

PART I

INTRODUCTION

Life and Context

1.1 LIFE

Sophie de Grouchy, 1764–1822, was an aristocrat who aligned herself with the republican party of the Girondins during the revolution, translating works by Thomas Paine and writing political pieces of her own and together with her husband, Condorcet. Although most of her writings are lost, she did leave one significant work of philosophy, the *Letters on Sympathy* [hereafter, *Letters*], translated here. This work was published in 1798, together with Grouchy’s translation of Adam Smith’s (1759) *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* [hereafter, *TMS*] and his “A Dissertation on the Origin of Languages: or, Considerations Concerning the First Formation of Languages and the Different Genius” ([hereafter “A Dissertation”] added by Smith to the third, 1767 edition of *TMS*). The *Letters* were advertised as a commentary on *TMS*.

Sophie de Grouchy was born in 1764 at the castle of Villette, near Meulan, a land that had been in her family since Louis XV. The family was of Norman extraction, with some ancestors traveling with William the Conqueror and others in St. Louis’s (Louis IX) crusades. One ancestor, Nicolas de Grouchy, had been tutor to Montaigne. Sophie’s family was a literary one. They spent the winter seasons in Paris in a *hôtel particulier* (a residential palace) where they hosted

the intellectual elite of the day: Turgot, d'Alembert, Beaumarchais, Condorcet.

Grouchy's education benefited from this general atmosphere. Although she did not have a tutor of her own, she was allowed to join her brothers' studies, so that she learned English, Latin, Italian, and German. When the tutor was ill or away, Sophie took over from him and taught her brothers. Her bedtime reading of choice was Marcus Aurelius, whose *Meditations* were then regarded as sound reading for Christians. Her mother, who had a reputation for learning and intellect, ensured that her children's education was not merely cerebral: she regularly took Grouchy and her sister, Charlotte, on charity rounds to visit the poor and the sick, teaching how to help and to comfort, and how to value the well-being of others. In the argument of the *Letters*, this experience is treated as formative.

When she turned eighteen, Grouchy was sent to the Chanoinesse school of Neuville, an ostensibly religious establishment, but mostly a finishing school for very rich and very well connected aristocratic girls and women. There she partied and studied equally hard, damaging her eyesight in the process. In the evenings the Chanoinesse hosted balls, and in the day, while the others recovered from the night's excesses, Sophie practiced her languages and put them to good use translating works from English and Italian—all fashionably political works, such as Arthur Young's *Tour in Ireland* and Tasso's *Liberation of Jerusalem*. She also read, discovering Voltaire, Diderot, and especially Rousseau. She lost her faith, but her early training in Christian charity, with her mother showing her how good it felt to relieve others' trouble, blended with her new readings, turned her toward social justice.

Through her readings, Grouchy also became a republican—several years before Robespierre even contemplated the possibility of a French republic. She was not yet concerned with the question of the administration of the country—although, like her husband,

she later became in favor of representative, rather than direct, democracy. Her focus at that time was with eradicating the psychological distance between the rich and the poor, wanting everyone to be a citizen, not a subject, and no one so rich or powerful that he could become a tyrant. This orientation is reflected in the *Letters*, where her political discussion is primarily focused on the psychological effects of oppression and inequality on the flourishing of the population.

Coming home to Villette, Grouchy announced to her horrified mother that she had become an atheist. Madame de Grouchy responded by burning all of Grouchy's Rousseau, Voltaire, and Diderot books and bringing Marcus Aurelius—a favorite of eighteenth-century Christian Deists—out again. Every night Grouchy would pray that God may give her back her faith—until it became obvious that he would not oblige, and she gave up. Fortunately for her, she was still much loved and valued, not just by her immediate family but also by her uncle and aunt, Charles and Félicité Dupaty, who put her in charge of their son, Charles Mercier Dupaty's education. Through her uncle, she developed further her passion for social justice; he was a magistrate and fought to reform the French criminal system, which punished the poor heavily and unfairly, while letting the rich get away. Uncle and niece saw eye to eye on this and greatly admired each other. At that time, the uncle was fighting the *parlements* (provincial appellate courts) to put a stop to the condemnation of three peasants from Bordeaux to torture on the wheel. He was working on this with the Marquis de Condorcet.¹

Sophie met Condorcet through her uncle. They already had much in common, both being republicans and atheists. But while Condorcet could express his convictions, Grouchy was still somewhat under the control of her family. This must have made Condorcet an

1. Ian McLean and Fiona Hewitt, eds., *Condorcet: Foundations of Social Choice and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1994), 17.

attractive party, despite the age difference—she was twenty-two, he was forty-three. Her intellect and her ability to hold her own in political debates with her uncle would no doubt have pleased Condorcet, but he also found out that she was brave and devoted. One day her tutee was attacked by a rabid dog: Sophie threw herself between the young Charles and the beast. Condorcet admired her from a safe distance, and soon the two were engaged and, in 1786, were married.

