy showed that Smith stepped outside of the boundaries of naturalism. The upshot of his explanation is still that goodness is a matter of approval and approval is a matter of sympathy. Jouffroy did not show, as he attempted, that we pass from a natural fact to a moral fact since he did not introduce any independent criteria of judgment outside of sympathy. However, Jouffroy's comments and criticism of Smith are very important, since he treats TMS as a moral theory and not as a moral psychology. Accordingly, his criticism stems from his own opinion that in reality we do not morally estimate actions by sympathy, we do so through reason. So Jouffroy, who turns out to be a rationalist, respects Smith's theory as a sentimental moral theory. He grants that sympathy is a proper principle of judgment (even though he thinks it is wrong). Instead of

saying that a rational theory is a moral theory and that a sentimental theory is moral psychology, he thinks both are moral theories.

In continuing our discussion of a normative versus a descriptive theory, notice that Smith does offer a prescriptive rule to follow: Consider one's sympathy and antipathy with a person and judge his behavior accordingly. Putting it this way, we can see a prescriptive demand to put oneself in another person's situation, evaluate one's speculated emotions, and judge according to the degree one would share those emotions. This act, of placing one's self in another person's situation leads us to the formation of general rules.

Our continual observations upon the conduct of others, insensibly lead us to form to ourselves certain general rules concerning what is fit and proper either to be done or to be avoided.<sup>31</sup>

The general rules are formed based on the sentiments that arise when we consider how we feel about another person's conduct.

We thus naturally lay down to ourselves a general rule, that all such actions are to be avoided, as tending to render us odious, contemptible, or punishable, the objects of all those sentiments for which we have the greatest dread and aversion.<sup>32</sup>

Smith argues that general rules are based on approving or disapproving another person's actions. As I explained before,

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<sup>31</sup>Smith, TMS, 159.

<sup>32</sup>Smith, TMS, 159.

approbation and disapprobation are based on sympathy. Prescriptive rules of morality are based on sentiments. We first detest a crime, Smith argues, then we form a rule condemning it:

We do not originally approve or condemn particular actions; because, upon examination, they appear to be agreeable or inconsistent with a certain general rule. The general rule, on the contrary, is formed by finding from experience, that all actions of a certain kind, or circumstanced in a certain manner, are approved or disapproved of. To the man who first saw an inhuman murder, committed from avarice, envy, or unjust resentment...who beheld the last agonies of the dying person...His detestation of this crime, it is evident, would arise instantaneously and antecedent to his having formed to himself any such general rule. The general rule, on the contrary, which he might afterwards form, would be founded upon the detestation which he felt necessarily arise in his own breast, at the thought of this, and every other particular action of the same kind.<sup>33</sup>

The basis of prescriptive rules of morality is emotional rather than rational. Instead of considering an abstract rational principle to form a general rule, we consider the speculated emotions of a spectator and form a general rule accordingly. The form of this theory is proper. We are able to provide prescriptive moral rules. However, these rules were derived from an emotional content. Emotional content, as opposed to a rational content is partial and subjective. Once we place ourselves in another person's situation, we judge him/her according to our own speculated emotions. The question then, of whether sentimentalism can be a moral

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<sup>33</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 159-60.

theory, hinges on a further question: can emotional content be impartial and objective? That is, can we derive disinterested, universal theory and can we answer the question of obligation within the scope of sentimentalism? Mme Condorcet we will see, responds to this challenge by arguing and explaining how sentiments can be general and abstract. Smith takes up the answer to these questions in his discussion of the impartial spectator.

### The Impartial Spectator

So far we have discussed how Smith looks at our judgment of how we judge other people's conduct. His next topic of analysis is how we judge our own conduct. The theory of the impartial spectator is a theory of self-judgment. It stands at the heart of TMS, and as such, is crucial to the understanding of Smith's theory. An understanding of Smith's system as a sentimentalist depends on an intelligible reading of his theory of the impartial spectator. As we will see shortly, this is the point at which, according to critics, his system fails as a sentimentalist theory. If Smith stopped short of introducing his concept of impartiality his theory would remain subjective, a position at which he in no way aimed. We saw that judgments of others (judgments of propriety, impropriety, merit, and demerit) occur through placing ourselves in other people's situations to see whether

we sympathize with various sentiments. Hence, the principle that Smith chose is that we judge other people through our own eyes, based on the sympathy we feel. How, then, do we judge ourselves? As a sentimentalist Smith would have to remain in the realm of emotions; and so the problem Smith is facing is: if we judge our own conduct through our own sentiments, how, then, can we reach objectivity? We may ask, how can a sentimentalist account for objectivity and uniformity in morality? Again there is controversy in interpretation surrounding the concept of impartiality and a debate of whether Smith was successful.

First let us look at Smith's own formulation of his view of the impartial spectator and then turn to criticisms. The impartial spectator is introduced by Smith to answer two problems. One, how can we overcome our selfish tendencies and the natural conduciveness to self interest? Two, can this be done through objective and universal principles of judgment? As we already saw, the process of sympathy requires an approval of another person's sentiments by the standard of one's own sentiments. Similarly, approval of one's own conduct is achieved through considering the sentiments of the spectator who is evaluating us. Smith explains that we consider the sentiments of an impartial spectator. Moral judgment, self-judgment or judgment of others is always a judgment of sentiments based on sympathy. In considering

self-judgment, Smith thus remains loyal to his principle of judgment as based on sympathy.

The principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, seems to be altogether the same with that by which we exercise the like judgments concerning the conduct of other people. We either approve or disapprove of the conduct of another man according as we feel that, when we bring his case home to ourselves, we either can or cannot entirely sympathize with the sentiments and motives which directed it. And, in the same manner, we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his situation, we either can or cannot entirely enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it. We can never survey our own sentiments and motives, we can never form any judgment concerning them; unless we remove ourselves, as it were, from our own natural station, and endeavor to view them as at a certain distance from us. But we can do this in no other way than by endeavoring to view them with the eyes of other people, or as other people are likely to view them...We endeavor to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it.<sup>34</sup>

Since one's judgment of one's own behavior is partial, and since Smith wishes to maintain sentiments as a basis for judgment, he forms an impartial spectator. In this way, upon judging ourselves, we still examine a sentiment, a feeling, concerning our behavior, that is not our own. We consider the sentiments of the spectator when he/she observes us. Smith's concept of impartiality is achieved through creating a distance from our own situation by considering how other people would view us. Smith is working with a principle of

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<sup>34</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 109-10.

distance to overcome the problem of partiality. Obviously, the parties involved are overcome by self-interest or just more passionate joy or sorrow. Smith provides the following analogy:

As to the eye of the body, objects appear great or small, not so much according to their real dimensions, as according to the nearness or distance of their situation; so do they likewise to what may be called the natural eye of the mind: and we remedy the defects of both these organs pretty much in the same manner.<sup>35</sup>

For this reason Smith claims that we need to view the situation through the eyes of a non-involved person, a third person who can be impartial. Once we see our own conduct through the eyes of the impartial spectator, we approve of our conduct if we sympathize with the approbation of the impartial spectator. Sympathy remains the main tenet of Smith's concept of judgment. This is no doubt quite complex:

When I endeavor to examine my own conduct, when I endeavor to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I, the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavor to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavoring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of. But that the judge should, in every respect, be the same with the person judged

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<sup>35</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 134-5.

of, is as impossible, as that the cause should, in every respect, be the same with the effect.<sup>16</sup>

We thus have a capability to remove ourselves from our own situation in order to judge. But we do not enter any sort of rational calculus, rather we consider how an impartial spectator would feel.

Furthermore, Smith claims that in times when it is difficult to view ourselves as an impartial spectator we resort to the use of general rules. Through continual observation of people's conduct, we form general rules. The general rules are empirical generalizations of what we approve or disapprove of. General rules are guarded by the sense of duty and they are obligatory. In the absence of moral sentiments, which Smith recognizes is realistic and common, or in cases of self-deceit with regards to the views of the impartial spectator, general rules serve as a moral guide.

Without this sacred regard to general rules, there is no man whose conduct can be much depended upon.<sup>17</sup>

I will raise two objections; both are raised by Victor Cousin and Jouffroy. Both contend that: One, the concept of impartiality is incompatible with a sympathy-based ethic; and two, in his analysis of the impartial spectator, Smith introduces a rational consideration and betrays the sentimentalist position.

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<sup>16</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 113.

<sup>17</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 163.

Cousin's criticism is aimed at the concept of impartiality as incompatible with sympathy. The notion of impartial sympathy, which Cousin claims appears throughout the text, he thinks is unintelligible. Impartiality means deliberating and judging without being influenced by sensibility. An impartial person does not experience (feel) any sentiment or at least does not take into account what he/she feels. Impartiality, Cousin concludes, excludes sympathy. A person who is judging with impartial sympathy does the impossible; in obeying sympathy he is not impartial and in maintaining impartiality he is not sympathizing. The only intelligible way to read this is to assume that one submits the sentiments of sympathy to rational considerations, but such an assumption would be the ruin of Smith's system.

If these words: "a witness whose sympathy is impartial", describe a man who submits each of his sympathetic sentiments to the approval of his reason, then Smith's hypothesis would become clear and reasonable; unfortunately, this would mean the ruin of his principle.<sup>30</sup>

In the same line of thought, Jouffroy asks, to what type of impartiality does Smith refer? It cannot be impartiality of reason since reason, according to Smith, has nothing to do with moral evaluation of actions. It must be impartiality of sympathy.

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<sup>30</sup>Victor Cousin, *Cours d'Histoire de la Philosophie Morale au Dix-Huitième Siècle: Second Partie-École Écossaise* (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1841), 134. My translation.

...and when we say that judgment is impartial, our idea is precisely this - that it is influenced by no passion. Why can I not be impartial with regard to a friend? Because sympathy biases my judgment in his favor. And I cannot be impartial in regard to an enemy, for an opposite reason. It becomes all the more difficult to comprehend what is meant by the impartiality of sympathy, because, in the common acceptation of words, it is the absence of sympathy that constitutes impartiality.<sup>39</sup>

Jouffroy defines impartiality as opposed to sympathy. Impartiality means not being influenced by any passion. In addition Jouffroy asks, who is the impartial spectator? Obviously the impartial spectator does not represent any one portion of society; he has no sex, age, nation, or era. Jouffroy, therefore, thinks that Smith's principle holds only as long as he speaks of an actual spectator. As soon as the process of abstraction takes place, the principle falls apart.

...for this abstract spectator does not exist, and never existed; and his sentiments, therefore, have no reality, and are wholly fictitious. It is no longer by the sentiments of others that I judge, but by my own. The sentiments of others I reject wholly, and prefer my own; this abstract spectator is one of my own creations; he has no existence in the world without; he is neither a real individual, nor a combination of real individuals; he is an emanation from my own sentiments.<sup>40</sup>

Jouffroy concludes that, in effect, the abstract spectator is nothing more than the use of reason evaluating a moral law that is greater than sympathy. In agreement with this line of criticism, Swabey raises the following objection: If moral judgments, according to Smith, are a matter of opinion

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<sup>39</sup>Jouffroy, *Introduction*, 131-2.

<sup>40</sup>Jouffroy, *Introduction*, 136-7.

concerning how an impartial spectator would feel, this standard is cognitive and not emotive.

In dealing with these criticisms we need to ask two questions. First, is impartiality really incompatible with sympathy? Second, does Smith use reason to stipulate the position of the impartial spectator, and if he does, does it mean the ruin of his system as a sentimentalist theory?

As I have already mentioned, the concept of impartiality is achieved through creating a distance from a particular situation. The impartial spectator is not emotionally involved in the case in question. As Campbell points out:

He [the impartial spectator] is not, however, 'indifferent' in the case of being without emotions; he has all the normal feelings characteristic of human nature. If he is 'cool' it is only in the sense that he does not directly feel the passions of those involved in a particular situation, he does not possess the feelings of the persons principally concerned.<sup>41</sup>

According to Campbell, the impartiality Smith speaks of is not impartiality with regard to emotions but impartiality with regard to a situation. If one accepts Campbell's interpretation, then one would have to conclude that Smith did not mean impartial sympathy as such, as Cousin and Jouffroy claim. Rather, impartiality stems from considering a general point of view as opposed to a particular situation.<sup>42</sup> The general point of view is still constructed out of

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<sup>41</sup>Campbell, *Adam Smith's Science of Morals*, 136.

<sup>42</sup>Hume in the *Treatise* expressed the same point of view. See: *Treatise of Human Nature*, 472.

considerations of sympathy. Impartiality of reason is not the only option available to define impartiality.

We now reach the first part of the second question: is the construction of the position of the impartial spectator rational? Although generally speaking, I think that Smith's TMS is a consistent philosophical work, it is possible to read his construction of the impartial spectator both as rational and nonrational. At the beginning of the discussion of the impartial spectator, Smith explains that just as we judge other people according to our sympathy or antipathy with them, so we judge ourselves according to our sympathy or antipathy with the impartial spectator.

And, in the same manner, we either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, according as we feel that, when we place ourselves in the situation of another man, and view it, as it were, with his eyes and from his situation, we either can or cannot enter into and sympathize with the sentiments and motives which influenced it.<sup>43</sup>

Here Smith claims that we sympathize with the impartial spectator's feeling. Reason does not play a role. At best one could claim that according to this formulation we think how the impartial spectator would feel. Smith cannot be accused here of using a rationalistic calculus and betraying his sentimentalist approach. However, elsewhere in the text Smith states otherwise. As he continues to develop his impartial theory, Smith asks what causes us to overcome selfish principles? To which he answers:

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<sup>43</sup>Smith, TMS, 109-110.

It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon such occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct. <sup>44</sup>

We can now point a blaming finger at Smith for utilizing reason and we reach the second part of the second question: Does this mean the ruin of the system as sentimentalists as Jouffroy, Cousin and Swabey thought?

Hume claimed that moral distinctions are not derived from reason; he renders reason an inert, inactive principle that cannot influence active principles such as affections, passions or any moral distinctions. When he concluded that reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions<sup>45</sup> he did not mean to exclude reason from moral discourse altogether. Hume presented a concept of reason that is instrumental. This use of reason is compatible with a sentimentalist approach. Smith uses reason in the same way. Moral principles are empirical generalizations achieved through the use of induction, which Smith points out is one of the operations of reason. Hence, from reason we derive general rules. Moral principles, however, originate in sympathy.

But though reason is undoubtedly the source of the general rules of morality, and of all the moral judgments which we form by means of them; it is

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<sup>44</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 137.

<sup>45</sup>See: *Treatise*, 415.

altogether absurd and unintelligible to suppose that the first perceptions of right and wrong can be derived from reason, even in those particular cases upon the experience of which the general rules are formed."

Under no circumstances, Smith insists, does reason give rise to a moral goal. Any stipulation of what the impartial spectator would feel is a search by reason of a collective or general sympathy. It is a search for an inductive generalization of feeling concerning a specific question. Rationalists use reason as a generator of moral concepts. Sentimentalists use reason as instrumental in discovering a moral concept that was already nonrationally chosen. The good for a sentimentalist is discovered empirically, not rationally. Critics of Smith, which claim that he contradicted himself at this point in his use of reason, are misguided for using reason so generally. They overlook the fact that Smith uses reason as instrumental only. It follows that Smith's use of reason does not lead him to betray his sentimentalist position.

So far we see that Smith is able to provide a normative and objective theory. Can he account for universality as well? Universality is achieved through the impartial spectator who is formed through considering everyone's sentiments. One might argue that sentiments vary among people, culture and times. Smith is well aware of this, and takes up the issue in a section entitled: "Of the influence of custom and fashion

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"Smith, *TMS*, 320.

upon moral sentiments". He argues that the different customs of different nations have an inconsiderable influence on the sentiments. While customs certainly vary, and Smith is generous with examples, basic human sentiments do not. Smith is making a distinction between culturally varied practices and basic human sentiments. He concludes that the variety of practices stems from the different customs and not from sentiments. Customs originate in many reasons, mostly survival reasons, and not from moral sentiments. Furthermore, Smith looks upon the sentiments to discern practices that seem morally repulsive. He gives an example of the permissibility of abandoning unwanted babies in ancient Greece. Examined through the sentiments, Smith claims, the practice is found repulsive. Plato and Aristotle, Smith reports, gave a rational justification for this practice and did not condemn it. Yet, while it is possible to give reasons to justify the abandonment of unwanted babies, such a custom, Smith claims, cannot "pervert the sentiments". Smith makes a thorough appeal to sentiments as discerners of moral principles.

### Conclusion

Smith's theory of moral sentiments is a theory of moral judgment based on sympathy. We saw that according to him, judgment lies in approval and not directly in sympathy. An acceptance of Smith's theory as normative depends on one's

willingness to accept sympathy as a basis for moral judgment. Once we accept sympathy as a basis for moral judgment, Smith derives a theory that is as universal and obligatory as one that is derived from a rationalistic truth.

The strength of Smith's theory is in his ability to form a consistent moral theory that is based on sentiments and is also impartial and obligatory. The weakness of his theory is the problem of the initial justification of the sentiments as including a moral content. According to Smith, we judge other people's sentiments by our own sentiments, and we judge our own Sentiments by other people's sentiments. The only moral justification is that everyone feels this way. The result is that we justify sentiments by sentiments, or, at best, we justify sentiments by universal sentiments. Murder is wrong because everyone feels this way. Smith is not able to provide an independent criterion to evaluate sentiments. What is missing from his theory is a way to render a universal emotional decision wrong.

But do rationalists altogether avoid this type of criticism? After all a rational justification can be construed to justify a moral atrocity as well. Reason is a faculty that operates through logical rules, but always rests on certain unproven assumptions. There is, then, a basic trust in reason's capability to discern the first premises as moral. I draw a parallel here to sentimentalism in ethics. While rationalists accept reason as the qualified moral

faculty to discern moral truths, sentimentalists accept feelings as indicators of moral truths. Rationalists assume that the dictates of reason are true, and sentimentalists assume that the dictates of sentiments are true. Once we overcome the charge that sentiments can only be subjective and relative, we see that both theories, rationalistic and sentimentalistic, can continue to construct rules to follow from the basic assumptions and offer various moral precepts.

Mme Condorcet will argue that neither rationalism nor sentimentalism stand as a complete theory. Both require an independent criterion of evaluation. Both suffer from the problem of justification. She will argue that both reason and sentiments are necessary to build a moral theory.

## Chapter Four

## Mme Condorcet on Moral Sympathy

Physical Pain and the Origin of Sympathy

Mme Condorcet opens her letters by stating that it is regrettable that Smith did not pursue his analysis of sympathy further to show what its first causes are and how people come to possess it.