They moved to Condorcet's apartments in the Hotel des Monnaies; Condorcet worked as the Inspector-General of the Mint, under the economist Turgot. There the couple set up a salon. Grouchy's English was excellent by then, so theirs was the house of choice for foreign visitors, such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, Anarchasis Cloots, and the Swiss Etienne Dumont—speechwriter for Mirabeau and translator of Jeremy Bentham. Their devoted friend, the doctor Pierre-Jean-George Cabanis, who later married Grouchy's sister, Charlotte, was a frequent attendant.

Grouchy did not stop studying after she married. Shortly after she moved into the Hotel des Monnaies, Condorcet together with another Academician, La Harpe, founded the Lycée, a school on the rue St. Honoré, where famous scholars and academicians lectured, and where the cream of society attended. Grouchy participated assiduously, studying mathematics, history, and botany. She became known as the Venus of the Lyceum—presumably because she was good-looking. She also took lessons in painting in the studio of Elizabeth Vigée le Brun. Grouchy painted well, as we know from the several miniatures she left behind, including several self-portraits.

At the start of the French Revolution (1789), the Condorcets became associated with the Girondins. They frequented the salon of Madame Helvetius, in Auteuil, where republican ideas were being debated and Brissot's anti-slavery club (of which Condorcet and Olympe de Gouges were members) was founded. By 1791, Grouchy

and Condorcet were among the strongest advocates of the republican movement, working with Thomas Paine, Jacques-Pierre Brissot, Etienne Dumont, and Achilles Duchatelllet, on *Le Républicain*, a newspaper that would disseminate republican thought in France. But by 1793, the Girondins fell out of favor and Condorcet had to go into hiding. He stayed in Paris while Grouchy moved to Auteuil—then outside Paris—with her daughter, traveling to the capital on foot twice a week to visit her husband and to paint in a studio she had rented on the rue St. Honoré. In March 1794, Condorcet fled his hiding place in order to avoid getting his hostess arrested. He died a few days later in a village prison, but was not identified until several months after his death, so that Grouchy remained ignorant of his whereabouts.

As Grouchy struggled to regain some of the property that had been confiscated and at the same time keep herself out of prison, she earned a living using the skills she had acquired as a miniaturist, painting portraits of imprisoned aristocrats for their families and, on two occasions, those of officers coming to arrest her. By the time the Terror was over, and she still had not regained control of her property, she decided to earn money by translating Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (*TMS*). She took this opportunity to publish her *Letters on Sympathy*, written several years earlier, as an afterword. She also worked on two editions of the complete works of Condorcet, together with Cabanis, and continued to educate herself and develop her thoughts in areas as varied as physiology and botany.

Grouchy died in 1822, age fifty-eight. Her daughter, Eliza, who had married an Irish man and revolutionary sympathizer, Alexander O'Connor, inherited her father's papers and, together with François Arago, an important academician and life-long republican, she completed the editions of Condorcet's work her mother had prepared, and published a new edition of his *Works*. It was Eliza's son who commissioned biographer Antoine Guillois to write a life of Sophie de

Grouchy. This is our main source for details concerning her life, as her papers have mostly disappeared.

1.2 ADAM SMITH IN FRANCE

Although the *Letters* were written before Grouchy translated *TMS*, they are framed, in part, as a response to that book, so that it makes sense to say a few words about Adam Smith's reception in France, and the significance of Grouchy's having chosen this work to engage with.

Smith was in fact very popular in France, especially with his (1776) *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (hereafter *Wealth of Nations*), having been translated five times already between 1776 and 1786.² This was due to the French reading public's thirst for sound reflections on economics and taxation, for the pressing need for an applied philosophy that could help them out of the terrible economic crisis they had fallen into. Smith's *TMS*, however, did not do so well, despite having been translated several times. Smith blamed the fact that the book did not sell in France as much as he'd expected on the poor quality of the translation, which "greatly mortified" him.³

It is not entirely surprising that Smith had issues with the translations produced by Eidous (1764), La Rochefoucauld (1774), and Blavet (1774–75). Translating practices in eighteenth-century France were "domesticating" practices—that is, emphasis was placed on making the text fit with local canons and debates, and less on making sure the author's meaning was conveyed exactly and in a way he

2. Gilbert Faccarello and Philippe Steiner, "The Diffusion of the Work of Adam Smith in the French Language: An Outline History," in *A Critical Bibliography of Adam Smith*, ed. Keith Tribe (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), 61–119.

3. See Faccarello and Steiner, "The Diffusion," 10. Smith could read French, although he was not comfortable speaking it.

or she intended it.⁴ So, for instance, the original text was summarized if it was thought too long, or examples were added if the text was thought too dry—fidelity to the original was not the first concern. And whereas this apparently did no harm to the popularity of the *Wealth of Nations*, it did affect the sales of the French translations of *TMS*.

Smith was no longer alive by the time Grouchy published her own translation (1798; he died in 1790), but it is safe to say that he would have been happier with hers, as she followed the text as precisely as she could, attempting to capture the tone and rhythm, as well as the multilayered meanings of his sentences. Moreover, Grouchy translated the seventh and final edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which was published posthumously. This is no doubt a large part of why her translation lasted longer than others (the next translation, by Bizieux et al., was published in 1999).

Did Grouchy ever meet Smith? She does not suggest that they did in her *Letters*. Her biographer, Guillois, names Smith as one of the international visitors to her Paris Salon. In fact, although Condorcet and Smith knew of each other, it is unlikely that Grouchy and Smith ever met.⁵ Even though Smith traveled to France, he does not seem to have been in Paris at a time when he could have met Grouchy.

4. Mary Helen McMurrin, *The Spread of Novels: Translation and Prose Fiction in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3. On the controversy over André Morellet's translation of Beccaria, an important influence on Grouchy, see Eric Schliesser, "On Philosophical Translator-Advocates and Linguistic Injustice," *Philosophical Papers* 47(1), (2018): 20–22.

5. Simona Pisanelli, "Adam Smith and the Marquis de Condorcet: Did They Really Meet?," *Iberian Journal for the History of Economic Thought*, 2 (2015). <http://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/IJHE/article/view/49771/46266>. However, Smith and Condorcet did correspond, and Condorcet presented Smith with a copy of his *Life of Turgot* (1786). Peter Groenewegen, "Turgot and Adam Smith," *Scottish Journal of Political Economy* 16, no. 3 (1969): 271–287, 271.

1.3 SOURCES

Not unlike other authors in this period, Grouchy does not much cite her sources. In the text of the *Letters*, only Smith, Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Fénelon, and Vauvenargues are explicitly mentioned. In addition, she quotes Condorcet once without explicitly identifying him. In the footnotes to the translation, we identify a few other possible intellectual interlocutors and sources, including works by Montesquieu, Hume, Marcus Aurelius, Beccaria, Turgot, and Bentham.

Of the ones she mentions explicitly, English-language contemporary readers are unlikely to recognize Fénelon and Vauvenargues. So, here we start with them and in our discussion introduce some of the others.

First, François Fénelon (1651–1715) was, prior to his political fall, one of the most influential clerics, theologians, and educators in France. He is mentioned at the end of Letter IV as a way to praise Rousseau’s rhetoric of virtue (“Rousseau talked of virtue with as much charm as Fenelon”). It is almost certainly an allusion to Fénelon’s (1699) *Les Aventures de Télémaque* (*The Adventures of Telemachus*), one of the most famous works during the eighteenth century.⁶ A common interpretation of the work is that it defends rural republican virtue; it helped set off the so-called luxury debate. On one side of the debate were those who believed that commerce and luxury corrupt our morals and—with a nod to the Roman civil wars and the decline of the Republic—undermine political stability and freedom. Fénelon was frequently taken to be an advocate of this

6. The complicated publication history of the text is itself part of the story of Fénelon’s fall. For an introduction to the text, the context, and a nuanced interpretation of its significance, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, “Fénelon’s *Telemachus*,” in *Ten Neglected Classics of Philosophy*, ed. Eric Schliesser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 26–54.

position. On the other side of the debate were those who believed that commerce and luxury would lead to national military and economic greatness; if this meant an embrace of vice, so be it. The Anglo-Dutch writer Bernard Mandeville, whose *Fable of the Bees* was a direct response to Fénelon, was a leading representative.⁷