You know that the subject of the first few chapters is sympathy. Smith contented himself with noting its existence and exhibiting its chief effects. I regretted that he had not dared to go further, penetrating up to its first causes and showing finally how it must belong to every sentient being capable of reflection. You will see that I had the foolhardiness to fill in his omissions.<sup>1</sup>

Mme Condorcet fills this lack in Smith's thought by arguing that sympathy originates in physical sensations of pleasure and pain. In doing so, she accounts both for the causes of sympathy and also provides a different kind of moral theory. We will see the implications of adding a physical dimension to our moral disposition as we trace her ideas.

Mme Condorcet, in claiming that sympathy originates in sensations of pleasure and pain, provides an empirical account

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<sup>1</sup>Sophie de Grouchy Marquise de Condorcet, *Letters on Sympathy*, in: Théorie Des Sentimens Moraux, Suivi d'une Dissertation sur l'Origine Des Langues; Par Adam Smith; Traduit de l'anglais, sur la septième et dernière Édition, Par S. Grouchy V<sup>e</sup>. Condorcet. Elle y a joint huit lettres sur la Sympathie. (Paris: F. Buisson, Imprim.-Lib. 1798) 357, my translation.

of the origin of sympathy. As Mme Condorcet provides a consistent and clear argument, she starts with an explanation of the origin of sympathy for physical pain. In following Mme Condorcet's ideas about sympathy, it is important to notice, first, in what way sympathy arises from physical sensations, and second, what is the philosophical significance of the relation between physical sensations and sympathy. My first question is then, what is the connection between sympathy and physical pain?<sup>2</sup>

We can see the emergence of sympathy from physical sensations of pleasure and pain in three stages. First, Mme Condorcet views pain as a complex phenomenon. Any physical pain, she explains, produces a composite sensation; that is, we first feel a specific pain (a headache for instance) and then a general impression of pain follows, a general feeling of sickness (*Un sentiment général de mal-aise*<sup>3</sup>).

Every physical pain produces in the one who receives it a composite sensation. It produces first a local pain in the part upon which it acts immediately as the cause of the suffering. Furthermore, it produces a painful impression in all our organs, an impression very distinct from that of the local pain, and which always accompanies the latter, but which can continue to exist without it.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Both pleasure and pain give rise to sympathy, Mme Condorcet elaborates on pain since she takes this feeling to be the more intense sensation.

<sup>3</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 358.

<sup>4</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 357.

In this quote, Mme Condorcet establishes that there is such a phenomenon as a general impression of pain. To better understand what is meant by a general impression of pain, let us briefly refer to Cabanis' views, who I think influenced her on this point. Cabanis asks what are the organs of sensations? He attempts here, to explain the physiological phenomenon of feeling. Of course the main organ of sensations is the brain, but it is the nervous system that transmits sensations throughout the body. Sensations, Cabanis explains, make us feel. Cabanis continues to argue that there exists a communication between organs which he calls sympathetic communication.

It must appear natural that the excess of action in an important organ brings on a proportional excess of influence, on its part, over the other organs that are sympathetically linked to it;<sup>5</sup>

In this view, through the sympathetic communication between organs, the entire body participates upon feeling pain. It is in this sense, an appeal to a physiological phenomenon, that we are to understand Mme Condorcet's claim that a general impression of pain in all our organs follows a local pain. Mme Condorcet sharpens her point, and argues that a general impression of pain is distinct from a local pain and can continue to exist even after the local pain ceases. A general impression of pain can also linger much longer than a local

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<sup>5</sup>Cabanis, *On the Relations Between the Physical and Moral Aspects of Man*, 664.

pain and become unbearable. What is then, the use of this point to the concept of sympathy?

Second, Mme Condorcet indicates that a general impression of pain can be recalled and felt again, the result is a painful memory. The concept of a painful memory is constructed through the idea that a painful sensation accompanies the memory of pain.

This general sensation renews itself when we recall the pains we have suffered. It is this sensation which makes the memory painful and it always accompanies this memory more or less strongly.<sup>6</sup>

The general impression of pain and the ability to recall it, have an important role in the explanation of sympathy. Mme Condorcet argues, that a general impression of pain can be recalled from the memory or from the sight of pain. Thus, seeing another person suffer will renew the impression of pain as well. This is the heart of Mme Condorcet's argument concerning sympathy, sympathy consists in feeling pain upon seeing another person suffer:

In the same way as the memory of harm which we have experienced reproduces in us the painful impression which all of our organs have suffered, and which was a part of the local pain caused by harm, so too we feel again this painful impression when, whilst discerning the signs of pain, we see a sentient being suffer, or know that he suffers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 358.

<sup>7</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 359.

We see, then, that by the renewal of pain, upon witnessing it, sympathy is created. Note that both memory and the sight of pain produce a painful impression in the same way. It follows that to remember our own suffering and to see another person suffer produces the same effect. Sympathy can be as strong a reaction as remembering our own pain.

This conception of sympathy is unique to Mme Condorcet. With her analysis of sympathy and pain, she can explain how it is that sympathy entails actually feeling pain when someone else suffers. Cabanis also argued that recalling sensations make us feel them again. He then proceeded to claim that sympathy does arise from detecting the signs of pain on another person and recollecting ones own pain. But, Cabanis' explanation, apart from being cruder and less developed than Mme Condorcet's, leaves sympathy in the realm of the instinct (as I explained in Chapter Two) and does not develop it further as (we will see shortly) Mme Condorcet does. Hume in A Treatise of Human Nature III:iii, Sec 1, claims that sympathy entails feeling an analogous feeling to what the sufferer feels. However Hume's argument is mechanical and simple; he claims that we perceive an idea of a passion that turns into a lively impression that resembles the original passion. For Mme Condorcet it is the fact that we are able to recall our own pain that creates the similarity of feeling between the sufferer and the spectator. The idea that

sympathy is related to our own experiences explains why sympathy can be felt quite strongly.

The problem with Mme Condorcet's argument, is that she does not distinguish between the intensity of a past pain and it's current memory. It would be unrealistic to claim that a past pain exactly replicates itself upon remembering it. Yet Mme Condorcet does argue that even a specific pain can be recalled with its original intensity, likewise, she claims, upon seeing another person suffer, we can feel a very intense pain:

Not only is the general impression of pain upon all our organs reproducible solely on the basis of its idea, but its local impression also can repeat itself when the memory or the idea of the pain hits us with intensity. It is thus, that a man who has suffered a violent operation believes, in recalling it with all of its circumstances, that he is feeling a part of the local pain he had experienced; or that the one who sees a wounded man, besides the impression he experiences at the sight of pain, believes, if his imagination is strong or easily moved, that he is feeling a local pain in the part of the body which the wound has damaged, and sometimes even in a neighboring part traversed by the same nerves.<sup>4</sup>

We can see that according to Mme Condorcet, pain can be reproduced upon memory or sight. Thus she can explain how it is that we can actually feel someone else's pain. Her argument, that we can feel someone else's pain, relies on the idea that a painful impression is being evoked upon sympathizing. She equates the strength of a painful memory and a current feeling of sympathy. Even though Mme Condorcet

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<sup>4</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 361.

qualifies the ability to sympathize by claiming that an impression of pain will be renewed according to one's sensitivity and imagination, she puts forth a very strong conception of what it means to sympathize. But if, as I argue, a current memory of pain is weaker than the actual past pain, then sympathy with another would not be as strong as our own past experience was. Yet her point, that some feeling of pain is included when sympathizing, still holds. She is still the closest to explaining the concept of sympathy as feeling pain with another person or feeling someone else's pain. Mme Condorcet can explain how it is that to say "I sympathize with you" and feel nothing, would be lip service rather than sympathy.

Third, repeated experiences of feeling pain produce an abstract idea of pain, and eventually a painful impression can be produced from the abstract idea of pain as well. Sympathy no longer has to be specific; we can sympathize with general suffering as well. For example, we can learn of the suffering of an entire group of people; this too will evoke sympathy - some feeling of pain.

Smith, on the other hand, makes no use of the concept of physical pain in his construction of sympathy. Smith writes:

Nothing is so soon forgot as pain. The moment it is gone the whole agony of it is over, and the thought of it can no longer give us any sort of disturbance. We ourselves cannot then enter into

the anxiety and anguish which we had before conceived.'

According to Smith, we do not recall our own pain and consequently we do not sympathize with pain. Smith distinguishes between the passions that originate from the body and the passions that originate from the imagination. Bodily harm, such as injury or hunger, excites very little sympathy, according to Smith. We may read about famine in a distant country, but "as we do not grow hungry by reading the description, we cannot properly, even in this case, be said to sympathize with their hunger"<sup>10</sup> Because, according to Smith, memory or sight of pain do not duplicate a painful experience, sympathy with physical pain will never be equivalent to what the sufferer feels. On the other hand, harm perceived through the imagination, such as a loss of fortune or dignity, provokes our deepest sympathies. An unrequited love, Smith claims, calls for more sympathy than the greatest bodily evil. This is so, Smith explains: "...because our imaginations can more readily mould themselves upon his imagination, than our bodies can mould themselves upon his body."<sup>11</sup> Smith treats physical pain and emotional pain as two separate unrelated phenomena.

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<sup>9</sup>Adam Smith, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1982), 29.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 28.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 29.

The frame of my body can be but little affected by the alterations which are brought about upon that of my companion: but my imagination is more ductile, and more readily assumes, if I may say so, the shape and configuration of the imagination of those with whom I am familiar...The person who has lost his whole fortune, if he is in health, feels nothing in his body."<sup>12</sup>

Sympathy for physical pain is negligible and hard to achieve.

Smith's approach is very different from that of Mme Condorcet and Cabanis. Both Cabanis and Mme Condorcet view mental and physical pain as an emotional and as a physiological event. Not only is physical pain felt first and serves as the basis for mental anguish, but it also accompanies any emotional reaction. Sympathy includes both a physical sensation and an emotional reaction. Mme Condorcet divides human suffering into two kinds: moral and physical. Physical pain includes any injury or disease to the body. Moral pain for which she uses through out the text the terms *douleur moral*, *peins morales*, *mal moral* is any kind of emotional or mental suffering, such as a loss of a loved one. Accordingly, Mme Condorcet distinguishes two kinds of sympathy - moral sympathy and physical sympathy. Moral suffering includes a bodily reaction; that is, physical sensations accompany moral sympathy as well.

It is thus obvious that what we have said of physical pains is also true of moral pains, seeing that we are capable of them. The sight and memory

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<sup>12</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 29.

of the moral pains of another affect us like the sight and memory of physical pains.<sup>13</sup>

To elucidate what she means, one might think of a time of a great loss. Surely no one experiences it as a pure thought. Upon the hearing of bad news, one has a physical reaction as well - it could be trembling, a fast heartbeat, feeling faint, or losing one's appetite. In overlooking the significance of physical pain and the sympathy we have for it, Mme Condorcet claims, Smith was unable to account for the causes of sympathy. Notice how, from the origin of sympathy in physical experience and from the necessary accompaniment of sympathy with sensations of pleasure and pain, we get a more complex sympathetic experience.

In addition, Mme Condorcet identifies the ability of a painful impression to be renewed from the sight and memory of pain as the moral presence of pain; since it is this ability of a general impression of pain to be recalled and felt again, that enables us to sympathize. Pain then has a moral presence, since it produces a moral reaction - sympathy. Furthermore, it follows that the painful sensation that accompanies sympathy motivates us to relieve pain in others, and thus affects our actions. Note that the painful sensation that accompanies our sympathy is already a result of our ability to sympathize, therefore Mme Condorcet does not believe that the motivation to relieve our own pain is selfish

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<sup>13</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 405.

motivation. We are capable of sympathizing with physical pains first, but then the idea of a moral pain can produce the same effect as a physical pain. For when we sympathize, whether it is sympathy with physical or moral pain, a painful sensation is present.

Here is an effect of pain which equally follows its physical presence and its moral presence. One understands here by its moral presence either the ideas which our memories give us of it or the one which we can have by the sight or knowledge of another's pain. The cause of sympathy towards physical pains thus comes from the fact that the sensation which produces all physical pains in us is a composite sensation, a part of which can renew itself from the sole idea of pain.<sup>14</sup>

The moral presence of pain, the general impression pain leaves on us and its ability to be recalled, enables sympathy. The experience of pain, Mme Condorcet claims, is what renders us more compassionate and humane.

#### Sympathy With Moral Pain

In order to explain moral sympathy, we have to understand particular sympathy first. Mme Condorcet claims that moral sympathy develops out of particular sympathy. The following is an explanation of particular sympathy: sympathy with moral pain, like sympathy with physical pain, begins with our first sensations of pleasure and pain. But, Mme Condorcet adds, sympathy with moral pain begins with sensations of pleasure

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<sup>14</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 360.

felt at the hands of our caretakers. Here Mme Condorcet relates the phenomena of physical pleasure and pain and the human contact between a parent and a child. An infant experiences his first sensations at the hand of the wet nurse. His first smiles are for the wet-nurse as well as his first longing for her. Mme Condorcet supposes that a child would reciprocate with care to those who cared for him. In addition to caring for our caretakers, Mme Condorcet notes, we also depend on them. Specific dependency begins in the crib; it is our first tie to another human being (*cette dépendance particulière de quelques individus commence au berceau; elle est le premier lien qui nous attache à nos semblables*<sup>15</sup>). This dependency begins in infancy and remains throughout one's life. Each individual depends on many others for necessities. Dependency and care yield a disposition of sympathy. We feel for those we depend on. We have an emotional disposition to feel for their pleasure and pain. A person cannot be indifferent towards those who contribute to his or her existence and happiness.

The force of our sensitivity, ...and the idea of the persons to whom we owe the greater part of our welfare being sufficient alone to make us feel a sentiment, we are thus predisposed toward emotion (*d'avance à l'emotion*) for all that may happen to them: their pleasures or pains must therefore affect us more intensely than the pleasures and pains of other people.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 376.

<sup>16</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 376.

We are capable of feeling a particular sympathy for individuals we are tied too. We are tied to those who care for us, and we care for them out of this emotional tie. The sympathy that we first feel for our caretakers is a capacity that develops and expands to other people throughout our life. We see, then, that moral sympathy, like physical sympathy, starts with our experiences of pleasure and pain, but is actually formed by the ties we have towards the people who caused those sensations in us. Dependency on other people is a strong aspect of our moral development. It is notable that Mme Condorcet sees in the first ties we have to other human beings an explanation of the development or origin of our moral faculties.

As we saw earlier, Mme Condorcet writes in a long tradition, originating with Locke, who claims that morality originates in sensations of pleasure and pain. Locke, Condillac and Helvetius claimed that moral ideas derive from sensations stimulated by an external source. Cabanis thought that moral ideas stem from sensations stimulated by an internal source as well. What is, then, Mme Condorcet's contribution? Mme Condorcet remains within the school of thought that morality is physically based, that is sympathy arises from initial sensations of pleasure and pain. I have argued earlier that a self-love based ethics was a necessary consequence of Helvetius' sensationalism. However, Mme Condorcet also embraces sensationalism. Sensations of

pleasure and pain are at the basis of sympathy. But in her view, physical sensations alone cannot account for moral development as Condillac and Helvetius thought. Mme Condorcet would concede that without feeling sensations of pleasure and pain, sympathy would not arise. But sympathy is evoked by sensations, not produced by them. Sympathy is produced by a relation to another human being. Mme Condorcet claims that very early on, a genuine ability to care for another develops. By adding a disposition for sympathy, she adds a new dimension to the ability to feel pleasure and pain, and it is the ability to feel others' pleasures and pains (I have explained above that we can feel someone else's pain by virtue of the fact that a painful impression accompanies sympathy). This assumption, that we can feel someone else's pain, takes Mme Condorcet out of the realm of a self-interest based morality that we encountered in Helvetius' theory. Helvetius claimed that a child enters the world without ideas and without passions. No moral disposition is found in infancy. Thus, the only sentiment in our heart in infancy is self-love. Helvetius assumed that all we possess is an ability to feel our own pleasure and pain. The motive to relieve suffering for Helvetius, as we already saw, stems from our fear of encountering the same unfortunate circumstances, or simply from the discomfort of a painful memory. Both Mme Condorcet and Helvetius held a physical basis for morality. Thus, both endorsed sympathy as consisting in feeling pain upon seeing

another person suffer. However, for Helvetius, we are motivated to relieve someone else's pain in order to relieve our own pain; for Mme Condorcet we are motivated to relieve someone else's pain, without considering our own benefit, simply to relieve their pain. Sympathy, for Mme Condorcet, is constructed out of caring for another. Sympathy, for Helvetius, is constructed out of caring for one's self. Nonetheless, Mme Condorcet does recognize that a fear of encountering the same circumstances as those of the one who is afflicted does take place. However, she is clear in her view that whatever actions we take to relieve another person's pain, the motive will not be related to our own benefit.

Being accustomed to feeling the relations of their existence to ours, we must further experience, at the sight of their pain or their pleasure, the sentiment we would have at the idea of a danger or of a good which would happen to us personally, and this by the sole effect of habit, without any determined and reflective attention to our own interest.<sup>17</sup>

We are accustomed then, to think of our loved one's circumstances as if they were our own. We think of another person's circumstances without considering our own interests. Helvetius lacked in his view a pure altruistic capability to feel for another. Interestingly, Smith, who does assume a pure disposition for sympathy, and by "pure" I mean not dependent on a self gratification process as the flight from pain and the pursuit of pleasure, did not abandon self

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<sup>17</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 377.

interest either. Smith did not define sympathy as opposed to self-interest. Although in Smith's theory, while sympathy is not based on self-interest, self-interest and sympathy are compatible. For Mme Condorcet, self-interest and sympathy are incompatible. We will return to sympathy and self-interest in Smith and Mme Condorcet in the next section.

By adding a physical origin to the concept of sympathy, Mme Condorcet explains the origin of this disposition and she is in a better position to claim that sympathy consists in feeling pain when seeing another person suffer. She provides a stronger more complete view of sympathy. By adding a disposition of sympathy to the physical origin of morality, Mme Condorcet achieves a non-selfish moral motivation.

In order to achieve sympathy, as we saw in Chapter Three, Hume relied on resemblance among people and on inference (inferring that someone suffers when detecting signs of trouble). Smith claims sympathy is attained through the imagination. For Mme Condorcet sympathy is a disposition that develops from early childhood experiences throughout one's life. It is also inseparable from its physical aspect. What is left now is to consider how the concept of sympathy differs between Smith and Mme Condorcet given the different origin and nature of the disposition.

### Smith and Mme Condorcet on Sympathy

So far we see that sympathy, according to Mme Condorcet, arises from our own experience, physical and emotional, through a relation to another person. The question arises how does her approach render a different concept of sympathy than Smith's? What are the implications of her view on the origin of sympathy for her concept of sympathy and her moral theory in general?