Much political and moral philosophy and political economy of the eighteenth century is an attempt to do justice to the insights of Fénelon and Mandeville, while avoiding their conclusions. So, for example, Hume and Smith both argued, influenced by Montesquieu, that commerce could produce not just national greatness but, with the right institutions, also better morals.⁸ Smith argued that one could tax luxury consumption by the rich so as to fund the provision of public works that benefit all. Addison and Kant (presumably unknown to Grouchy) both argued, more optimistically, that commerce would facilitate international peace. With those that advocate commerce, Grouchy evinces familiarity with arguments offered by Turgot and Smith that show restrictions on and barriers to commerce have a tendency to act as a monopoly for the few that impoverish the many. Her argument against monopoly is not merely economic but also political: “those laws, at the same time, were harming the well-being of all by collecting, little by little, in the hands of a few, wealth that then became in those hands a means of oppression, and which otherwise, through the free movement of interests would have remained if not equal, at least common to all.” Not unlike Smith, she thinks that free markets have an equalizing tendency. This is a natural thought when the status quo is deeply hierarchical and in which the

7. For an excellent introduction to these issues, see Istvan Hont, “The Early Enlightenment Debate on Commerce and Luxury,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 377–418.

8. See, for example, Lisa Herzog, “Adam Smith on Markets and Justice,” *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 12 (2014): 864–875.

aristocratic rich have economic and tax privileges (so that they avoid paying taxes) and deeply entrenched legal exemptions.

Privileges and exemptions do not just have an economic and political effect, however. In Letter VIII, Grouchy argues that these also undermine the impartial rule of law and threaten its authority, because they convey the thought to those subject to it that even the criminal law itself is an instrument of the rich against the poor: “the people are tempted to see criminal laws as made against them and in favor of the rich, as the result of an association designed to oppress them.” (Grouchy here seems to draw an implicit contrast between an illegitimate association and a legitimate union.) She argues that one of the unintended, but foreseeable, consequences of laws that favor the wealthy is that of increasing contempt for the law and so increasing lawlessness.

To be sure, Grouchy’s views should not be assimilated fully to Smith’s political economy. At one point (in Letter VII), she endorses a set of physiocratic doctrines: “agriculture is, after all, the most productive of all professions for individuals, while for states, it is the unique source of real and lasting wealth.” As a systematic political economy, physiocracy was founded by Quesnay (1694–1774) and was embraced, as a reaction to Colbert’s *dirigiste* form of mercantilism, by many of the modernizing French *philosophes*, including Turgot, who developed his political economy in the context of a larger argument about progress (which surely influenced Condorcet). Physiocrats advocated free trade as the best means to prevent famines and aimed to develop the impoverished French countryside. While Smith admired Quesnay and Turgot, in Book IV of *Wealth of Nations*, he attacked mercantilism and physiocracy as promoting one-sided economic development. Grouchy was apparently unconvinced by Smith’s argument.

Earlier we mentioned how Fénelon and Mandeville represented opposing sides of the luxury debate. But this opposition was not

total; their views were taken to be in agreement on a crucial element: if left unsupervised, the working poor were profligate and lazy. This helped justify a whole range of economic policies, including what we would call “sin taxes” on the consumption goods by the poor and maintenance of low wages (in order to motivate the poor to work hard). Grouchy echoed Smith in rejecting the assumptions behind and the content of such policies, and instead favored policies that would enrich the poor. She thought the working poor were not naturally profligate. In addition, any “mismatch” between their “wages” and “the necessities of life” would be “temporary” suggesting she accepted Smith’s argument that the necessities of life of the work poor created an important link between the price level, the wages of the working poor, and population size (Letter VII).

She argues that laws, which target the behavior of the poor, create perverse incentives, which impoverish the poor and encourage criminality. Many of Grouchy’s particular arguments on legal reform are original. But they reveal the more general influence not just of Smith but also, and specifically, of the great Italian legal reformer (and political economist) Cesare Beccaria (1738–1794), who was extremely influential on French Enlightenment thought. In Beccaria we find some of the eclectic and, to modern eyes, curious mixture of state-of-nature theorizing (that modern readers associate with Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau) and utilitarianism (that moderns associate with Hutcheson, Helvetius, Bentham, and sometimes Hume) that we can also find in Grouchy.

As well as Beccaria, Grouchy may have read or discussed Jeremy Bentham. Her friend and correspondent, Etienne Dumont, was Bentham’s editor and his translator into French. We know that when Dumont was working with Bentham in England, he corresponded with Grouchy; and while we do not have his letters to her, we do know from her replies that Bentham was discussed. This correspondence dates from the same time as the first drafting of the *Letters*,

and we should not be surprised, therefore, to find some elements of Bentham's thought in the *Letters*.

While there is some evidence that Grouchy was familiar with Bentham's early works, the main notion of "utility" that she deploys is, in fact, a bit closer to Beccaria, Hutcheson, Helvetius, and Hume. In that sense, "utility" means something like "public good" (sometimes she uses "common utility" or "general utility" to capture notions related to this). Not unlike Smith, she clearly evaluates social institutions like the law in such consequentialist terms. The main consequences that matter are pleasure and virtue. She thinks that such utility can come in degrees (see Letter VIII). But unlike Bentham, she does not offer a calculus nor does she aim to maximize the utility of individuals.

One may wonder, then, why Grouchy avoids the welfare-maximizing calculus of Bentham. While one can only speculate, it seems this is due to the fact that, not unlike Smith, she thinks utility may be one of several competing values, none of which has ultimate priority.⁹ For at times, she thinks that even institutions should be evaluated in light of "reason," by which she means, in this context, impartiality (e.g., Letter VIII: "when they considered that reason and common utility were the natural and absolute judges of social institutions"). We offer two further comments on Grouchy's conception of utility.

First, she treats utility as something that an individual can have in relationship to another individual: "we now see how we are disposed to a particular sympathy for those we are tied to by utility or pleasure" (Letter II). Here she uses utility as an explanation for a directed sympathy with somebody else. That is, if another is—because of her, say, riches, influence, or status—useful to us, we are likely to feel sympathy for her. Again, this is unlike the Benthamite notion where utility

9. Michael B. Gill, "Moral Pluralism in Smith and His Contemporaries," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 3 (2014): 275–306.

is related to a hedonic or psychological property of experience. (As it happens, Grouchy helpfully distinguishes utility from pleasure in the quoted passage.)

Second, her main conception of utility is relevant when it comes to her sole mention of Vauvenargues (1715–1747), who is even less well known today than Fénelon. Vauvenargues, an aristocrat, was also little known in his own short lifetime, but he was befriended by Voltaire, who drew attention to his writings. In Letter V, Grouchy quotes Vauvenargues as holding that “moral good and evil refer to whatever is more useful or harmful to humanity in general.” The idea that “good” just is what is useful can be traced back to Hobbes and Spinoza. But the idea that this should be understood in terms of humanity in general seems original to Vauvenargues. It presupposes a cosmopolitan understanding of the public good. Not unlike Grouchy, Stoicism greatly influenced Vauvenargues in his youth, although there is debate about his mature views.¹⁰ Proto-utilitarians (like Hutcheson, Helvetius, and Beccaria) tend to treat such utility in terms of the greatest number, not in terms of humanity as such.

Grouchy mentions Vauvenargues in order to contrast his conception of good and evil with her own conception of *moral* evil: “that is of an act that is harmful to others and which is prohibited by reason.” Grouchy here presupposes a distinction between moral and physical pains. The contrast between the “moral” and “physical” was a standard one in the second half of the eighteenth century. The “physical” refers to bodies or matter—so, “physical evils” are bodily pains. The “moral” refers to what we would call “social,” but it used to refer to things connected to the mind (in a broad sense)—so, a “moral evil” is a social harm.

10. Yves Laine, “Vauvenargues and his Work,” *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 27 (1966): 21–30.

Grouchy's criticism of Vauvenargues is a bit complex. In part, he is treated as a misguided elitist who fails to see that the working poor are capable of sound moral evaluation. But her grounds for criticizing Vauvenargues are themselves a bit elitist: that the working poor will lack understanding of such a cosmopolitan conception of humanity in general. She states the point, however, in an egalitarian way: "we should prefer those definitions that the least enlightened of men may grasp." (Grouchy here echoes Smith's criticism of Hume in *TMS* IV, where Smith shows that disinterested utility could not ground the origin of an institution it is meant to justify because it is too "refined and enlightened.") The underlying point is a serious one. She rejects a kind of elitist-moral expertise: the most reliable and enlightened reason is that which is the most common.

The other reason for calling her criticism "complex" is that while criticizing Vauvenargues's definition, Grouchy also claims that, in fact, their definitions actually agree. That is, there is a sense in which their definitions are meant to track a common (and cosmopolitan) good (or evil). This turns on her understanding of reason, which—to simplify—is not just a psychological faculty that can calculate the foreseeable effects or outcomes of actions but also a kind of cosmopolitan principle that demands from us that we are all treated equally, or impartially. So, a moral evil is a harm to others when that violates this cosmopolitan principle. Putting it this way allows her to avoid calling, say, momentary or instrumental social dislocations "evil."

The impact of two of the towering figures of the French Enlightenment, Voltaire and Rousseau, on her *Letters* is more diffuse, and we cannot hope to do justice to this in the confines of an introduction. Voltaire is explicitly quoted when she begins to introduce her views on moral education in Letter I. But Grouchy's views on how to organize institutions and individual practices of education into virtue also reveal she was a close, albeit critical student of Rousseau's *Emile*. She shares a republican conception of virtue with

Rousseau, but the *Letters* are framed by her rejection of his sexism toward women.