Although Mme Condorcet does not use the following terminology, she constructs sympathy as a relational disposition. Her construction of sympathy as arising from a relation to a caretaker entails that sympathy arises from a relation of the self to another human being. Sympathy presupposes a human interaction. Smith's concept of sympathy is *individualistic*. For Smith, sympathy exists in individuals prior to any human relation. Smith just assumes that sympathy exists. He opens TMS with the following statement:

How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it.<sup>18</sup>

However, Smith does not neglect to notice the importance of family relations and the special place sympathy holds in the context of family. The members of the family are the object

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<sup>18</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 9 (my italics).

of one's warmest affections after one's self. Sympathy with family members arises from practice:

He is more habituated to sympathize with them [family members]. He knows better how every thing is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. It approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself.<sup>19</sup>

Even though Smith recognizes the primacy of family relations, he does not attribute the emergence of moral sensibility from familial contact. Nor does he think that sympathy for family members is prior to sympathy with one's self:

Every man, as the Stoics used to say, is first and principally recommended to his own care; and every man is certainly, in every respect, fitter and abler to take care of himself than of any other person. Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other people. The former are the original sensations; the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance; the latter the shadow.<sup>20</sup>

Sympathy, for Smith, arises within the individual, and renders one's moral disposition fitter to care for one's self first. Sympathy, for Mme Condorcet, arises out of a relation to another, and renders one's moral sensibility towards another as much as towards one's self. Caring for one's self first is a recurring theme in TMS. However, I am not arguing that Smith's allowance for the primacy of caring for one-self, is a direct result of his individualism, since Shaftsebury,

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<sup>19</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 219.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 219.

Hutcheson, Butler and Hume endorsed an individualistic origin of morality and argued for innate altruistic tendencies as well. I am arguing that Mme Condorcet's non-selfish moral tendency is a result of constructing our moral disposition as relational. Not only does sympathy always exist in the dyadic relationship from which it arose, but sympathy also consists in caring about other people at least as much as we care for ourselves. Remember that, according to Mme Condorcet, seeing another person suffer and remembering our own pain produces a painful impression in the same way. Feeling just as strongly about another person is the nature of sympathy the way Mme Condorcet conceives it. Since we would feel just as strongly about another person as we would about ourselves, we would treat that person as we would ourselves. This means that we would not care about ourselves more, we would care about another as we would care about ourselves. For this reason, her conception of sympathy is incompatible with selfishness. As one's moral sensibility develops, the ability to feel sympathy for another person increases throughout one's life. Eventually, we are able to sympathize with people who are not close to us as well. In this view, the capacity to care for another is an early emotion one has experienced, and one that will easily be repeated. Mme Condorcet places sympathy at the core of human relations and makes it an integral part of human interaction. For Smith, sympathy can mean caring for another but we do not sympathize because we care. We do not

necessarily care about other people; it is possible to care only about ourselves.

Men, though naturally sympathetic, feel so little for another, with whom they have no particular connexion, in comparison of what they feel for themselves; the misery of one, who is merely their fellow-creature, is of so little importance to them in comparison even of a small conveniency of their own;<sup>21</sup>

Smith does not see sympathy and selfishness as coming into conflict. He treats them as two unrelated phenomena. According to Mme Condorcet, not only is sympathy incompatible with selfishness, but sympathy is the very faculty that amends selfish tendencies (...comment cette Sympathie...qui répare Une partie Des maux qu'enfante l'intérêt personnel...<sup>22</sup>). We will return to this issue in the discussion on progress.

Apart from a different origin of sympathy, Smith and Mme Condorcet endorse a different role of sympathy in their moral theory. I have argued previously that Smith's theory of moral sentiments is a theory of moral judgment based on sympathy. Recall that for Smith, sympathy is not an immediate reaction. We first have to place ourselves in another person's situation to see if we would have reacted in the same way to the same circumstances. Thus, we might witness a violent expression of anger and then learn of the cause of the anger and think that the person is not justified in being so angry; Smith claims

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<sup>21</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 86.

<sup>22</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 369.

that we would not sympathize with this person. Smith's judgment-based sympathy goes in the other direction as well. He conceives of a possible situation in which we would feel for another a passion that she is not capable of feeling for her self. Thus, a person might not think she is suffering, but, upon placing ourselves in her situation, we feel sympathy. For instance, a person might be poor but happy, I still might sympathize with her.

We sometimes feel for another, a passion of which he himself seems to be altogether incapable; because, when we put ourselves in his case, that passion arises in our breast from the imagination, though it does not in his from the reality.<sup>21</sup>

Sympathy, for Smith clearly correlates to a person's situation rather than her emotions. I repeat the following quote: "Sympathy, therefore, does not arise so much from the view of the passions, as from that of the situation which excites it.". Sympathy, for Smith, is a conditional sentiment that depends on circumstances rather than a person's suffering. A reading of Smith's TMS as a theory of moral judgment stems also from the way the entire book is constructed and not only from his discussion of the occurrence of sympathy. Remember that Smith continues to argue that approbation, disapprobation, merit and demerit stem from sympathy, as well as justice, injustice and the impartial spectator. Thus, Smith draws the entire range of moral determinations in this book from sympathy. If sympathy, for Smith, is a theory of

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<sup>21</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 12.

moral judgment, from whence does moral motivation derive? Smith relegates motivation to the impartial spectator. Since we care primarily about ourselves, Smith asks, how can we overcome selfish tendencies?

When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves, than by whatever concerns other men; what is it which prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interests of others? It is not the soft power of humanity, it is not that feeble spark of benevolence which Nature has lighted up in the human heart, that is thus capable of counteracting the strongest impulses of self-love. It is a stronger power, a more forcible motive, which exerts itself upon occasions. It is reason, principle, conscience, the inhabitant of the breast, the man within, the great judge and arbiter of our conduct.<sup>24</sup>

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, the long list of adjectives at the end of the above quote are Smith's different ways of describing the impartial spectator. Thus, via the impartial spectator's opinions, we can overcome selfish tendencies. I have argued previously that the impartial spectator is based on sympathy, and that it is not a rational construct. The impartial spectator is based on hypothetical general sympathy. One might ask: "How would an objective person feel about my actions?" Thus the moral motivation one would feel stems from a well considered point of view, from a judgment the impartial spectator already formed. Even though Smith is consistent in applying feeling as a basis for any moral

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<sup>24</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 137.

determinations, moral motivation is not based on immediate feeling of sympathy as it is with Mme Condorcet.

In spite of my claim that Smith is consistent in treating sympathy as a medium for moral judgment, I would like to present one exception, a quote in which Smith does treat sympathy as a motive for action:

What is called affection, is in reality nothing but habitual sympathy. Our concern in the happiness or misery of those who are the objects of what we call our affections; our desire to promote the one, and to prevent the other; are either the actual feeling of that habitual sympathy, or the necessary consequences of that feeling.<sup>25</sup>

Even though Smith claims in this quote that the desire to help another stems from sympathy, I would not blame Smith for inconsistency. For one thing, this quote appears in Smith's discussion of sympathy in the family and could be taken to refer to this narrow context. Secondly, Smith's previous construction of sympathy as a basis for approbation, disapprobation, merit and demerit can still hold. The sympathy he speaks of here can be post judgment sympathy, that is sympathy that has already been approved. Sympathizing for Smith is a mean of judgment and as such it is entirely optional. Mme Condorcet endorses a concept of sympathy without judgment:

Finally, since we sympathize with the passions of others, the signs of those passions move us, and suffice to make us experience them.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 220.

<sup>26</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 426.

For Mme Condorcet the role of sympathy is one of moral motivation. Because when we sympathize we feel pain with another person. Not only would we like to help that person, but we certainly would not wish to inflict pain on another. It is the knowledge of what it is like to suffer that motivates us to help and deters us from doing harm. This knowledge is enabled through sympathy.

Since the sight or idea of another's misfortune makes us feel a painful sentiment, the sentiment is then more intense when we are the voluntary or even involuntary cause of this misfortune.<sup>27</sup>

The immediate reaction to the view of suffering is sympathy. Sympathy for Mme Condorcet means feeling pain with another. This pain intensifies if we were the one to cause the harm. From our ability to feel pain when someone else suffers, Mme Condorcet argues, it follows that we would be motivated to relieve that pain. We feel pain with their pain, and pleasure with their relief:

But when we free them from a suffering, our pleasure, like theirs, being the one which arises from the cessation of pain, is even more natural than the one of being satisfied by having made it cease to be...<sup>28</sup>

The primacy of the sympathetic reaction and its intensity yield a motive to relieve the pain witnessed.

We see, then, that Smith and Mme Condorcet conceive of a different origin and a different role of sympathy. I would

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<sup>27</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 436.

<sup>28</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 435.

like to point out several other differences. A consequence of Smith's individualistic origin of sympathy is the difficulty he conceives in experiencing sympathy. In treating sympathy as a disposition that develops out of our own experience, and from relations with others, Mme Condorcet can explain how we can easily relate to other people's experiences. For Smith, relating to other people's experiences is not achieved with the same ease that it is achieved for Mme Condorcet. The following is Smith's formulation of sympathy:

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected, but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation... our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations...By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. His agonies, when they are brought home to ourselves, when we have thus adopted and made them our own, begin at last to affect us, and we then tremble and shudder at the thought of what he feels.<sup>29</sup>

Note that Smith does recognize a physical reaction - "we tremble and shudder", yet again in dismissing the physical aspect of the development of sympathy he can only state the occurrence of this phenomenon but cannot explain it. Smith then claims that we have no immediate experience of what

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<sup>29</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 9.

another person feels. We have to think how we would feel in his situation and we do so through the imagination. The result is that we feel something that is similar but weaker. What gives rise to sympathy then, or what sympathy depends on, is our ability to imagine ourselves in another person's situation. Smith realizes that sympathy is an interactive process, insomuch as we too have to feel something which has to relate to our own experience. But since Smith does not account for sympathy as a disposition that develops out of physical and familial experience, he achieves the presence of our own experience in the process of sympathy only through imagination. We imagine our own experience - how we would feel in another person's situation, but we do not immediately feel with the other who is in pain. Hence, for Smith, it seems that we relate to another person only through *possible* experience, whereas for Mme Condorcet we relate through *actual* experience. For Smith we imagine what our experience would be in his situation, while for Mme Condorcet we recall our own experience directly and immediately. Mme Condorcet, nonetheless, does recognize that imagination is very important for sympathy. Apart from the value of imagining another's circumstances, imagination is important, for not every experience we sympathize with is one we have experienced ourselves. Smith claims that imagination is the sole basis for sympathy, whereas for Mme Condorcet the basis of sympathy is the general impression of pain that is actively renewed at

the sight of suffering. Thus, for her we are able to immediately sympathize and what we feel is just as strong. According to her, we have an immediate emotional reaction. We sympathize as soon as the object of sympathy is offered to our senses (*Les premiers mouvements de cette Sympathie naissent à l'instant même où les objects qui peuvent l'exciter s'offrent à nos regards*.<sup>30</sup>). As I already mentioned, sympathy in Mme Condorcet's sense means relating directly to another through recalling our own experiences. She starts with the assumption that we are similar and connected first. Smith, instead, assumes a certain separation and therefore requires imagination to bridge the gap.

Smith's conception of caring primarily for ourselves, and the difficulty he conceives in relating to other people leads him to endorse a limited conception of sympathy. Smith believes that we cannot sympathize with love, small sorrows or great joys. For Mme Condorcet we sympathize with joys or sorrows regardless of their intensity. Sympathy, for her, is a necessary consequence of our moral sensibility and our attachment to certain people. Love too, evokes pleasure when witnessed. Smith's limited range of sympathy stems both from what he takes the role of sympathy to be in his moral theory, and from his idea that a correspondence of sentiments needs to take place in order to be able to sympathize. I have mentioned previously that according to Smith we need to share

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<sup>30</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 386.

someone's sentiments in order to be able to sympathize. Since according to Smith what the sufferer feels is much stronger than what the spectator feels, if the sufferer wishes to elicit sympathy, he must convey a message that the spectator could comprehend.

Mankind, though naturally sympathetic, never conceives, for what has befallen another, that degree of passion which naturally animates the person principally concerned... The person principally concerned if sensible of this, and at the same time passionately desires a more complete sympathy... But he can only hope to obtain this by lowering his passion to that pitch, in which the spectators are capable of going along with him. He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him.<sup>11</sup>

Smith is uncomfortable with a strong expression of emotions. He conveys an incapability to sympathize with strong expressions of pain. In effect, it is indecent, in his opinion, to grieve or lament violently.

Following Smith's use of sympathy as moral judgment and his dependence on imagination to achieve sympathy, his approach to sympathy is intellectual rather than emotional. He is more comfortable with imagination than with emotions. So extreme is his claim that a perception of feeling is not necessary to illicit sympathy that he claims that we can even sympathize with the dead! We can sympathize with one who feels nothing, solely based on imagination:

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<sup>11</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 22.

We sympathize even with the dead...It is miserable, we think, to be deprived of the light of sun; to be shut from life and conversation; to be laid in cold grave, a prey to corruption and the reptiles of the earth; to be no more thought of in this world, but to be obliterated, in a little time, from the affections, and almost from memory, of their dearest friends and relations.<sup>12</sup>

Smith finds it easier, as a man, to sympathize with a woman in labor, than to withstand a person who grieves violently. Mme Condorcet does recognize that the closer one is in culture, customs, or relation to us, the easier it is to sympathize. Yet she does not turn this notion to a cardinal point in her theory as Smith does.

Mme Condorcet's conception of sympathy is emotional rather than intellectual. Sympathy is felt, not merely imagined. In addition, Mme Condorcet claims that sympathy is augmented by enthusiasm, which she labels a moral phenomenon. Enthusiasm is a capacity to represent to one's self all the pleasures and all the pains that may arise from a certain situation. One can immediately imagine possible events that in reality can take a life time to experience. Enthusiasm, then, is a capacity to imagine an object with certain exaggeration. This explanation and terminology is very awkward to a twentieth century reader. Mme Condorcet does not provide a coherent argument or an explanation at this point. However, I take this to be an important point. It is easier to understand what enthusiasm signifies by looking at

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<sup>12</sup>Smith, *TMS*, 12.

Voltaire's definition of enthusiasm in his *Philosophical Dictionary*. Voltaire sees enthusiasm as an emotional state, an ability to react emotionally to an event. He defines enthusiasm as opposed to reason:

Enthusiasm is precisely like wine: it can excite so much tumult in the blood vessels, and such violent vibrations in the nerves, that the reason is entirely destroyed.<sup>33</sup>

Mme Condorcet applies enthusiasm to explain the workings of sympathy. She explains that enthusiasm is an emotional reaction that accompanies sympathy. She labels enthusiasm a moral phenomenon in the same way she labeled physical pain a moral phenomenon. The ability to feel physical pain and emotional pain is what accounts for our ability to sympathize.

### Conclusion

Both the influence of the French Enlightenment and that of Adam Smith are apparent in Mme Condorcet's work. She shares with the French an attempt to ground morality in human nature, specifically physical nature; and she shares with Smith the centrality of sympathy in moral practice and theory. By combining elements from these two traditions, Mme Condorcet puts forth a different and more complete concept of sympathy than Smith's. Sympathy has a double origin: physical and

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<sup>33</sup>Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, Trs. Ed. Theodore Besterman, (England: Penguin Classics, Penguin Books, 1972), 188.

relational. The following four points indicate the uniqueness of Mme Condorcet's concept of sympathy. The first two points pertain to the physical origin of sympathy, and the second two pertain to the relational origin of sympathy. One, Mme Condorcet is able to account for the empirical causes of sympathy and explain how sympathy arises from sensations of pleasure and pain. Accounting for the causes of sympathy is a task Smith altogether overlooked. Two, the idea that sensations of pleasure and pain are among the first causes of sympathy is completed by the idea that physical sensations also accompany this disposition. Thus, Mme Condorcet can explain how sympathy means feeling pain upon seeing another person suffer. Neither Hume nor Smith could account for our ability to share feelings in the way Mme Condorcet does. Three, in seeing sympathy as a relational disposition, Mme Condorcet can argue against a self-love based ethics, which Smith could not avoid. Four, by combining the relational and physical aspects, Mme Condorcet explains why sympathy functions as moral motivation. The feelings we share with other people when sympathizing are as strong as theirs, thus we care about them as we would about ourselves and are as motivated to relieve their pain. Smith did not derive moral motivation from sympathy.

## Chapter Five

## Mme Condorcet on Reason and Sentiments

Sympathy and Reflection

The following are a few general remarks concerning reflection and sympathy. In addition to feeling sympathy, we can also think about a person's feelings, circumstances and possible effects. We might, for instance, sympathize with a person who suffered serious or crippling injuries. We can think of the possible short and long terms effects of these permanent wounds. No doubt, then, that the more we think about the situation, the more we sympathize. Mme Condorcet argues that while sensation can present an idea to our mind, it is reflection which extends it and sustains it. Thus we can witness a person suffer for a moment, and yet think about it for much longer. In spending more time reflecting we can increase our feelings and create more sympathy. Reflection provides thoughts and images which motivate us to alleviate pain in others, and perform morally good actions. Reflection gives rise to compassion by sustaining ideas of suffering. Sympathy, then, which begins with a sentiment, increases through the exercise of sensitivity through reflection. Reason works here to enhance the sentiments.

The sympathy of which we are capable for physical pains, and which is a part of what we understand by the name of humanity, would be a sentiment too brief to be often useful, my dear C\*\*\*, were we not

so capable of reflection as we are of sensitivity... The sentiment for humanity is thus in some manner a seed lodged at the bottom of man's heart by nature and which the faculty of reflection will nurture and develop.<sup>1</sup>

The sentiment of humanity, our moral capacity, is born out of sympathy, and it needs to be cultivated. Reflection, Mme Condorcet claims, not only increases sympathy but is also necessary for sympathy. However, the argument she provides here is highly implausible. She claims that country people who are preoccupied with material concerns cannot afford the time to reflect enough, therefore are less compassionate. Her intention here is positive, since she is arguing for equality of material wealth so everyone has equal time to develop his moral and intellectual faculties. She also has in mind a vast gap in education among socio-economic classes typical to her time. Yet, it cannot be correct to equate the ability to reflect with the time available. Nevertheless, after having explained the role of reflection in sympathy, she is in a position to claim that reflection is as important as sensibility:

But it is in observing man himself, that one can still more easily grasp how he owes the greatest part of his humanity to the faculty of reflection; indeed, his humanity is proportionate to his being sensitive and reflective.<sup>2</sup>

Reflection, like enthusiasm, can increase sympathy. Mme Condorcet does not treat sympathy merely as a static

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<sup>1</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 370.