Letter IV closes with an extended contrast between Rousseau and Voltaire. She treats them as exemplars of certain kinds of rhetorically sophisticated public intellectuals: one who speaks for freedom (Rousseau), and the other who speaks for public enlightenment (Voltaire). The treatment of Rousseau is simultaneously more critical and more admiring: Rousseau speaks to our conscience in a way that flirts with demagoguery (because it works by way of the emotions). But unlike demagogues, Rousseau ends up avoiding flattery of his audience and “disciplines” our hearts and orients us toward public virtue. Voltaire, by contrast, effectively uses ridicule to undermine the power of religious institutions and other sources of fanaticism and superstition. She shares with Voltaire an anti-clerical animus.

There is a subtle point lurking in the main contrast between Rousseau and Voltaire. Like other Enlightenment figures, Grouchy draws on a stadial conception of history hinted at in Mandeville, but most subtly articulated by Montesquieu and Buffon, and later developed in the Scottish Enlightenment (including Hume and Smith). At some point, this stadial conception of history became understood as a template for progress. Not unlike Turgot and Condorcet, Grouchy thinks that once Enlightenment spreads, it is permanent; so, future ages do not need a new Voltaire. In contrast, she also believes that freedom can be threatened in each age, and so Rousseau’s works will always remain relevant and, due to their emotional nature, potentially effective.

1.4 WOMEN PHILOSOPHERS IN THE REVOLUTION

Despite what many hoped, the French Revolution did not liberate women. In fact, they were probably worse off at the end of the

revolution than they had been during the Ancienne Régime, when they were at least included in public life and often were a force to be reckoned with.¹¹ Yet, the revolutionary years saw a massive increase in publications by women in France. Between 1789 and 1800, there were a total of 329 publications written by women. In the previous three decades, the numbers ranged between 55 and 78. And between 1811 and 1821, it decreased to 299 (presumably because many of the writers of the revolutionary years had been guillotined).¹² Carla Hesse, whose figures these are, reports that in England, while there was a regular increase of women in print, it was not as dramatic as in France. Between 1780 and 1789, 166 women were published, and the following decade, it was 191.¹³ English women writers were to some extent encouraged by the Revolution, especially if they were republican thinkers—as, for example, were Wollstonecraft, Barbauld, and Macaulay. These women were prompted to action both by the fact that republicanism was becoming a real possibility and the implication that French women might, with some help, be included in the reforms taking shape. Writers who had thought about the possibility of women's citizenship, such as Wollstonecraft and Macaulay, had understood the role of institutions, as well as of laws and individuals, in dominating women's actions. Women were held down not just by laws but also by social habits, prejudices, and practices, which made it nearly impossible for a woman to rise up and stay up long enough to require citizenship.

11. See Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 32. Olympe de Gouges, in her "Declaration of the Rights of Woman," refers to women's "nocturnal administration," meaning that many political decisions were made by influential wives and especially mistresses. For the impact on scholarship, see the seminal paper by Eileen O'Neill, "Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and Their Fate in History," in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet A. Kourany (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 17–62.

12. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, 37.

13. Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment*, 39.

Women writers in France (Olympe de Gouges, Etta Palm D'Aelders) did also take to the Revolution and attempted to convince the new rulers that women should be granted citizenship. Some (Madame de Staël, Louise Kéralio Robert), however, preferred to use their influence to help men become citizens. Grouchy's husband, Condorcet, was one of the most active advocates of women's rights. In 1790, he published a paper arguing that women should be given rights of citizenship on the same basis as men, because nothing else would serve equality.¹⁴ In this paper, he lists a number of objections that had been or might be presented regarding the inclusion of women in politics; he debunks them, one after another. He concludes by naming a number of famous intellectual or political women, daring anyone to argue that they would not make better political leaders than most men. There is no reason to suspect that Grouchy had a hand in writing this piece, but we know that they had a close marriage and discussed their work together, as well as with friends in their salon and in that of Madame Helvétius. A few months later, Condorcet introduced the Dutch exile Etta Palm D'Aelders to his Cercle Social, and had a paper of hers published, also arguing for the inclusion of women as citizens in the new republic. D'Aelders then went on to create several patriotic societies for women citizens throughout France.¹⁵

It is not clear to what extent Grouchy participated in her husband's activism, however. Condorcet was always cautious. When his wife and infant daughter got caught up in the Champ de Mars massacre, in the summer of 1791, Condorcet immediately closed down

14. Nicolas de Condorcet, "Sur l'Admission des Femmes au droits de la cite," *Journal of the Society of 1789*, July 3, 1790; Nicolas de Condorcet, "On the Emancipation of Women," in *Condorcet: Political Writings*, ed. Steven Lukes and Nadia Urbinati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 156–162.