<sup>2</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 372.

disposition that just exists, as Smith does. Sympathy is rather a dynamic faculty that improves and develops. Reflection can be practiced and sensitivity can be exercised.

It seems that there is no need to prove that sensitivity is livelier the more it is exercised...A sensitivity that is not at all practiced tends to weaken, and can only be stimulated by very strong impressions.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Mme Condorcet claims that moral faculties need to be exercised, and she draws an analogy between physical exercise and mental exercise (*L'émotion semble donc convenir à l'ame, comme l'exercice convient au corps;*<sup>4</sup>). The analogy points both to the necessity of exercising and the pleasure we get from improving our mental and physical faculties.

### General and Abstract Sentiments

Sensations of pleasure and pain play a significant role in Mme Condorcet's moral views, and can be read in three consecutive stages: One, we already saw that initially, when sympathizing, sentiments of pleasure or pain accompany our feelings. Hence, the well-being of others makes us feel pleasure and their misery makes us feel pain. Two, our ability to feel pleasure and pain in sympathizing with other people does not end with sympathy but rather extends to accompany our help or harm to those people. Consequently,

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<sup>3</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 364.

<sup>4</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 348.

from our ability to sympathize, to feel someone else's pleasure or pain, it follows that we also feel pleasure in contributing to the happiness of another person and we feel pain in harming them. Mme Condorcet explains that we already sympathize with pain or relief, hence, our own feelings are more intense if we were the one to help or harm another. More simply put, we take pleasure in doing good and we feel pain in causing harm. Three, Mme Condorcet argues that in addition to the pleasure of doing good, we also feel a pleasure of having done good, which remains in us as an *abstract sentiment*. What does she mean by an abstract sentiment? Without understanding this point, one cannot follow the role of emotions in Mme Condorcet's theory. In the previous chapter we saw that Mme Condorcet explained the emergence of sympathy from sensations of pleasure and pain and the working of sympathy through the recollection of pleasure and pain. Now Mme Condorcet wishes to explain moral motivation through general and abstract sentiments. The pleasure that we take in doing good, giving money for charity for instance, or the pain that we take in causing harm, for example, having to fire a loyal employee of many years, constitute specific feelings of pleasure and pain that are related to specific actions. Mme Condorcet argues, that a specific feeling of pleasure in performing a good action, can give rise to a general feelings of pleasure in doing good. She draws an analogy between a specific sensation of pleasure or pain and the general impression that can be

renewed, and a specific pleasure we take in performing a good action, and a general impression of pleasure in doing good. Thus, in the same way that a local pain can give rise to a general impression of pain, so can the pleasure from a specific action give rise to a general feeling of pleasure in doing good.

We thus feel a natural pleasure in doing good; but there arises yet another sentiment from its pleasure: the satisfaction of having done good, just as there arises from physical pains, besides the present local impression, a painful sensation in all our organs.<sup>5</sup>

There is a difference between a pleasure of doing good, and a recoltable pleasure of having done good. The pleasure of having done good can remain as a general impression that is no longer connected to the specific action that gave rise to it:

Thus, to the pleasure of doing the good is joined the long duration of the satisfaction of having done good; a sentiment which becomes, in some way, general and abstract since we feel it anew at the sole memory of good actions, without recalling their particular circumstances.<sup>6</sup>

General and abstract sentiments arise from specific sentiments that accompany our actions. We recall them, just as we recall a general impression of pain when we remember our past actions. We will see next, how in accompanying our actions general sentiments serve as moral motivation or deterrence.

To illustrate what she means by general and abstract sentiments Mme Condorcet uses in her discussion sentiments of

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<sup>5</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 434.

<sup>6</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 435.

regret and remorse. Just as having done good produces an abstract pleasant sentiment, having done wrong produces a painful one, a feeling of regret and remorse.

Just as the satisfaction of having done some good unites itself to our existence to make us feel the delightful sentiment, in the same way the consciousness of having done wrong attaches itself to us in order to disturb us. It produces a sentiment of regret and of remorse which bothers us, afflicts us, worries us, makes us suffer, even when we do not retain a distinct memory of the first impression of pain that the wrongs which we caused made us feel.<sup>7</sup>

These feelings of regret and remorse can become general feelings that are not related to the specific action that gave rise to them.

Also the remorse of an evil and the satisfaction of the good we have done, can exist without the imagination retracing the effects of these actions; we do not even have the general memory of having done good or evil, but the most abstract and general sentiment of having done good or evil. Other sentiments can join in this latter, depending upon circumstances, but it is not necessary that they join in for conscience to act upon the soul, to determine, to judge or reward our actions.<sup>8</sup>

Sentiments such as regret and remorse are moral sentiments insofar as the discerning of moral concepts is necessarily embedded in them. Mme Condorcet's theory can explain how is it that we can feel that certain actions are right or wrong. One can think about capital punishment for instance, and in addition to providing rational arguments concerning this topic, it can simply feel wrong. It is the ability to have

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<sup>7</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 437-8.

<sup>8</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 444.

feelings that indicate the rightness or wrongness of an action that Mme Condorcet attempts to establish in her discussion of general and abstract sentiments.

Moral sentiments, then, such as regret, remorse and satisfaction of relieving pain, arise from abstract feelings of pleasure and pain that accompany our actions. They become general and abstract sentiments, and as such they constitute a tendency to do good and avoid harm. They become permanent and active powers. Out of the pleasure and pain we feel for helping or hurting someone, a moral conscience is born:

The satisfaction attached to good actions, and the terror of the memory of bad ones, are two effective motives for the determination of all our actions. These two sentiments are universal: they constitute the principle and the ground of the morality of the human genre.<sup>9</sup>

Feelings of pleasure and pain serve as a primary non-reflective moral tendency. For Mme Condorcet, feeling is neither limited to the perception of particular ideas, nor is it context specific. Generality and abstraction, usually seen only as assets of reason, are the domain of the sentiments as well.

Apart from moral motivation, according to Mme Condorcet, general and abstract sentiments have an additional role. In order to be able to construct a sentimentalist moral theory, one has to be able to find a way to generalize sentiments. A moral theory cannot be constructed from specific cases of

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<sup>9</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 438.

sympathy. Both Smith and Mme Condorcet recognize that generality and abstraction are required for moral discourse. Smith achieves generality through the impartial spectator and abstraction through the formation of general rules (from specific sentiments). Yet sentiments to Smith remain partial and context specific. One can generalize based on many instances, or many people's feelings; but sympathy and feeling themselves do not take a general and abstract form. This is not the case with Mme Condorcet. We saw that specific sentiments that accompany our actions give rise to general sentiments. The general and abstract sentiments serve to solve the problem of partiality and specificity of moral sentiments. As indicated in the above quote, Mme Condorcet claims that moral sentiments are universal. Moral sentiments can function as a general moral rule does, in being applied to an action to determine if it is a moral one. For Mme Condorcet one can obey a general sentiment in the same way one obeys a general rule; both can be applied to an action, the former to indicate that the action feels morally wrong and the latter to indicate that the action seems rationally wrong. Mme Condorcet draws an analogy to science. Once a scientific principle has been established, we use it without deriving it anew each time. In the same manner, Mme Condorcet argues, once a general sentiment has been created, we follow what that sentiment indicates. Moral sentiments, Mme Condorcet claims, become habitual. We easily discern the satisfaction or the

remorse that arises from carrying or planning to carry out a certain action:

The idea that this action is good makes one presume a secret satisfaction; the idea that it is bad announces remorse, precisely in the same way as the sole idea of physical pleasure or pain produces, in that moment, and for the future, a painful or pleasant sentiment. There here occurs something, which in certain respects happens in the sciences when one uses certain methods, certain principles, whilst relying upon their exactness and truth, without having the memory of the proof we once worked through. Similarly, one obeys general sentiments without thinking of the manner by which they are formed and of all which justifies them.<sup>10</sup>

General sentiments then become a part of our moral constitution. Thus the requirement of the rationalists, that moral concepts should be general and abstract, is fulfilled by the general and abstract sentiments.

Since abstract and general sentiments are based on sensations of pleasure and pain, one might ask whether Mme Condorcet's elaboration on the role of pleasure and pain renders her theory hedonistic. It is important to keep in mind that sympathy or moral actions are not carried out for the pursuit of pleasure and the flight of pain. These sensations are a by-product of actions and in no way serve as moral motivation by themselves. Helvetius does use pleasure and pain in his theory as the sole factor in motivation and deterrence, hence his theory is hedonistic. What pleasure and pain do contribute, according to Mme Condorcet, is an

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<sup>10</sup>*De même, on obéit à des sentiments généraux, sans penser à la manière dont ils se sont formés et à tout ce qui les justifie. Mme Condorcet, Lettres sur la Sympathie, 444.*

indication of whether an action is right or wrong. Mme Condorcet sees pleasure and pain as a way to improve our moral faculties, a moral action is pleasurable and an immoral one is painful. She sees this phenomenon as a part of our moral constitution designed to turn the human moral tendency into a pleasurable experience. Thus, she claims that pleasure and pain are an integral part of our moral constitution:

Perhaps it will suffice in order to find it [the cause of pleasure], to observe that the exercise of our faculties perfects them, that this perfection is a means to attain pleasure and avoid pain...A sentiment of pleasure is thus mechanically tied to all exercise of our faculties and tends to develop them.<sup>11</sup>

Pleasure, then, is a necessary consequence of our moral constitution. Pleasure provides an internal motive for doing good.

Also, and although one has often brought with eloquence the immediate influence of vice and virtue upon our felicity, we have not been sufficiently concerned with demonstrating that the principles of virtue, and the internal pleasure it provides, were a necessary consequence of our moral constitution, and that the need to be good would be an almost irresistible penchant for men submitted to wise laws and brought up without prejudices.<sup>12</sup>

In using pleasure and pain as means only and not as ends, Mme Condorcet avoids a hedonistic theory. Mme Condorcet resembles the French tradition by using pleasure and pain as an initial explanation of our moral development. But she departs from Condillac and Helvetius, by arguing that although pleasure and

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<sup>11</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 419-20.

<sup>12</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 433.

pain have a significant role in our moral constitution, moral motivation ultimately stems from sympathy and reason. It is important to remember, and perhaps it is not so clear in the text, that the pleasure we take in doing good or the pain we feel in doing harm is already a consequence of our ability to sympathize. Thus, the pleasure that she speaks of in the two above quotes, was initially derived from being able to feel someone else's pleasures and pains.

Before I continue with the discussion of reason and sentiments, I would like to briefly digress and compare the role of pain and remorse in Helvetius, Smith and Mme Condorcet. We have encountered the role of pain in moral motivation in the French philosophes. I already mentioned that Condillac treated pain as 'nature's warning'. If nature had given only pleasurable feelings to the statue, it would not have survived. Pain teaches a lesson, puts a curb on desires. With the advent of pain, the statue will cease to desire pleasurable things that lead to pain. Fear of pain is a motive to limit one's self. In his discussion of pain, Condillac was only interested in acquiring survival skills; nevertheless, he recognized pain as a guiding force. Helvetius, as I mentioned before, was interested in the ethical implications of sensationalism and attributed to pleasure and pain a role in moral reasoning. Remorse, he argues, is nothing more than an anticipation of pain. Remorse is an unpleasant physical sensation that owes its existence to

a fear of punishment or shame. Even though, according to Helvétius, pain underlies the feeling of remorse; it is the fear of pain one anticipates will occur to oneself that brings forth this sentiment. Helvétius' sensationalism, without a disposition for sympathy and without an initial social bond, remained a theory in which morality is solely based on self-love, as is remorse. Smith's concept of remorse also falls short of a complete explanation. For Smith, remorse first stems from sympathizing with people's hatred and resentment of a person's deed. Then sympathy with the injured follows. Remorse is a sentiment that is socially constructed. The nature of this sentiment consists of a feeling of isolation, a desire to hide due to people's hostility and rejection, and shame of one's actions. So the painful aspect of remorse, for Smith, is largely due to people's reactions to the crime and only then sympathy with pain and suffering follows. Similar to Smith's view of sympathy as a theory of moral judgment, is his view of remorse. It first stems from the disapprobation of the spectator, and then sympathy with the offended follows. Remorse, like sympathy, is conditional and intellectually based. Mme Condorcet, in the same way she views sympathy as relational, views remorse. As we saw above, remorse stems from a painful memory of having done harm through our action. Thus remorse, for her, originates in a feeling of pain of having hurt someone else. Remorse is a feeling that is more intense than just sympathizing with pain, since we were the

one to have caused pain. Smith, in overlooking the phenomenon of physical pain, does not derive remorse from our own experiences. Instead of Helvétius' self-love and Smith's social approach as a basis for remorse, Mme Condorcet derives remorse from sympathy. Like sympathy, remorse for Mme Condorcet, also serves as a moral deterrent. For Smith, neither sympathy nor remorse serve as moral motivation. Again, moral sentiments for Smith serve as moral judgement only.

### Reason's Role

We see that moral sentiments are very powerful to Mme Condorcet. But the question remains: if we have a primary nonreflective moral tendency, so that some moral distinctions have already been made through the sentiments before we reflect on them, what, then, is the role of reason?

The pleasure that we feel from doing a good action is still a vital and important sign that the action is a moral one. But sentiments are also modified by reflection. Once moral sentiments appear, we reflect upon them.

There is then, my dear C\*\*\*, a distinction between our actions already established by sentiment alone, since some of them are accompanied by pleasure and followed by an internal satisfaction, whilst the others are accompanied by pains and followed by a disagreeable, and often painful sentiment. But this more enduring sentiment of satisfaction or pain, which is attached to the memory of the good or wrong we have done to others, is necessarily modified by reflection. And it is the modification

which reflection brings to them, which leads us to the idea of the moral good and evil...<sup>13</sup>

A good action would be one that gives others pleasure as approved by reason, whereas an evil action is one that gives pain as condemned by reason. It is the activity of reason, when reflecting on the moral sentiments, that gives rise to ideas of good and evil. Mme Condorcet makes a fine distinction here in explaining the role of both reason and sentiment in the concepts of good and evil. When we perform a good or evil act, certain sentiments accompany them. When we reflect on those sentiments, we get the abstract ideas of good and evil. Ideas of good and evil are a product of reason when reflecting on the sentiments. That is, without the sentiments, reason cannot give rise to ideas of good and evil.

You have seen my dear C\*\*\*, that the sentiments which are awakened in ourselves when we perform some good or evil to others, give us, when reflection accompanies them, the abstract idea of moral good and evil.<sup>14</sup>

It is important to remember Mme Condorcet's view on the abstract sentiments which states that we feel the presence or consequences of good and evil actions. It follows that there is a difference between feeling good and evil and having a rational idea of good and evil. Yet both are equally important to the constitution of a moral agent.

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<sup>13</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 439-440.

<sup>14</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 452.

Mme Condorcet defines reason as universal and law-like. Rational constructs are necessary, not arbitrary. Reason steadily maintains concepts such as justice.

The morality of our actions, the idea of justice, the desire to follow it, are the necessary works of our sensibility and reason; in this regard, any reasonable and sensible being will have the same ideas; the limits of these ideas will be the same: they can thus become an object of an exact science; since they have invariable objects. Indeed, one can express by the word *just*, whatever idea one wants: but all men that reason well will have a common notion of justice. Since moral ideas are not arbitrary, their definition can be arbitrary only in a more or less clear, or more or less general way of presenting them.<sup>15</sup>

If we raise the question of what does reason contribute that the sentiments have not already indicated, Mme Condorcet would reply that sentiments, although general and abstract, are not necessarily law-like. Sentiments might still vary among people and are not a proper subject of an exact science. Reason, on the other hand, will always yield the same results. Upon claiming that the objects of reason are invariable, Mme Condorcet advances a rationalistic approach with regards to moral concepts. Her work at this point is incomplete. Although she does qualify reason to a certain extent, it is not clear what conception of reason she is working with. It is also not possible to extract a metaphysics or an epistemology from her text. What then renders moral concepts invariable? Are moral concepts metaphysically based, are they

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<sup>15</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 463.

constructed by reason, are they perceived by intuition? As we will see next, lack of coherence regarding the concept of reason impairs her discussion to a certain extent.

Apart from rational ideas of good and evil, moral concepts such as rights and justice also stem from reason. Mme Condorcet defines a right as a preference of reason in favor of an individual or an interest that is made into a general law. Then, ideas of good and evil, combined with ideas of rights, give rise to ideas of justice and injustice. Concepts such as justice, as opposed only to ideas of good and evil, have to be a product of reason since justice is founded on the concepts of rights. Justice and injustice, then, are defined as conducive or contrary to rights (*Une action conforme au droit, est juste; Une action contraire au droit, est injuste*<sup>16</sup>). The idea of rights is a concept that requires a thought process that takes into consideration personal interests and the general good. Unfortunately, Mme Condorcet is very brief when she gets to this important section. Several of her qualifications of reason resemble what she said concerning sentiments. As we saw previously, Mme Condorcet argued that sentiments are universal and can function as a general rule does. The question arises: why do justice and rights stem from reason as opposed to being derived only from sentiments, as Smith thought? It seems that, according to Mme Condorcet, it is both the necessity and complexity of these

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<sup>16</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathy*, 458.

issues (justice and rights), that lead her to relegate them to the domain of reason. From her claim that rational concepts are invariable and are the objects of an exact science, one can conclude that rational concepts are necessarily true. Also, in concerning justice, for instance, many factors need to be taken into consideration and good arguments have to be provided in order to convince. Reason *prefers* justice based on rationally assessing a situation, and provides a general law applicable to many particular situations. She uses Locke's theory of property rights to illustrate her point: a man who cultivated his field in the state of nature is entitled to the fruit of his labor. This entitlement she labels a "preference" of reason.

This preference that reason orders be granted to him, even when not all the fruits of his harvest are necessary to him, and another has a real need for them, precisely constitutes right. This preference is grounded upon reason, upon the necessity of a general law which serves as a rule for actions, common to all men and which exempts one from examining the motives and consequences of each particular action. It is equally founded on sentiment, since the effect of injustice being more harmful to the one who is its object than the effects of a simple wrong, it must inspire in us a greater repugnance.<sup>17</sup>

It seems then, that the main difference between reason and sentiments is the extent to which moral concepts can be developed. While sentiments might indicate a concept such as justice, it is reason that explains it. In providing

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<sup>17</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 453-4.

arguments as to why a certain action is just, reason also provides additional motives for action.

After explaining the role of reason and sentiments, Mme Condorcet proceeds to argue that both are of equivalent importance. With the idea of rights, Mme Condorcet sees reason both as initiating a moral concept and as motivating us to follow it. However, reason acts with sentiments and must act with sentiments. For fear of remorse alone, as she shows in an example, is not sufficient to prevent the injustice committed at the hands of tyrants, oppressive rulers and corrupt clergy. Thus she has a partially rationalistic view. However, it is important to keep in mind that this rationalism would not be possible without the sentiments.

In the idea of the moral good or evil, we submit the natural sentiment of sympathy to reason, which then directs it toward the most pressing interests. In the idea of the just and the unjust, we submit this sentiment to reason, itself directed by general rules, by that of a preference founded on general and reasoned motives, which aim at the greatest good; that is to say, directed by the rule of right.<sup>18</sup>

Mme Condorcet criticizes Smith for not deriving justice from reason. For Smith finds that justice and injustice stem from the sentiments, from sympathy with the beneficiary or the injured. Sympathy with the gratitude of the beneficiary gives rise to a sense of justice, and sympathy with the resentment of the injured gives rise to a sense of injustice. Injustice is an object of resentment and not an object of reasoning. As

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<sup>18</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 457.

we saw in Chapter Three, Smith also criticizes reason both by providing an elaborate theory of moral judgment that is based on sympathy, and by explaining the inadequacy of reason alone to discern moral truths. I have already mentioned that Smith's criticism of reason is similar to Hume's:<sup>19</sup> reason can show us how to attain a moral goal but not how to determine what that goal is. Reason is not the source of moral concepts; rather, sympathy is. Smith writes:

But reason cannot render any particular object either agreeable or disagreeable to the mind for its own sake. Reason may show that this object is the means of obtaining some other which is naturally either pleasing or displeasing, and in this manner may render it either agreeable or disagreeable for the sake of something else. But nothing can be agreeable or disagreeable for its own sake, which is not rendered such by immediate sense and feeling.<sup>20</sup>

Smith thus sees reason as instrumental, but not as a source of moral distinction. General rules are based on reason but moral concepts themselves, such as justice, are based on sentiments.

As we already saw, for Mme Condorcet justice arises from reason, yet justice is also founded on sentiments, since the effects of injustice are emotionally unbearable. Having sentiments that make primary moral distinctions, we submit them to the guidance of reason. With her theory we lose

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<sup>19</sup>See Hume's *Treatise*, III;i. sec. 1.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 320.

neither the importance of the sentiments nor the contributions reason can make. She writes:

It was necessary to show that the origin of our moral sentiments lies in the natural and unreflective sympathy for the physical pains of another, and that the origin of our moral ideas lies in reflection... yet, one cannot say that morality is founded on sentiment alone, since it is reason which shows us what is just or unjust. But, one can even less maintain that it is founded uniquely on reason, since the judgment of reason is nearly always preceded and followed by a sentiment which announces it and confirms it, and since it is even originally from sentiment that reason acquires moral ideas and forms principles out of them.<sup>22</sup>

The origin of our morals and our moral motivation is thus embedded in the sentiments. Sympathy is a sentiment that can motivate us not only to amend evil issuing from personal interest, but also to oppose passions that oppress the weak and to avenge any kind of injustice. The sentiments also accompany any rational decision we make, and in doing so they approve or disapprove of the rational decision. Reason enhances our natural moral tendency by directing the sentiments through rules of justice and rights. Reason and sentiments work in conjunction to provide a moral action.

Having explained the role and importance of reason and sentiments, Mme Condorcet continues to argue for their necessity. Mme Condorcet, who attributes a great deal of importance to the sentiments, still asks whether sentiments alone are sufficient to guarantee a moral action and whether they are reliable to always do so. While she replies that

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<sup>22</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 463.

reason can certainly compensate in the case of lack of proper emotions, she also reminds us that lack of proper reason can occur just as lack of proper sentiments can.

...it would then follow that these motives [to practice virtue and justice], for men formed and governed by reason, would be efficacious in nearly all the circumstances and would fail to produce their effects only in very rare circumstances or in the actions of little importance. Now it is not here a matter of proving that they would always be sufficient; that all men, having no other motives, infallibly would be just, but only that they would be so more often...It is then sufficient to show that only reason united with sentiments can still lead toward the good by surer, gentler, easier and less complicated means, liable to fewer errors and dangers. And that these means, far from demanding from us the sacrifice and silences of any of our faculties, give birth, on the contrary, to our moral perfection from our intellectual perfection.<sup>22</sup>

Mme Condorcet reminds us that sentiments may not always be reliable, but in the same way reason is not infallible. It does not make any sense to leave a sovereign (who could be a tyrant) no other restraint other than remorse. Perfection of moral faculties can only be attained by including both its aspects.

Mme Condorcet sees reason and sentiments as components of one moral faculty. In her discussion of property rights, she gives an example of two immoral actions. One is an example of a person who has a surplus of goods but would not share them with the poor. The other is a person, who by force, compelled his neighbor to share his goods. The following is her commentary on these two instances:

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<sup>22</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 468.

The first would lack humanity, the second would violate one of those very general laws which reason dictates and leads men to respect by showing them that they serve their common interests, and by showing them that the good which would result, in some very rare particular circumstances, from their infringement cannot be compared to the advantages provided by the generality and certainty of these laws.<sup>23</sup>

Can one be a moral agent without humanity or without a rational understanding of the necessity of general laws?

Experiencing an abstract and general sentiment versus forming abstract and general ideas, Mme Condorcet claims, is what distinguishes hearts from minds. Hearts efficiently provide morally stimulating sentiments. Minds are capable of calculating, comparing and conjuring results to enable arrival at well thought general truths. Both faculties, reason and sentiments, are fallible. Passions can stifle intelligence and prejudice can blind reason.

One must, as it were, go and seek in their passions forces which can extend and renew their intelligence, weakened by inaction, and degraded by error;...It is thus desirable that one of the primary goals of education be that of providing the ease of acquiring the general ideas, of feeling the general and abstract sentiments I have discussed.<sup>24</sup>

Education can enhance or deprive moral development. It is not beneficial, according to Mme Condorcet, to teach children logic and not to develop their sensitivity, or vice versa.

In addition, Mme Condorcet indicates that assent to moral truths is different from assent to mathematical proofs. For

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<sup>23</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 455.

<sup>24</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 449.

moral thinking is unlike any other rational thinking in the sense that we are not indifferent to it. I think that this is an important distinction. If we stop to think about it for a moment, we might realize that whether light consists of particles or waves is an idea which might leave us indifferent, whereas regarding the question of abortion, for instance, we have an emotional reaction. In encountering moral truths there is thus both an emotional desire to fulfill a goal and a fear of avoiding it. Moral truths are accompanied by feelings that motivate us to act accordingly. Again, rather than creating a division between reason and sentiments, Mme Condorcet employs both.

As I already mentioned, additional work needed to be done on her part concerning reason. I regret that she did not spend more time explaining the role of reason; she devoted only a brief discussion to this issue. Although she thinks that reason and sentiments equally constitute our morality, she does not give them equal treatment in her text. Her discussion of the sentiments is well argued, while her discussion of reason is incomplete.

#### Hume and Price on Reason and Sentiments

In what follows I would like to present two Eighteenth Century philosophers, David Hume and Richard Price, who allowed for room in their moral theories for both reason and

sentiments. I would like to compare their approach to Mme Condorcet's.

Richard Price is a rationalist, an intuitionist who claims that moral ideas are simple ideas of right and wrong which are perceived by the understanding, by intuition. Right and wrong, Price argues, are real qualities, real truths that are perceived by reason. Nevertheless, Price claims that emotions accompany our perceptions of right and wrong. Apart from the "cool judgment of reason", we are also aware that actions seem amiable, odious or shocking. In addition to empirically acknowledging the presence of emotions in moral discourse, Price also argues that emotions have an important role. Emotions are important in supporting and reenforcing the dictates of reason and they also protect reason from certain failures.

From hence, it must appear that in men it is necessary that the rational principle, or the intellectual discernment of right and wrong, should be aided by instinctive determinations. - The dictates of mere reason, being slow, and deliberate, would be otherwise much too weak.<sup>25</sup>

According to Price then, reason requires the aid of emotions in moral determinations. It seems as if Price argues that reason alone is insufficient and therefore, he advocates a moral theory that combines both reason and sentiments. Hume appears to be advocating a similar approach with regards to combining reason and sentiments.

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<sup>25</sup>Richard Price, *A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals*, In *British Moralists*, D.D Raphael ed., 688.

Recently both Annette Baier and Walter Brand have argued that Hume attributes a significant role for reflection in his moral theory, more than has been previously acknowledged. Annette Baier argues that Hume's anti-rationalist arguments in the *Treatise* were intended only against the insufficiency of pure reason in moral discourse, and not against reason in general. Baier claims that Hume intended to replace pure reason with a different concept of reason, one which holds that reason is already passionate and social. Reason is passionate and social, Baier explains, because it takes into consideration shared moral sentiments which is a socialized point of view. Baier reminds us that according to Hume the love of truth is a passion, a passion that can motivate us to reason.

Hume's *Treatise* campaign to show the limits of "reason", to point up what it cannot do alone, was a campaign directed first against deductive reason or "demonstration", then against a wider-ranging inferential reason that was limited to fact-finding, fact-relating and fact-predicting. This latter needs to "concur" with some motivating passion before it goes to work for any practical or evaluative purpose. But the love of truth is among our passions, and it can motivate us to reason, to write treatises, to become moral anatomists who tell ourselves that our systems might also serve practical morality, might concur with other passions besides the love of truth.<sup>26</sup>

Annette Baier's argument rests on a distinction between the conception of reason Hume is criticizing and the one that he is advocating. Baier's thesis is that Hume, in the *Treatise*,

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<sup>26</sup>Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's Treatise* (Harvard University Press, 1991), 279.

constructs a conception of reason that is essential to his theory of judgment. Hume, Baier claims, uses both reason and sentiments in his moral theory.

Walter Brand argues that sympathy according to Hume is not enough to produce an impartial judgment, hence sympathy needs to be corrected by reflection. Hume thought that a general point of view was essential to the formation of moral judgment. Brand argues that Hume's view on the impartial spectator rests on his account of general rules. An impartial point of view consists of overlooking considerations that are motivated by self-interests. General rules, in excluding individual considerations, provide just that point of view.

While Hume thinks that sympathy is the "chief source" of moral evaluation, he does not think sympathy is enough to produce impartial moral judgment...The immediate sympathetic response requires correction by reflecting on the "circumstances" (T148) or "accidents" (T584) which produce a range of sympathetic reactions.<sup>27</sup>

Brand's argument concerning Hume's use of reason in the *Treatise* is detailed and complex. What is pertinent here, is Brand's thesis that Hume is critical of the immediate judgment of sympathy and therefore makes an appeal to the use of reflection (Brand continues to argue that Hume's theory of judgment can only be understood through his theory of beliefs and general rules).

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<sup>27</sup>Walter Brand, *Hume's Theory of Moral Judgment: A Study of A Treatise of Human Nature*, A Dissertation submitted to the City University of New York, 1991, 244.

In reading Price and in following Baier and Brand's interpretation of Hume, one is led to conclude that both Price and Hume wrote a moral theory that combines both reason and sentiments. Once again I ask, where does Mme Condorcet's originality lie?

I do agree with Baier and Brand that reflection plays a significant role in Hume's *Treatise*, they certainly presented very good arguments to support their views. Also, I did mention in Chapter Three that Smith was the only true sentimentalist in this period of time since Hume introduced rationalist considerations as well. However, the question that I pose, in order to compare Hume to Mme Condorcet, is not what reason can do, but: what can reason not do? Here I would like to refer the reader to the section in the *Treatise* entitled: "Moral Distinctions Not Derived From Reason". Hume argues in this section that reason alone cannot distinguish between good and evil. Since moral distinctions are not property of reason, they also do not contain a truth value. Hume claims that one might mistake a fact, but it is not possible to make a mistake concerning right or wrong. Hume in this section strips reason from two properties, moral determinations and motivating force. Concerning the extensive role both Baier and Brand attributed to reason in Hume, the question to ask here is: did Hume by using reason throughout the *Treatise* mean to override the criticisms he provides in the section mentioned above? I think not. I argue that as

complex as reason's role can be for Hume, it still cannot initiate a moral goal or motivate us to follow it. My agreement with Baier's and Brand's assessment of the use of reason in Hume, does not contradict the limitations I mentioned above. In effect, Baier in her closing argument mentions:

It [reason] thereby reestablished a transformed, active, socializes reason to a "likeness of rank, not to say equality" with sovereign moral sentiment.<sup>28</sup>

So after all, Baier concludes, sentiments according to Hume still govern. Brand at the outset claims that he would not deal with the issue of motivation.

In reading Hume's and Price's moral theory it is important to consider the historical context of some of the arguments. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, at that time there was an ongoing debate of whether morals were a question of reason or sentiments. Both Hume and Price took part in this debate. Hume writes:

There has been a controversy started of late, much better worth examination, concerning the general foundation of morals; whether they be derived from Reason, or from Sentiments;<sup>29</sup>

Similarly Price poses the question:

Some actions we all feel ourselves irresistibly determined to approve, and others to disapprove. Some actions we cannot but think right, and others

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<sup>28</sup>Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, 288.

<sup>29</sup>David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Open Court Classics, 1966., 2.

wrong...What the power within us is which thus determines, is the question to be considered.<sup>30</sup>

Both Hume and Price set out to determine whether reason or sentiments were the dominant moral faculty.

Let us return to Mme Condorcet. Mme Condorcet opens her discussion of reason and sentiments by claiming that reason modifies distinctions made by the sentiments. She explains that reason serves as a guide in discerning complex situations or resolving a moral conflict. So far her arguments are very close to Hume's. But by using reason as indicating a moral goal and motivating us to follow it, she departs from Hume and is original. According to Mme Condorcet, it is possible to make a mistake concerning right or wrong since they possess truth value. Mme Condorcet differs from Price, Hume or any other philosopher in this period who took a part in the debate, by not trying to subordinate reason to sentiments or sentiments to reason. With regards to reason and sentiments, Mme Condorcet asks, how can you claim that one faculty is more important than the other? Her combination of reason and sentiments is in attributing an equal status to the two faculties. This is a very different argument than showing that one faculty is dominant while the other has a supporting role. In interpreting Mme Condorcet's text, the whole question that guided the debate - whether morals were a question of reason and sentiments - would be wrong headed.

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<sup>30</sup>Price, *A Review of the Principle Questions in Morals*, 656-7.

She does not see a dichotomy between reason and sentiments, but as I mentioned above she sees them as components of one moral faculty. Accordingly, Mme Condorcet does not see the necessity in determining which faculty is dominant. Her goal is to show how both can contribute to the formation of a moral agent by providing different kinds of motivation, both rational and nonrational.

### Conclusion

We see how, building on the inadequacy of Smith's theory, Mme Condorcet provides a theory of the origin of sympathy. In doing so she makes an important contribution to moral theory. Her view, that a specific experience of pain gives rise to a general impression of pain that can be renewed from the sight and memory of pain, entails two moral implications. First, when we see someone suffer, a painful sensation is renewed in us and enables sympathy. Second, general impressions of pain that accompany our actions create abstract moral sentiments that serve as a moral motivation or deterrence. Sympathy, then, originates in recalling general impressions of pleasure and pain, and moral sentiments originate in the general impression of pleasure and pain that accompany our actions. Moral ideas arise in reflection on the sentiments. In this way moral ideas are traceable to our first sensations of pleasure and pain. Mme Condorcet provides

a valuable empirical account of moral ideas that not only improves on Smith's, but that also bridges the gap between the rationalists and the sentimentalists of her time.

I maintain that the general sentiments of regret and remorse are strong moral concepts. Remorse is something we feel, not merely think about. It has an important function in moral theory. In this sense morality is for the most part embedded in feelings. A moral action should feel right in addition to seeming rationally correct. Indeed I wonder, can one really be a moral agent without ever feeling regret and remorse? By introducing moral feeling such as regret and remorse, and by showing how out of specific experiences we get general moral feelings that function as a moral conscience, Mme Condorcet not only points to the importance of these sentiments, but she also shows how they serve in building and creating our moral behavior. Her theory indicates both how our moral constitution is developed and how it functions.

The strength and depth of her moral theory lie, therefore, not only in her seeing that both reason and sentiments are necessary to form a moral action, but also in her showing how in and of themselves neither reason nor sentiment is sufficient to generate moral action. Mme Condorcet shows how both have an indispensable role. She does not reduce morality either to reason or to sentiment. Instead of the usual dichotomy between the two faculties, she shows how both reason and sentiments are complementary and how they

enhance each other to provide a better moral theory. She is not a pure rationalist, for according to her the sentiments both motivate and accompany our moral lives. Nor is she a pure sentimentalist, for she recognizes that some moral concepts originate in reason. In her use of reason and sentiments Mme Condorcet is original and unique in her time. In adding to the rationalists the importance of emotional experience and in adding to the sentimentalists the role of reason, she bridges the gap between them.

## Chapter Six

### Adam Smith and Mme Condorcet on Social Progress

#### What is a Theory of Progress?

An idea of progress entails that mankind progresses or will progress, through its own efforts, from a current situation to a future one that is better. A theory of progress will identify what is meant by progress and suggest the means of progress. One might think that a technologically advanced society is a good example of a progressive society while another might disagree and claim that progress is not a question of technology, but of the prevalence of human rights or social welfare. J.B. Bury, in his book The Idea of Progress, pioneered in looking at the history of philosophy and determining which theories could be classified as theories of progress. He contrasted the idea of progress with the idea of degeneration as it appeared in Greek history and in the Judaio-Christian tradition. The Greeks believed in a 'golden age' from which mankind has fallen. The period that they were living in was one of degeneration and decay for reasons that were not embedded in human conduct. Degeneration occurs due to the nature of the universe. In this view, Human society was deteriorating and not progressing. Although there were theories in ancient Greece that indicated a vision of

improvement and growth, Bury thinks that the belief in a golden age overrides isolated ideas concerning progress.<sup>1</sup>

During the middle ages, the belief in divine providence, Bury argues, is also incompatible with a belief in progress. Medieval doctrine perceived history as a series of events ordered by divine intervention. Both Jewish and Christian tradition view human history as heading towards an end (in this world). Moreover, the Christian tradition also embraces the doctrine of original sin in which humans are born evil and moral advancement is practically impossible.

Bury defines the idea of progress against theories of degeneration:

The idea of human progress then is a theory which involves a synthesis of the past and a prophecy of the future. It is based on an interpretation of history which regards men as slowly advancing - *pedetentim progredientes* - in a definite and desirable direction, and infers that this progress will continue indefinitely... a condition of an eternal happiness will ultimately be enjoyed, which will justify the whole process of civilization; for otherwise, the direction would not be desirable. There is also a further implication. The process must be the necessary outcome of the physical and social nature of man; it must not be at the mercy of any external will; otherwise there would be no guarantee of its continuance and its issue, and the

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Nisbet, in his *History of the Idea of Progress*, disagrees with Bury's analysis of the Greeks. Nisbet claims that the belief in progress carried more weight in Greek History than Bury was willing to admit. Part of this criticism, I think, is due to a misunderstanding of Bury. Bury does give credit to ancient philosophers who spoke about a better future. Bury's argument rests on the claim that the idea of progress is incompatible with the belief in degeneration. The question is, then, which view was dominant, to which Bury replies that the belief in a Golden Age prevailed.

idea of progress would lapse into the idea of providence.<sup>2</sup>

Bury's definition includes two important elements; one is the idea of change, the future will be different and better from the past. Two, progress is brought about through human efforts.

Given the two above requirements for a theory of progress, Bury notes, the proper intellectual environment for the development of a theory of progress, was the 'quarrel of the ancients and the moderns'. The quarrel was a literary war during the seventeenth century in France and England, that lasted about a hundred years over the comparative merits of the ancients and the moderns. The quarrel span a wide range of disciplines. The question that was raised is: are the intellectual achievements of the moderns inferior to those of the ancients? This question entails a larger one: has mankind progressed or does mankind have the capability of progressing? Bury argues that the quarrel was an important part of the history of ideas as it represented a liberation from past intellectual authorities.

Martin Kingsley, in French Liberal Thought in the Eighteenth Century, emphasizes the scientific aspect of the philosophy of progress from the enlightenment point of view. Philosophes writing on progress had to provide some account of historical causation without which predictions for the future

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<sup>2</sup>J.B. Bury, *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry Into Its Origin and Growth* (New-York: The Macmillan Company, 1932), 5.

cannot be made. In this sense, Kingsley argues, philosophy of progress is a "child of modern science". It is the discovery of laws of nature that enabled the application of scientific thought to the subject of history and the future. Indeed, philosophes such as Fontenelle, Turgot, Condorcet, Saint-Pierre and others, all provide a historical analysis, first in order to prove that progress occurred through out history, and then to identify the conditions that were most conducive to progress and those that were an impediment.

Bury first credits Fontenelle with putting forth a theory of the progress of knowledge and the Abbe de Saint-Pierre with advancing a theory of the general progress of man. He then proceeds to present theories of progress from the enlightenment through the nineteenth century.

#### Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet and Helvetius

The optimism of the Enlightenment can certainly be seen through the theories of progress that were written at that time. It is not simply the faith in reason that constitutes optimism concerning the human condition, but it is the scientific outlook on human nature which entails the possibility of molding and predicting human behavior. For if the study of human nature falls within the scope of science, so can the ethical applications. We saw in Chapter Two that the study of moral and intellectual faculties of people were

conceived as the 'science of man', and that the 'science of man' was demonstrated through sensationalism. The foundation, then, for a philosophy of progress is a two fold approach; on the one hand according to sensationalist psychology, people are born without innate moral or intellectual tendencies, thus can be molded by the environment. On the other hand, discovering the laws of human development provides the possibility of treating ethics and political theory in a scientific manner which in effect means with practical applications. Antoine-Nicolas Condorcet (who was a mathematician), very clearly expressed this attitude:

Just as the mathematical and physical sciences tend to improve the arts that we use to satisfy our simplest needs, is not also part of the necessary order of nature that the moral and political sciences should exercise a similar influence upon the motives that direct our feelings and our actions?<sup>3</sup>

If nature is law-like, and if the initial analysis of human behavior is scientific, so can be the moral and political theory. M. Condorcet's interesting work on progress is his Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind (*Esquisse d'un Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain*). Upon reading this work, one should keep in mind that the book was written in captivity under the threat of death and without any resources. According to Keith Michael Baker,

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<sup>3</sup>Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of The Progress of the Human Mind*, Tr. June Barraclough, Ed. Stuart Hampshire (First Published 1795, New York: The Noonday Press, 1955), 192.

the *Esquisse* was intended as an introduction for a larger work, *Tableau Historique des Progrès de l'Esprit Humain* (unfinished, it still remains in manuscript form).<sup>4</sup> In some ways the *Esquisse* represents prevalent Enlightenment trends of thought and in others it is an original work, very much ahead of its time. Stuart Hampshire labeled the *Esquisse* "one of the few really great monuments of liberal thought".<sup>5</sup>

The *Esquisse* consists of an analysis of human history in ten stages, from the first stage of hunters and gatherers to the tenth stage of future progress. Although the book advocates many points of progress, M. Condorcet's main theme is progress with regards to knowledge. M. Condorcet opens the *Esquisse* with a brief account of sensationalistic philosophy that is very similar to Condillac's. M. Condorcet draws an analogy between studying individual human development and collective social development. He explains that if one is interested in studying individual human faculties for their own sake, then one is engaged in metaphysics. However, if one studies the laws of human development throughout history, one is engaged in a study of progress:

If one confines oneself to the study and observation of the general facts and laws about the

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<sup>4</sup>Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 344.

<sup>5</sup>Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, Ed. Stuart Hampshire: Introduction.

development of these faculties, considering only what is common to all human beings, this science is called metaphysics. But if one studies this development as it manifests itself in the inhabitants of a certain area at a certain period of time and then traces it on from generation to generation, one has the picture of the progress of the human mind. This progress is subject to the same general laws that can be observed in the development of the faculties of the individual, and it is indeed no more than the sum of that development realized in a large number of individuals joined together in society.'

Both the study of individual and social development rest on the idea that nature is law-like:

The sole foundation for belief in the natural sciences is this idea, that the general laws directing the phenomena of the universe, known or unknown, are necessary and constant. Why should this principle be any less true for the development of the intellectual and moral faculties of man than for the other operations of nature?'

Future predictions, then, are based on the uniformity of the laws of nature.

We see then that M. Condorcet's theory of progress rests on the assumption that he is providing a scientific account of historical change and future predictions. The result is an incredible optimism with regards to the human condition:

The real advantages that should result from this progress, of which we can entertain a hope that is almost a certainty, can have no other term than that of the absolute perfection of the human race.'

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<sup>6</sup>M. Condorcet, *Sketch for the Historical Progress of the Human Mind*, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup>M. Condorcet, *Sketch for the Historical Progress of the Human Mind*, 173.

<sup>8</sup>M. Condorcet, *Sketch for the Historical Progress of the Human Mind*, 184.

The anticipated outcome of a theory of progress is a potential improvement that is no less than perfect. Again, such an attitude is an outcome of a scientific approach. This expected outcome of perfection is seen in Mme Condorcet's writings as well. At several points throughout the letters she claims that exercising out moral and intellectual faculties would lead to their perfection. In addition, in a passage where she argues that reason is as important to the moral agent as sentiments are, she claims that perfection of moral faculties is an outcome of applying both reason and sentiments:

It is then sufficient to show that only reason united with sentiments can still lead towards the good by surer, gentler, easier and less complicated means, liable to fewer errors and dangers. And that these means, far from demanding from us the sacrifice and silence of any of our faculties, give birth, on the contrary, to our moral perfection from our intellectual perfection.'

Although M. Condorcet and Mme Condorcet possess a number of very close points in their theories of progress, their main themes are different. M. Condorcet's emphasis is on the progress of knowledge whereas Mme Condorcet's emphasis is on progress with regards to moral behavior.<sup>10</sup> Another marked influence on Mme Condorcet is Helvétius, to which I turn next.

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<sup>9</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 468-9.

<sup>10</sup>Upon reading the *Esquisse* I would argue that on several issues S. Condorcet's influence is apparent in spite of the fact that the publication of the *Esquisse* predates the writing of the letters of sympathy.

Helvétius's theory of progress is contained in *De l'Homme* where he argues that as education and legislation are the source of individual morality they are also the cardinal means of improvement. Helvétius' argument rests on his assertion that legislation has influential power over an individual's morality. Despotism destroys social bonds. When people have no liberty or property, Helvétius claims, they live in a continual war (Helvétius really means animosity) and the rules of force and fraud prevail. Not owning property, due to legislation that allows an unequal distribution of property, has a negative effect on one's moral behavior. Helvétius poses the question:

Have the indigent really a country? Does the man without property owe anything to the country where he possesses nothing? Must not the extremely poor, being always in the pay of the rich and powerful, frequently favor their ambition? And last, have not the indigent too many needs to be virtuous?"

Helvétius in effect is asking: what kind of civil behavior should be expected from the disadvantaged and powerless? He continues to develop his argument and explains that evil deeds by the poor stem from an exaggerated picture of the felicity of the rich. The possibility of the wealthy's luxury increases the misery of the poor. Just legislation, on the other hand, can ensure an equal distribution of land and thus eliminate injustices that stem from deprivation and poverty.

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<sup>11</sup>Claude-Adrien Helvétius, *De l'Homme: De Ses Facultés Intellectuel et Son Éducation* (Londres: Chez la Société Typographique, 1773; Librairie Arthème-Fayard, 1989), Vol. 2, 748.

Laws according to Helvétius "do everything". Even thieves, he argues, have their own moral codes which they follow. Laws can compel people to be good.

It is not the vices, wickedness and improbity of man that make people miserable, but the imperfection and consequently the stupidity of their laws.<sup>12</sup>

We will see similar arguments regarding the correlation between legislation and morality developed by Mme Condorcet as well. However, in Helvétius' view, the motivation and reasoning behind social change are quite different than those for Mme Condorcet. It is important to note, that M. Condorcet, Mme Condorcet and Helvetius share similar goals of progress that are quite different from Smith's. All three Enlightenment writers argued for democracy, economic equality and human rights. However, there are significant differences in their theories.

As Helvétius's initial moral and political analysis is individualistic, so is the reasoning behind his theory of progress. I have argued that Helvétius' sensationalism led him to a self-love based morality. In the same manner, this individualistic approach led him, as it led Smith, to a theory of progress that is based on self-interest. Remember that according to Helvétius, morality stems from sensations of pleasure and pain followed by self-love. Helvétius then continued with a utilitarian moral theory that is based on

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<sup>12</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 774.

self-interest. Accordingly, a theory of progress has to be such that it will also fulfill the requests of self-interest.

Man always follows his interests, or what he thinks his interests are. *It is a known fact that whether we talk or not, the conduct of man will be always the same.*<sup>13</sup>

Based on this assumption, the role of the legislator is to write laws that will satisfy the demands of self-interest. The key to progress and the true ingenuity of the legislator lies in the ability of the laws to unite private and public interest. There is at this point a striking similarity to Smith which we will see next.<sup>14</sup> Helvétius writes:

Make good laws; they alone will naturally direct the people in the pursuit of the public advantage, by following the irresistible propensity they have to their private advantage.<sup>15</sup>

Knowing that people pursue their own interests, is of course, according to Helvétius, of enormous utility. The legislator can assign punishment to vices and rewards to virtue such that it will be in people's interests to be virtuous. Social sanctions also work well. Helvétius, in an example, suggests assigning infamy to cowardice and honor to courage such that

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<sup>13</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 773.

<sup>14</sup>Smith was not familiar with Helvetius' work. In a letter to Hume dated 12 December 1763, Smith asks Hume to relay an apology to Helvetius for not including his book in his account of philosophical systems (in TMS). Smith explains that he had not read *De l'Esprit* before his own book (TMS) was printed.

<sup>15</sup>Helvétius, *De l'Homme*, 774.

the soldier will find it to be in his interest to fight rather than flee.

Mme Condorcet shares the same goals of progress. A just and fair legislation that is conducive to equality in property, education and rights. However, regarding the means to achieve progress, Helvétius is closer to Smith in thinking that simultaneously satisfying self-interest and public interest by uniting public and private interest is the key to a successful program of progress.

#### What is Adam Smith's Theory of Progress?

In this section I raise the question: what is Smith's theory of progress? Robert Nisbet classifies the *Wealth of Nations* (henceforth WN) in the following manner:

It is inevitable that we classify the *Wealth of Nations* as economic in theme, indeed as the principal source of what would come in time to be called economics or political economy. But it is also a text in the history of the idea of progress. I would argue indeed that the major purpose of the book is that of not only describing human progress, especially economic progress, but also of seeking to demonstrate the pattern of this progress, and above all the root causes of economic progress.<sup>16</sup>

Nisbet then holds that Smith presents in the WN a theory of progress in terms of economic growth. The WN is an influential book that is accompanied by a considerable amount

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<sup>16</sup>Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New York: Basic Books Inc., 1980), 189.

of scholarship. One might expect different interpretations concerning the main theme of the book. If indeed the WN is a work in economics, from whence comes the controversy concerning the purpose of the book? Smith supplied us with two other major works, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and *Lectures on Jurisprudence*.<sup>17</sup> We saw that in TMS Smith presents a sentimentalist moral theory that is based on sympathy. In the LJ Smith constructs his theory of government. In effect the WN is a development of parts two and three of LJ. Diversity in interpretation of Smith stems from analyzing these three works and the relations among them. I will present two different approaches to Smith's work. One might consider the WN to be a separate work in economics with the sole aim of producing an economic theory. Or, one might look at all three works as a part of one philosophical system in which economics is not necessarily the main theme. The answer to the question of whether the WN stands alone or can only be properly understood in relation to TMS and LJ, is crucial in determining Smith's theory of progress.

As I am here only interested in Smith's theory of progress or his overall theme, I will not expound on his economic theory. I will only present its main principles and the principles that underlie it. Smith opens his inquiry with

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<sup>17</sup>The *Lectures on Jurisprudence* are notes of Smith's lectures given at the University of Glasgow. There are two reports of Smith's lectures, one taken in the 1762-3 session and the other in the 1763-4 session. They are referred to as LJ(A) and LJ(B) respectively.

the statement that a nation's wealth consists in either the product of labor or what can be purchased with it from other nations. Accordingly, the two most important features of economic growth are the division of labor and capital accumulation. Both, we will see, depend on the workings of self-interest in order to flourish. Smith illustrates the point and purpose of the division of labor through an example of the production of pins. If one person manufactures pins he can scarcely produce one pin a day. If, however, the labor is divided among ten people (accompanied with machines), each being responsible for making one part of the pin, together they can make forty-eight thousand pins a day. Divided by ten, it is as if each person, through cooperating with others, made forty-eight hundred pins a day. Skill and dexterity are also improved in this manner. The division of labor, then, increases productivity which in turn increases national wealth.

The more extensive the division of labor, the greater is the dependency of people upon each other. A wool coat, Smith explains in a simple and coherent example, is a joint labor of numerous workers. The shepherd, the wool-comber, the dyer, the scribbler, the spinner, the weaver and many others must join their efforts to produce one coat. Without cooperation, Smith claims, "the meanest person in a civilized country" could not be provided with basic necessities. Seeing that the division of labor has so many advantages, Smith asks how this

system originated and how is it sustained? He replies that the division of labor originated in the propensity in human nature "to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another". But what is the motivation to exchange? Smith answered with a very famous passage, quoted in almost every commentary on Smith:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and shew them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.<sup>18</sup>

The motivation behind economic decisions is self-interest. It is self-interest that leads to exchange, and exchange leads to a market. A prosperous economy depends on a large market, which depends on production, and production depends on the division of labor. As D.D. Raphael notes: "Exchange leads to a market, and it is the laws of the working of the market that Smith wants to discover".<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981), 26-7.

<sup>19</sup>D.D. Raphael, *Adam Smith* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 50.

I have mentioned that wealth depends on two principles, the division of labor and capital accumulation. Following his analysis of the division of labor and production, Smith continues with a theory of prices and capital accumulation. Money serves as means of exchange. Exchange, as already mentioned, is performed through the motive of self-interest; therefore, any deal has to be profitable to all parties involved. A harmony of prices of supply and demand is necessary. In a society, Smith claims, wages or profits are naturally regulated. He draws a distinction between a 'market price' and a 'natural price'. The natural price consists in the cost of production, labor, rent and profits. The commodity is sold for what it is worth. The market price is the actual price the commodity is sold for, and can be above or below the natural price. The market price is determined according to supply and demand. When a quantity of a certain product falls short of the demand for it, people are willing to pay more for the product. As they will compete for the product, the market price will rise above the natural price. When supply exceeds demand, the prices drop below their natural price. When the quantity of products is in good proportion to the demand, the market price and the natural price are close or equivalent. It is in the interest of the sellers that the quantity of their products will not exceed the demand for it. At times in which supply exceeds demand, owners will reduce the amount of workers and decrease

production. At times where demand exceeds supply, owners will hire more workers and increase production (we see here the workings of the invisible hand in regulating the market which I will explain shortly). Smith concludes that the natural price is the central price to which prices of commodities continually gravitate. Industry, through self-interest and competition, is naturally aimed at a closeness of supply and demand. Any policy that would disturb this balance, and create an artificial distance between market price and natural price, will diminish the potential wealth of a society. We see, then, that Smith sees the market as naturally self-regulating.

The principle of a natural order of economic activities, as demonstrated in the discussion of natural versus market price, runs throughout Smith's economics. He continues to argue that wages, rent, and profits are also naturally regulated. The ability of the market to be naturally regulated depends on one of Smith's most important principles: the concept of free choice. Freedom of choice is the cornerstone of Smith's system of natural liberty. By natural liberty Smith means complete freedom in economic choices. In the WN he argues for natural liberty from two points of view; one is obviously economic efficiency and the other is social equality.

But the policy of Europe, by not leaving things at perfect liberty, occasions other inequalities of much greater importance.<sup>20</sup>

Smith speaks here of inequalities of wages and profits. Smith also refers to his own plan as "the liberal plan of equality, liberty and justice"<sup>21</sup>. The concept of choice is based on the motive of self-interest; the market is successfully regulated when one is free to act in accordance with self-interest.

The system of natural liberty entails an unregulated market. Smith argues against any restriction or regulations on trade, interest rates or profits. Government, Smith thinks, can never successfully regulate wages or profits although it intends to. Perfect liberty is the only efficient way to increase national wealth.

Smith then argues for a laissez-faire economics (note that the term 'laissez-faire' does not appear in WN, the terminology Smith uses is 'perfect liberty' or 'natural liberty'), on the basis that government regulation is unsuccessful whereas a self-regulating market is. Wealth depends on the division of labor and on capital accumulation. We already saw that the division of labor depends on self-interest as does capital accumulation which begins with individual savings. It is in one's best interest to save money. Smith's economics consist of two interrelated

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<sup>20</sup>Smith, WN, 135.

<sup>21</sup>Smith, WN, 664.

principles: an absolute reliance on the motive of self-interest and an unregulated economy.

The reason that his system holds is not simply reliance on self-interest, but the idea that the beneficial economic results were not at all intended. There is a natural harmony between self-interest and public interest. He explains this point through his famous metaphor of the invisible hand:

As every individual, therefore, endeavors as much as he can both to employ his capital in the support of domestick industry, and so to direct that industry that its produce may be of the greatest value; every individual necessarily labours to render the annual revenue of the society as great as he can. He generally, indeed, neither intends to promote the publick interest, nor knows how much he is promoting it... he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention.<sup>22</sup>

The success of Smith's economic system is unintended and is naturally created through uninterfered reliance on the workings of self-interest and a system of exchange. D.D. Raphael views this as the highest point of Smith's theory:

He uses the phrase [invisible hand] for vivid effect, to give us a picture of an imaginary controlling devise, but he knows very well that the effect comes about automatically through the interplay of individual interest and the system of exchange. His perception of this truth is one of his greatest contributions to economic understanding.<sup>23</sup>

Haim Barkai, in Adam Smith in the Context of Our Times, notes that the invisible hand creates a harmonic economic system.

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<sup>22</sup>Smith, *WN*, 456.

<sup>23</sup>D.D. Raphael, *Adam Smith*, 72.

There has to be coordination between manufacturers and consumers, employers and workers, buyers and sellers. The invisible hand regulates prices to satisfy the demands of the participants in the economic system. The invisible hand creates a harmony between individual action, motivated by self-interest, and public prosperity which is the unintended result of individual motivation. Haim Barkai claims that the "axiomatic base of the *Wealth of Nations*" consists in the following ideas<sup>24</sup>: the perception of the motive of self-interest as a moving force of economic activity; the idea that the market prices regulate themselves through the workings of the invisible hand; and the idea that a minimal interference by government will insure maximum prosperity.

Smith conceives of his economic system as directed towards everyone's welfare. He is certainly concerned with the poor as he claims that there should be a minimum wage under which a person can maintain himself and family. He mentions that currently the poor live under severe conditions that are unfavorable to the rearing of children, hence, they suffer from a high infant mortality rate. Since laborers constitute a large part of the population it is important that they will enjoy a basic level of subsistence. Smith thinks that it is neither efficient nor fair to neglect the poor:

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<sup>24</sup>Haim Barkai, *Adam Smith in the Context of Our Times* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv: The Open University and The Bialik Institute, 1995), 16.

No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable. It is but equity, besides, that they who feed, cloath and lodge the whole body of the people, should have such a share of the produce of their own labor as to be themselves tolerably well fed, cloathed and lodged.<sup>25</sup>

In countries where economic growth occurs, the wages of workers is the highest. The demand for labor and the funds to maintain workers increase. On the other hand, a wealthy country with a stagnant economy may not offer the same opportunities for earning and work. In countries which are less endowed than England, but where the economy is growing (Smith uses the English colonies as an example) wages are higher. It is an effect of a growing, prosperous economy, that the poor are better off.

It deserves to be remarked, perhaps, that it is in the progressive state, while the society is advancing to the further acquisition, rather than when it has acquired its full complement of riches, that the conditions of the labouring poor, of the great body of the people, seems to be the happiest and the most comfortable.<sup>26</sup>

Smith then thinks that higher wages would be a result of his proposed economic system, thus an improvement of the condition of the poor would be a necessary result.

Although Smith argued for an unregulated economy from an efficiency point of view, he did allow for ethical considerations to violate his principles. Such is the case regarding his view on education. Common people, he notes,

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<sup>25</sup>Smith, *WN*, 96.

<sup>26</sup>Smith, *WN*, 99.

have little time or means to spend on education. Yet for a small expense the public can facilitate or even impose the education of all its youth. Education can be instituted through charitable institutions such as churches, or from another angle, certain exams could be required in order to enter a profession. As those measures will only facilitate and encourage education, they would not guarantee it. Smith, then, further argues that the state should assume the responsibility of providing a mandatory universal education.

I now continue with the question of what is Smith's main goal in the WN, and accordingly how can we extract a theory of progress from his writings? Glenn Morrow sees both WN and TMS as complementary but separate works. The theory of sympathy presented in TMS, is a necessary presupposition to the economic order. It is because individuals are social beings, Morrow notes, that advancing their own interest will advance other people's interests as well. What Morrow is pointing out is that there is a natural social cohesion presented in TMS that is assumed in the WN. However, Morrow notes that as the WN is a work that is based on the principles of self-love and human needs, the moral point of view used in TMS is not used in the WN. The WN is concerned with a wealth-producing economic order based on the motive of self-interest. Glenn Morrow, who is motivated by his own view of sympathy in Smith which he equates with Hume's (see Chapter Three), sees no other motive apart from self-interest in the WN. D.D. Raphael

compares the role of sympathy in TMS to the role of self-interest in WN. While sympathy in TMS is the foundation of our moral attitudes, self-interest in WN is the basis for our economic attitudes. These are two different books, Raphael claims, presenting different kinds of social bonds.

The social bond created by sympathy and imagination, which plays so important a part in the *Moral Sentiments*, is quite different from the social bonds of mutual dependence described in the *Wealth of Nations* as resulting both from the division of labor and from the workings of the market. It is different but it is not inconsistent with them. The social bond of sympathy and imagination leads to our code of ethics and to a good part of our code of law. Economic behavior, on the other hand, has to be explained in terms of self-interest.<sup>27</sup>

Sympathy, according to Raphael, creates a social bond and self-interest creates an economic bond.

Whether the WN and TMS contain two different motives for action or merely two different orientations, the two works are distinguishable in their main theme. Although self-interest can be found in TMS in Smith's discussion of prudence, and in spite of the fact that Smith finds acting on this motive of self-interest acceptable and prudent, this is not the main theme of the book. Under Smith's theory of moral sentiments any moral precept would ultimately be based on sympathy. One should not murder, for instance, out of respect for a rule that is based on the idea that no impartial spectator will approve this kind of behavior. I have argued earlier that

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<sup>27</sup>D.D. Raphael, *Adam Smith*, 94.

sympathy is not a motive for action, but it is a basis for the formation of moral rules and judgements (in Chapter Four I explained that the moral motivation for Smith stems from confederations of the impartial spectator). For this reason sympathy is compatible with self-interest. Sympathy explains the construction of our moral theory. In the WN, any economic decision is explained in terms of self-interest. In our need for cooperation we appeal to people's self-interest for their help, and not to their benevolence. What makes a successful moral theory according to Smith, is a reliance on the guidance of sympathy, antipathy, and the impartial spectator. What makes an economic system successful is a reliance on the motive of self-interest.

Seeing TMS and WN as two separate and different works would lead to a conclusion that the main goal of the WN is to present an economic theory that is most conducive to economic growth. Notice Smith's own statement concerning the goal of political economy:

Political economy, considered as a branch of the science of a statesman or legislator, proposes two distinct objects; first, to provide a plentiful revenue or subsistence for the people, or more properly to enable them to provide such a revenue or subsistence for themselves; and secondly, to supply the state or commonwealth with a revenue sufficient for the publick services. It proposes to enrich both the people and the sovereign.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Smith, WN, 428.

A progressive society is a wealthy society. This view goes hand in hand with Smith's opinion that everyone is better off in a wealthy nation. Smith does not only speak of the condition of the poor, but also of cultural development in general.

The idea that Smith's main goal in the WN is economic growth has not gone unchallenged. Athol Fitzgibbons, among others, argues that the main theme of Smith's philosophical system is not economics, but his theory of justice. Considerations of justice underlie the WN and the economic theory is subservient to the principles of justice.

Fitzgibbons claims that Smith intended to present one integrated system of morals and economics. The conclusion of TMS, he claims, indicates that the work intended to serve as a foundation for another work about politics, law and economics. There are also extensive textual overlaps between his books, essays and lectures. The meaning of the economic system, Fitzgibbons insists, cannot be properly understood outside of the context of his entire system. Smith's system is more firmly based on moral theory than has been understood.

Fitzgibbons first undermines the view that Smith's economics is based on self-love, then he proceeds to present what he conceives to be the moral basis for the economic theory. Fitzgibbons marks that Smith uses both terms, self-interest and self-love, to indicate two different dispositions. Self-love presents pure ego and is morally

dubious, whereas, self-interest integrates self-love with a degree of virtue. In other words, self-love represents pure selfishness, and self-interest represents enlightened or rational interest. Fitzgibbons' point is consistent with Smith's view in TMS. Self-love in TMS is viewed as a weakness, and self-interest is viewed as a means to control selfish passions with the goal of one's own welfare in mind. Smith claims that a member of the parliament who cares about maintaining his position, or a prince who is concerned about defending his kingdom is acting according to self-interest. Fitzgibbons uses the distinction between self-love and self-interest to introduce considerations of justice in the WN at the very basic level:

What Smith actually said was much more explicit; the foundation of society was justice. 'Justice is the main pillar that upholds the edifice', because the whole object of the laws, without which society could not exist, was to constrain the useful motives of greed and self-love. The foundation of Smith's society was legal constraint on excessive self-love, and not self-love itself.<sup>29</sup>

Fitzgibbons builds his case against the primacy of self-love in the WN by pointing out that according to Smith not all professions would thrive on the premise of self-love. Occupations concerned with national defence, police, the judicial system and education would not benefit from being motivated by self-love; they require other virtues.

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<sup>29</sup>Athol Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith's System of Liberty, Wealth and Virtue: The moral and Political Foundation of The Wealth of Nations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 140.

Fitzgibbons uses this distinction among occupations and their motives to interpret the statement concerning the motivation of the butcher and the baker in supplying us our dinner.

The point of the 'self-love' section in *The Wealth of Nations* was not to prove that all occupations are pursued with the same low motive in mind: it was to prove that they are not, which was why the argument was included in the chapter on the division of labor...The division of labor meant that society could afford philosophers as well as cooks, who contributed to society in different ways. The benevolence of the butcher and the baker would not put the dinner on the table, but neither would self-love of philosophers lead to any worthwhile ideas about science, philosophy and the law. Self-love played an important role in Smith's system, but it was far from being the only important source of human motivation.<sup>30</sup>

Fitzgibbons then takes Smith's strongest statement concerning the motive of self-interest and reads it in terms of Smith's proposed diversity of occupations (stemming from the division of labor) and argues that one motive could not possibly account for such a complex system. A long list of virtues is required to motivate different occupations according to their goals. Moreover, economic growth depends on capital accumulation, and capital accumulation depends on individual savings. Prudence and self-command are necessary virtues that will enhance people to make long term sacrificial choices. In TMS Smith presents three cardinal virtues: prudence, self-command and benevolence, all of which Fitzgibbons thinks are a necessary foundation for the economic system to work. Prudence and self-command rely on rational self-interest.

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<sup>30</sup>Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith's System of Liberty*, 144.

Fitzgibbons claims that to assume that economic growth can be motivated only by self-love represents a confusion and a misunderstanding of the role of self-love versus self-interest.

Smith endorses a minimal conception of justice as a requirement to abstain from injuring. He labels his conception of justice as "commutative justice" which is opposed to distributive justice that requires certain action and not only prevention from injury. Fitzgibbons argues that Smith's conception of justice was necessary for his economy:

...commutative justice was essential to establish the character of the economic system, because an opulent and liberal society needed an economy that was relatively free and efficient, rather than one that was interventionist and repressive.<sup>11</sup>

It is the laws of justice, according to Fitzgibbons, that enable the kind of economy Smith is advocating. The concept of commutative justice indicates free trade. Respect for liberty and freedom in economic activity will yield economic growth. Fitzgibbons argues that Smith's system meant the enforcement of justice and respect for virtues.

Smith was not opposed to inequalities of fortune as long as the poor were better off and have reached a certain level of subsistence. Smith saw his own system as more or less egalitarian in effect. For this reason he did not see a need for distributive justice which would violate his principles of justice. Fitzgibbons goes as far as claiming that had Smith

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<sup>11</sup>Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith's System of Liberty*, 148.

known the immoral results of capitalism he would not advocate it:

Smith thought that free trade was an important part of liberalism, but he was not the author of the capitalist blueprint, at least not if capitalism meant an amoral system of production and exchange.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, considering Smith's interest in everyone's welfare, James M. Buchman states: "A returned Adam Smith would be a long distance from the modern libertarian anarchists, and even from the espousal of the minimal state described by Robert Nozick."<sup>13</sup> Fitzgibbons combines the theory of virtue as presented in TMS and principles of justice as presented on both TMS and LJ to form what he labels as a moral foundation to the economic theory.

The theme of the *Wealth* was that a good moral climate would encourage good economic performance, and conversely that good economic performance could improve the moral climate. The *Wealth of Nations* was an applied moral theory...<sup>14</sup>

In the same line of thought, Leonard Billet argues that the WN is fundamentally concerned with providing a theory of just economy. The rules of justice, as expressed in TMS, are the foundation of any social order. Smith indeed claimed in TMS that justice is the most fundamental virtue without which society cannot function (TMS,II;ii,3,3). Billet then claims that Smith set out to determine which rules of justice are

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<sup>12</sup>Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith's System of Liberty*, 193.

<sup>13</sup>James M. Buchman, "The Justice of Natural Liberty", in Fred R. Glahe, 63.

<sup>14</sup>Fitzgibbons, *Adam Smith's System of Liberty*, 153.

most appropriate to the economic order or what kind of economics would the rules of justice prescribe.

Everyone knows that Adam Smith is the apostle of economic liberty. However, few seem to recognize that, for Smith, liberty, competition, and the market process are derived from and subordinate to principles of social justice. Justice necessarily circumscribes liberty, and the unrecognized central theme of *The Wealth of Nations* is just liberty.<sup>35</sup>

Given that liberty is a necessary condition for an efficient economy, Billet asks why, according to Smith, liberty is a necessary moral condition in economics? Billet bases his answer on Smith's conception of human nature. People are creative, free agents to which self-expression and self-determination are important. Billet argues that, according to Smith's view of human nature as liberty seeking, government restriction on individual freedom would inhibit people from realizing their full potential. Billet carries the same rationale to explain the moral basis of self-interest in the WN. Self-interest is a:

...principle of action that is a necessary foundation for a just economy precisely because he [Smith] sees that self-interest is intrinsically connected with choice, reason and self-determination.<sup>36</sup>

The moral choice, in Billet's analysis of Smith, is between self-determined and other-determined interests. The idea that

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<sup>35</sup>Leonard Billet, "Justice Liberty and Economy", in *Adam Smith and the Wealth of Nations: 1776-1976 Bicentennial Essays*, Fred R. Glahe ED (Boulder Colorado: Colorado Associated University Press, 1978), 85.

<sup>36</sup>Billet, "Justice Liberty and Economy", 86.

a person is free to use his own labor and capital is the moral foundation of the economic theory. Moreover, economic self-interest is expected to operate within the constraint of the laws of justice which state that one person cannot injure another.

The purpose of economic liberty and a competitive market, Billet claims, is to create a harmony between self-interest and public interest. It is also a way to prevent monopoly and oppression of economic institutions. Smith's reliance on self-interest is designed to create a different system than the merchantilist or feudal system he criticizes. The competitive market is also proposed as a measure to remedy some of the past injustices left from the feudal economic system. Both individual and society will benefit from a system of a free market. James Buchman takes the same point of view and claims that the system of natural liberty would also promote his ideal of justice. Removal of restriction on the free market would increase the wealth of the laboring class.

There was, to Smith, no trade off between "efficiency" and "equity", in the more familiar modern sense. As a general principle of social order, the freedom of individual choice would produce efficiency; but it would also be a central attribute of any social order that was just.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Buchman, "The Justice of Natural Liberty", 68.

Like Fitzgibbons, Billet uses TMS as a foundation. Relying on self-interest is an already socializing position as a person who acts in self-interest subordinates passions and self-love and acts in accordance with expectations of others. Self-interest is distinguished from selfishness and greed. Self-interest from the stand point of prudence, which, as we saw, is an integral part of self-interest according to Smith, is compatible with persons using their own resources for the benefit of others to support the arts and sciences. Economic self-interest is consistent with benevolence and with regarding the needs of others. Self-interest is assumed to operate within the constraints of moral rules, religious beliefs and rules of justice.

Although Billet does not state this clearly, it follows and is consistent with his position that the impartial spectator serves as a basis in the interplay of self-interest as well. A person would not follow his/her own interest outside of what an impartial spectator would approve. In this sense TMS could serve as a moral foundation to the WN. One could consider the social bond that is created through sympathy to underlie the decisions based on self-interest. Self-interest receives a different meaning when combined with the virtues of prudence and self-command and the notions of justice as improving one's own situation while not hurting others.

The upshot of these favorable interpretations of the WN is that if justice is to be the main theme of Smith's work, then perhaps his theory of progress is a theory of justice. Smith's account of a progressive society would be a society that operates according to the rules of justice, to provide among other benefits, a just economy. In this sense, ethical considerations are prior and underlie economic ones. The problem with this view is that it relies on the idea that the same principles underlie Smith's entire system. Fitzgibbons argued that considerations of justice and self-interest appear in TMS as well as in the WN. However, the theories of the virtues and the view of commutative justice only appear in TMS but do not constitute the main theme of the book. The theme in TMS is a theory of moral judgment based on sympathy. Similarly, considerations of justice appear in the WN, but again do not constitute the main theme of the book. I do agree, however, that Smith is primarily a moralist and that he wrote his economic system with ethical considerations in mind. The way to solve this puzzle is to agree that Smith did intend two different works, one on ethics and one on economics. However, economics, in his opinion, is a *moral goal* for all the benefits that were mentioned above. Economics is also a moral goal because this is what would lead to progress. I think that Smith's work is tied together through the idea of progress, and the means to progress is economic growth. This does not imply that Smith was not concerned with justice, it

does mean that he was consistent and did not contradict the principles that he established in TMS and LJ.<sup>38</sup>

### Mme Condorcet on Moral Progress

The last two letters of Mme Condorcet's eight letters on sympathy contain her theory of progress. Although Mme Condorcet does not refer to her writing as a theory of progress, that is clearly the subject matter of these letters. While in her letters on sympathy Mme Condorcet combines elements from the two traditions - English and French; in her letters on progress only influences of the French tradition are operant in her thought. She remains very close to the French tradition and opposes Smith's views. Although Mme Condorcet does not make any specific references to Smith in the last two letters, she must have been familiar with his ideas. Smith wrote and revised both TMS and WN more or less at the same period of time and long before Mme Condorcet published her letters on sympathy. Whereas for Smith progress is evaluated in terms of economic growth, for Mme Condorcet progress is evaluated in terms of social justice. Social justice for Mme Condorcet, entails, among other points, economic equality. Mme Condorcet opposes the possibility of

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<sup>38</sup>In the same line of thought, Professor Bernard B. Baumrin (Herbert H. Lehman College, CUNY Graduate School, Mount Sinai School of Medicine) claims that Smith's main concern is the achievement of happiness (as expounded on in TMS), hence, wealth is the means to achieve that goal.

capital accumulation in the hands of a few, which for Smith was a condition of economic growth. In addition, reliance on self-interest, which for Smith is a necessary asset for his theory, is a vice for Mme Condorcet. In what follows, we will see how, considerations of justice and altruism at the basis of Mme Condorcet's theory, will render a different theory of progress than Smith's.

In her letters on progress Mme Condorcet analyzes existing individual and social injustice to determine their cause and offers a solution respectively. Mme Condorcet structures her argument in two parts; she first looks at injustices that can stem from a tendency in human nature, then she proceeds to examine motives that can lead people to break the law. In the seventh letter Mme Condorcet points out that the interest of an individual in being unjust can stem from four tendencies in human nature: love, ambition, self-love or vanity and the desire for fortune. She then proceeds to analyze under which conditions these tendencies flourish and under which conditions they are suppressed. In the eighth letter Mme Condorcet points out that there are two ways of being unjust; one might break the law or one might violate principles of justice that are not embedded in the law, hence do nothing illegal. She then proceeds to analyze what causes people to violate the law (written or unwritten) and under which conditions people would be just.

Obviously, in writing a theory of progress, Mme Condorcet is interested in analyzing the phenomenon of injustice in order to be able to offer a remedy. Her analysis rests on an observation of human nature, social institutions and the legal system in order to determine the source of potential unjust behavior. Her work is based on the question of whether vices are embedded in human nature or are the result of unjust social institutions. If one can prove that motives for being unjust are more the works of social institutions, and less the works of human nature, then one "should cease slandering human nature" and seek reform. We can see now, how the Lockean approach of arguing against innate ideas, was developed by Enlightenment writers to argue against innate character traits as well, which provided the basis for a theory of progress. In this sense, Mme Condorcet continues the works of Helvetius, M. Condorcet and others in her time. She departs from Helvetius by arguing that sympathy and moral conscience develop early on. This would influence her theory of progress as well.

Given her view of human nature as conscientious and morally inclined, Mme Condorcet asks how interests such as money, ambition, love and self-love can lead to injustice?

But is this pressing need [of having money] strong enough to stifle the voice of conscience and win over it...?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 474.

She proceeds to analyze each of these four interests to determine the reason that morality is stifled by them. In contrasting the power of conscience against the motive for being unjust, it is important for Mme Condorcet to be able to clear the human conscience of the responsibility for being unjust. In what follows, and for different reasons, Mme Condorcet will consistently locate the source of injustice in the structure of social institutions and legislation. We can see Helvetius's influence on Mme Condorcet on the issue of the correlation between legislation and morality.

Mme Condorcet claims, that the real and pressing need for money might lead an individual to unjust acts. A very poor person will have very little to lose by being unjust. But would a pressing need exist when one has the basic necessities? Imagine, Mme Condorcet suggests, that the laws cease to favor inequalities of fortunes. She provides the following example: in a country of six million people and a revenue of twelve hundred million francs there would be an income of two hundred francs for each family. Suppose further, that natural circumstances, such as the family one is born to or one's intelligence would absorb three quarters of the total revenue, and the rest would be distributed equally. Each family would have an income of at least fifty francs. With an income of fifty francs, Mme Condorcet notes, a family can live comfortably and will not have any reason to commit a crime for money. The interest, then, of being unjust for the sake of

satisfying a real need can be eliminated through redistribution of means. In addition to unfair distribution of wealth, Mme Condorcet notes that the current laws are geared towards concentrating the wealth in the hands of a few, the rich, while oppressing the poor. The accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few also provides the rich with power and means to dominate and oppress the lower classes. Laws that constrict commerce and industry, laws that favor the unequal distribution of taxes leave the lower class with no freedom or property. Thus, Mme Condorcet concludes, the need for basic subsistence in the lower classes originates from unjust laws.

The interest in being unjust, founded on need, is thus very rare in the absence of bad laws.<sup>42</sup>

Mme Condorcet locates the origin of the propensity to commit an unjust act for attaining basic material needs in unfair legislation.

What is more interesting is her analysis of unjust behavior, not for the supplement of basic needs, but for the sake of becoming richer. Here Mme Condorcet argues that injustice committed for an increase of wealth presupposes the possibility of success. This possibility is enabled by the laws. If the laws did not permit corruption or any exceptions, people could not accumulate extraordinary amounts of wealth in a legal manner. The only way to do so would be

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<sup>42</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 477.

robbery. Remorse would be effective against the temptation to rob while perhaps ineffective against the temptation to accumulate unnecessary wealth in a legal manner.

It is thus against the temptation of robbing to acquire unnecessary surplus, that one must compare the force of the remorse in being unjust, and not against that of allowing oneself such veiled injustices, favored by means of long examples and almost authorized by silence or rather by the vices of the laws: laws which should be the supplement to the citizen's conscience, and which all too often are nothing more than oppressive chains, or at the most sometimes the last bridle on wickedness.<sup>41</sup>

In the presence of just laws, Mme Condorcet claims, conscience would prevail.

Mme Condorcet continues to examine the motives of ambition, self-love and love. Concerning ambition, Mme Condorcet claims that a good position offers professional rewards other than the honor of filling the position. It allows the expression of talent. The requirements should be qualifications and not public position or unfair heredity rights. People should be able to choose their profession freely, according to ability and not by social status. The means that are necessary to succeed are already unfair and corrupt. Mme Condorcet explains that the foundation of professional virtues is compromised. Ambition can serve as a moving force when social institutions are designed to allow wealth and social status, rather than qualifications, to entitle people to positions. In the presence of fair laws

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<sup>41</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 478.

conscience would have less to overcome. Conscience would only have to overcome greed but would not have to deal with laws encouraging greed. Self-love and vanity are also embedded in social institutions that are geared towards preferring individual interests over general interests.

The interest in being unjust born of vanity and ambition is the work of social institutions to an even greater extent. These alone bring it about that man, rather than law, dominated over man.<sup>42</sup>

Under social institutions in which positions are obtained through birth or fortune, self-love overpowers virtues. Mme Condorcet's argument rests both on an analysis of the legal and social structure at that time, and on the assumption that in a just society reason and conscience would prevail.

But should all the vicious institutions be abolished from one end of the earth to the other, should there remain only the necessary and reasonable laws...human reason would still come out healthy and vigorous from under its chains: it would dominate in all classes and itself inform public opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Reason, then, is influenced by an unjust legal system. Conscience is not sufficient to overcome a poorly structured society.

The present order of society amongst all peoples whose government is not based upon the natural rights of man, is thus the unique cause of the obstacles brought to bear upon the movements of conscience by ambition and vanity; and in a well ordered society, conscience would nearly always suffice to repress these obstacles, since ambition and vanity, if they acquire some degree of

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<sup>42</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 478.

<sup>43</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 481-2.

strength, would then be in accord with reason and justice."<sup>4</sup>

Mme Condorcet has faith in human moral tendency. However, she recognizes that in a corrupt system one's moral inclination is suppressed. Certain conditions have to be present for moral behavior to thrive. Mme Condorcet sees a reciprocal relationship between social institutions and individual morality. A corrupt system corrupts individuals and a just system allows natural moral inclination to thrive. In order to emphasize this point, Mme Condorcet asks why it is that people take pleasure in seeing their fellow human being tortured (she might have had the guillotine in mind in asking this question). A vicious legislative system, she points out, has separated the interests of individuals, creating a situation in which people are opposed to each other rather than being united. Since childhood people are accustomed to seeing misfortunes of some against good fortunes of others. This situation can desensitize people and distort their sense of justice.

Mme Condorcet continues her analysis of injustice to include the concept of love. What kind of injustices can possibly arise from the motive of love? After all, Mme Condorcet notes, love is a sentiment that leads to a concern for the happiness of its object, to care for someone even at an expense to oneself. The only reason for being unjust for

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<sup>4</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 482.

the motive of love, Mme Condorcet argues, is for a desire to possess a certain person. She carries her analysis of the issue of love to criticize the institution of marriage. Marriages are performed for convenience and economic reasons. Instead of love being a motivation for marriage it is again greed and ambition that are the motive. The passion of love, instead of prevailing, is being sacrificed.

The vices of social institutions help exalt the various interests in being unjust. Living under such conditions has long-term or indirect effects such as a diminished power of conscience and remorse. People who are constantly exposed to injustice tend to become accustomed to it.

You have seen my dear C\*\*\*, how the interest in being unjust was exalted and multiplied by vicious institutions; that far from securing man against his own weaknesses, they often do nothing but profit from it in order to lead him to corruptions by means the most capable of seducing the small number who benefit from corruption and most capable of imposing it upon the multitude which suffers from it; that in hindering man, for entire centuries, in the exercise of his natural rights, they had led him from misfortune to the credulous blindness which makes one accept as a law of necessity the chains one has become incapable of judging and breaking. It will not be difficult to show how reasonable laws can add to the personal interest of being just and cement the power of conscience, even with respect to the objects which it alone must cover and punish...the empire of an ordinary conscience with reasonable laws would thus be sufficient for man to be just and good.<sup>45</sup>

We see, then, that Mme Condorcet located the forces that stifle conscience in vicious social institutions.

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<sup>45</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 489-90.

Whereas in the seventh letter Mme Condorcet discussed passions that lead to injustice versus a moral conscience to determine which of these factors would be dominant under different circumstances, in the eighth letter Mme Condorcet examines unjust actions that are committed against the laws, written or unwritten. Here too she would like to determine why and when moral conscience could function to overcome injustice. In the seventh letter Mme Condorcet targeted social institutions to argue that they not only help inhibit unsocial passions, they encourage them. In the eighth letter she targets the legal system, and argues that an unjust legal system enhances crime.

Mme Condorcet considers both cases: one might commit a crime that is illegal, or simply act unjustly within the constraints of the law. Given that in all societies there are penal laws, Mme Condorcet asks: when do laws work as a deterrent and when do they not? For a fear of punishment to be efficient, Mme Condorcet argues, the punishment should be reasonable and invoke an idea of justice. When punishments are revolting and are in no proportion to the crime, instead of acting as deterrents they raise the idea of barbarism and injustice. Mme Condorcet notes that excessive severity of the laws is "as dangerous as it is unjust". Above all, cruel laws have not been able to prevent crime so far, hence, gentler and better laws united with reason and conscience would have a better chance in preventing crime. Mme Condorcet's argument

rests on the assumption that just and fair laws are in harmony with the dictates of reason and conscience. Such a legal system has the advantages of providing reasons to be just from both ends, individual conscience and legal codes. On the other hand, when the legal system and people's ideas of justice and fairness are at odds, neither the law nor conscience functions properly. In the same way that Mme Condorcet argues that vicious social institutions stifle conscience, so she argues that vicious laws stifle reason and conscience. An unjust system of justice distorts our sense of justice as well.

In addition, Mme Condorcet notes that the penal laws favor inequalities. A judge can arbitrarily worsen or lighten a penalty; social privileges of hereditary rights enable some to avoid punishment altogether. Under such conditions the poor tend to think that penal laws are made against them and in favor of the rich who intend to oppress the poor. The result is that people hate more than they fear the law. Such laws become an inefficient deterrent.

...then people hate more than they fear those laws which no longer warn their conscience because it revolts their reason, and, in strong souls, in all those who are embittered by the sentiment of injustice and of need together, this hatred suffices to dominate fear.<sup>46</sup>

In addition, going back to the point of economic inequalities, laws that favor inequalities of fortune create

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<sup>46</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 493.

a class of people who have little to lose by committing a crime. A person who does own property has plenty to lose by committing a crime; he will fear retribution and losing all that he has, he will also fear always being accused and suspected. Mme Condorcet argues that a person who possesses property will also respect another's property. It is the general good that leads one to respect other people's property which is enhanced when everyone can possess some property. (Mme Condorcet reminds us that she has argued that in a well-governed country everyone possess a little property) If a person who has nothing can hope to legally attain means of subsistence, he would have no motive to commit robbery.

... from the moment when bad laws will not have multiplied needs and accidents, one will always gain more by attempting to obtain help through legitimate and peaceful means. Simply withdraw the extreme inequality which places the poor too far from the wealthy to be known by him, and the wealthy too far from the poor for the former to perceive the latter and hear the voice of humanity reaching to the bottom of his heart, and the unforeseen misfortunes will become rarer and more certainly amended.<sup>47</sup>

Note that Mme Condorcet points out that extreme economic gaps also create a distance between compassion and sympathy among the social classes.

Even more interesting is her analysis of unjust actions that are not illegal. In a society, Mme Condorcet claims, each person is interested in obtaining the trust of others through their reputation for honesty and virtue. One prefers

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<sup>47</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 499.

a craftsman whose probity is known to a dishonest one. In the present social structure the motive of obtaining trust is weak. Again, in a corrupt system that relies on special rights and privileges, trust of any virtues does not exist at the base of social structure. The extreme inequality of fortunes renders the different classes estranged from one another. The powerful person and the worker are too distant to judge one another, hence their respective duties are not clear. The powerful person can oppress the other almost without remorse while the worker can deceive the rich person without impunity even while believing that he is doing a just thing.

The consequence of the misery of a numerous class, is a sentiment of mistrust and avidity which leads it to deceive, places it [lower class] all the more strongly in the impossibility of being hard on the honesty of the man whom it buys and to which it sells. Thus, in all social relations, a crowd of vicious social institutions, vicious because of the abuse of power on one side, and on the other, because they deprive man of his natural rights, isolates man from his fellow man, renders probity and justice useless and foreign to him, annihilates nearly all of their advantages and motives.<sup>48</sup>

In a society where there is no trust, honesty cannot be expected of people. Trust cannot exist in an oppressive class structured society.

Mme Condorcet's theory of progress is not simply based on considerations of social justice. It is based on her keen understanding that a legal system and the social structure

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<sup>48</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 501-2.

have a profound effect of people's moral sense and behavior. She argues against economic inequalities not only because she finds them unfair, but because she perceives them as morally harmful. Mme Condorcet manifests sensitivity towards the feeling of frustration, lack of freedom and oppression of the lower classes. She is concerned with how people feel in a society, not only how they fare.

### Conclusion

One might ask how are Mme Condorcet's letters on progress are related to the letters on sympathy? It is through sympathy with the weak and the poor that the motivation to amend the situation arises. With Smith, the only way to tie the theory in the WN to his view of sympathy, as I suggested above, is to accept that the impartial spectator underlies the operation of self-interest as well. The impartial spectator, as I argued in Chapter Three, is to arrive at judgments based on sympathy. Self-interest would serve as a motive for action while sympathy will provide judgment. Sympathy to Smith, as I already argued, is only relegated to the formation of judgment, and does not serve as moral motivation. For Mme Condorcet, sympathy serves as a motive for action in her theory of progress as well.

What do we not owe to sympathy, even in its weakest beginnings, since henceforth it is the first cause of this sentiment of humanity, the effects of which are so precious; it amends a part of the evils

issuing from personal interest in vast societies, it struggles against the power of force which man encounters everywhere in his steps and which only centuries of enlightenment can destroy by attacking the very vices which produced it! Amidst the shock of so many passions which oppress the weak or push aside the unfortunate, humanity secretly pleads, from the depth of hearts, in favor of the sentiment, and avenges the injustice of fate by awakening the sentiment of natural equality.<sup>49</sup>

For Mme Condorcet, one has to care about the weak and the poor in order to be motivated to help. In line with her views on sympathy, first the emotional disposition has to be present, then reason provides sophisticated arguments that take various issues into considerations. Her theory of progress is a good example of how reason and sentiments work to provide a complete moral reaction. Mme Condorcet finds the situation of the weak and the poor emotionally repulsive. In thinking about the poor, one increases his/her sympathy. Criticizing the current legal system, locating the source of the problem and proposing a solution is a task reason performs. The extent that one will be willing to sacrifice for the poor will depend on the extent that one cares about the poor. Here, I think, is Mme Condorcet's important contribution. From the point of view of the privileged, there is a correlation between how much one cares about the lower classes to how much one would be willing to sacrifice some of the privileges or wealth one possesses. One might argue that one would act according to his/her own perception of duty. While it might

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<sup>49</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 369.

be true that acting according to one's duty will yield some results, there is no doubt that caring about the poor would add another dimension and force to one's actions. Moreover, Mme Condorcet would argue that it is not possible to act out of duty without first having an emotional disposition to begin with. One cannot perceive a duty without caring first.

For Smith, acting in self-interest would yield beneficial results. For Mme Condorcet, acting in self-interest is a vice as it creates greater distance among members of society. Self-interest will not lead the rich and the privileged to give up their position. Sympathy, combined with notions of human rights, might provide a better motive for action. The notion that it is unjust that the poor suffer in a wealthy society, as Smith argues, will only carry one so far with regard to reform, as is the case with Smith. However, the uncomfortable feeling resulting from sympathizing with the poor will motivate one much more, as is the case with Mme Condorcet.

In a freer and wealthier class, in a higher rank, do we not also see more or less human men, depending on whether they are more or less capable of *sensitivity* and especially reflection? Those beings, preoccupied by their exclusive passions, born of egoism or vanity, limiting attention to their own objects and their reflection to calculating the means of obtaining them, are they not always devoid of humanity, as well as compassion?<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 373 (my italics).

Smith did not use sympathy as a motivation to amend social injustice. In addition, Smith's analysis of the poor is in reference to their economic situation. Mme Condorcet's analysis is more encompassing. She cares about oppression and feelings of frustration from being disadvantaged. In her analysis of injustice and crime she argues that it is the feelings of oppression and deprivation that distort people's sense of justice. She is concerned with the moral implication of the social structure as it manifests itself in people's attitudes and personal feelings. For this reason she argues for equality of fortune. Smith stopped at considerations of justice. Mme Condorcet takes into account the personal and social moral implications. Through the application of sympathy Mme Condorcet takes the trouble to imagine what it would be like to be a poor peasant in eighteenth century France. I think that this thought process and the sympathy that results has implication for one's proposed actions. The desire to help the poor begins with a sentiment. Because it begins with a sentiment it engenders a stronger desire than one that is provoked by notions of justice only.

What about progress? Both Smith and Mme Condorcet evoke justice as a necessary virtue. For Smith, justice entails both freedom of action and especially economic action, and the prevention of injury. A redistribution of property is an infringement on a person's natural liberty. For Mme Condorcet, justice means the prevention of great inequalities

of fortune through redistribution of property. "One of the primary goals of the law should be to establish and maintain economic equality of wealth amongst citizens"<sup>51</sup>. For Smith, progress is an outcome of his concept of justice that will promote economic growth. For Mme Condorcet, progress is an outcome of both one's moral development and the concept of justice that will enable people to live out their full moral potential.

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<sup>51</sup>Mme Condorcet, *Lettres sur la Sympathie*, 372.

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