15. See Elisabeth Badinter and Robert Badinter, *Condorcet: Un Intellectuel en Politique* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 297.

the journal they had just started together, *Le Républicain*, for fear that someone would come after his family.¹⁶ Grouchy, as an outspoken republican aristocrat and an attractive young woman, was already the subject of much malicious gossip. It is not unlikely that Condorcet decided he would be the one to promote a view as unpopular as women's citizenship. Although there are hints of Grouchy's feminism in the *Letters on Sympathy*, there is nothing analogous to her husband's clearly stated feminist agenda.

Condorcet was right to be cautious. Although women's active participation in the Revolution was tolerated at first, their involvement was later violently repressed. Women who had interested themselves in politics and had written about it, such as Olympe de Gouges and Marie-Jeanne Roland, were executed in 1793, whereas Grouchy lived until 1822. It's likely that the backlash was always going to happen, but the incident that seems to have sparked it was the (1793) murder of Marat by Charlotte Corday, a young Girondin sympathizer who had come to Paris to kill a monster and save the revolution. Shortly after her execution, which was closely followed by Roland's and Gouges's executions, Hébert issued the following warning to women in *Le Moniteur*, a leading publication of the Terror:

Women, do you want to be republicans? Love, follow and teach the laws that remind your children to exercise their rights. Have glory in the brilliant actions they may one day perform on behalf of the fatherland, because these speak well of you; be simple in your dress, laborious in your household work; never follow popular assemblies with the aim of speaking there; but by your occasional presence at them, encourage your children to participate;

16. See Grouchy and Duchatelet's letters to Dumont on this subject, in Jean Martin, "Achille du Chastellet et le Premier Mouvement Républicain en France d'Après des Lettres Inédites (1791-1792)," in *La Révolution Française, Revue Historique*, Nouvelle série 33 (Paris: L. Maretheux, Imprimeur de la Cour d'Appel, 1927), 116.

then your fatherland will bless you, because you will truly have done for it what it expects of you.¹⁷

Women's clubs were closed, and there was no more talk of women acquiring the same rights as men. Then, when Napoléon came to power, he is reported to have told Sophie de Grouchy that he did not like women who talked about politics. She replied, echoing a famous argument by Olympe de Gouges: "I agree with you, but in a country where they might lose their heads, it is natural that women should want to know why."

17. Dauban, Charles Aimé. 1864. *Etude sur Madame Roland et son temps*. Paris: Plon, ccxlix. Sandrine Bergès' translation.

The Text

2.1 WRITING THE *LETTERS*

The *Letters on Sympathy* were published in year six of the new French First Republic—that is, in 1798. They were appended to a two-volume translation of Adam Smith’s *TMS* and “A Dissertation.” Perhaps the new translation was encouraged by the appearance of a French translation of Smith’s posthumous (1795) *Essays on Philosophical Subjects* by the Suisse natural philosopher, Pierre Prévost; this showed there was interest in Smith’s works in French.

While the *Letters* were published in 1798, we have good reasons to believe that they were written in 1793, with drafts prepared in 1791. First, Condorcet refers to them in his testament (written in the early days of 1794), suggesting to his daughter that for her moral and philosophical education, she should turn to her mother’s *Letters on Sympathy*, as well as to “other fragments on the same subject.” We do not know what these other texts might have been, or whether they were developed beyond fragments between Condorcet’s death in 1794 and Grouchy’s in 1822.

In fact, Grouchy herself referred to the *Letters* at an even earlier date. In the spring of 1792, in correspondence with Etienne Dumont, their Swiss friend and associate, she asked whether he would look

at a draft of seven “letters,” adding that she could not find the draft of the eighth and final one. She also mentioned the draft of a novel with which she was not satisfied. Later, she wrote Dumont another letter, berating him for not offering any feedback (despite the offer of a dinner) and adding that it would have cost him very little indeed to say whether he thought there was anything in them that was worth pursuing.¹

We do not know whether she eventually found someone, other than her husband, to read the draft, or whether the novel was abandoned. But we do know why the *Letters* were eventually published in 1798. According to Grouchy’s daughter, Eliza Condorcet O’Connor, Sophie published her translation of Adam Smith’s works because she needed money. Her assets had been confiscated, and it was taking a long time to get them back. She needed to live and to pay for her daughter’s upkeep, as well as an annuity for her nanny and help for her sister.

Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* published in 1721 had repopularized the epistolary format. Grouchy’s approach is closer to Seneca’s *Letters* (1917), which are instructive and have a dedicated addressee whose responses are not recorded (or only obliquely hinted at). A remark at the start of Letter III suggests that each letter is meant to be a daily missive. The headings on Letters V–VII suggest that they are a connected argument.

Although the epistolary format is a stylistic choice, and the “letters” work as the chapters of a short treatise; they are all addressed to a reader, and the introductions and conclusions all appeal to that reader’s judgment of the arguments presented. This might suggest that Grouchy is setting up her reader as an intellectual version of Smith’s “impartial spectator”—someone who is to provide an

1. Martin, “Achille du Chastellet,” 121.

objective judgment. The concept of the impartial spectator is noticeably absent from the argument of the *Letters*, so it would not be entirely surprising to find that Grouchy had somehow worked it into the fabric of her text.

The recipient of each letter is not named; all are addressed to “My dear C***.” Some have surmised that C*** stood for Condorcet. However, as he was dead by the time the *Letters* were published, that is highly unlikely. Although he was alive when the *Letters* were drafted, it is also unlikely she would have thought to present her work as a correspondence with her husband, as they were living together then and in the public eye. The only surviving correspondence we have between the couple was written while Condorcet was in hiding. There was, on the other hand, another C*** with whom Grouchy corresponded and collaborated throughout her adult life: Jean-Georges Cabanis, a close friend of the Condorcets; the lover and later the husband of Charlotte de Grouchy, Sophie’s sister; and a favorite of Madame Helvetius.

Cabanis (1757–1808), whose father had been one of Turgot’s assistants, was an influential physician and theorist of what we would today call public health. He had a common interest with Grouchy—namely, physiology, which was a materialist science aimed at understanding human beings by way of their bodily organs. In 1802, Cabanis published his *Rapports du Physique et du Moral de l’Homme*, in which he explored the relations between bodies and morality, discussing, for instance, the influence of weather and digestion on mood and decision-making. Prior to publishing this, he corresponded with Grouchy and had long discussions with her on the subject. Physiology is also central to the *Letters on Sympathy*, as Grouchy argues that our moral feelings are born out of the physiological response that ties a newborn to the person who nurses her and holds her.

2.2 SUMMARY OF THE *LETTERS*

In Letter I, Grouchy introduces her project—to find the origins of sympathy—and sets out her view that these origins are physiological, that they are based in pain and pleasure, whether experienced, remembered, imagined, or processed by the mind through reflection.

In Letter II, she shows how reflection, memory, and abstraction lead from physical sympathy for a specific person to moral sympathy for the whole of humanity. She argues that the very first human bonds arise from the need an infant feels for the body of her nurse. The pleasure and pain experienced by the infant in relation to the presence or absence of the nurse is the first step toward the development of sympathy. As the ability to take a step back from these sensations develops, and the sensations themselves become more complex and attached to more abstract objects, sympathy matures into the sort of sentiment that can in turn give rise to morality.

Letter III expands on Letter II by offering a discussion of different kinds of sympathy, personal sympathy, friendship, and romantic love, showing how each develops from a similar basis.

Letter IV asks what it is we may feel sympathy for, and looks in particular at the infectious power of laughter and its role in psychological development. This letter, which is more loosely structured than the others, also touches on the question of the influence of demagogues and on the psychology of crowds. It forms the transition to the next four letters, where she applies her theory of sympathy to politically salient, institutional reform.

Letter V is entitled “On the Origins of Moral Ideas” and begins with an analysis of the concepts of virtue, moral goodness, evil, and remorse in light of her discussion of Smith that occurs in the previous letters. In her analysis, she moves between virtue ethical and consequentialist explanations of moral concepts. On the one hand, everything must stem from the character of the agent, which has to

be educated in order to develop the propensity to feel the right sort of sympathy in the right circumstances—this is clearly Aristotelian in spirit. On the other hand, she claims that reason approves of or condemns acts depending on whether they are beneficial to humanity or not—which feels more utilitarian.

We might reflect here that at the end of the eighteenth century, although consequentialism was very new and no doubt felt revolutionary, it was not yet a stance that positioned itself against more Aristotelian perspectives. The idea that there are three different types of moral theories—Kantian, utilitarian, and Aristotelian—was very new. And, later, Mill himself claimed that his own views were not incompatible with Aristotle's. Grouchy herself was not an Aristotelian. This was not a position held by anyone at the time, even though ancient virtue ethical notions were widespread both philosophically and culturally; and Grouchy was well acquainted with Stoicism. Talk of virtue would have come naturally to her, but she also had some acquaintance with consequentialist views.

The aim of the next two letters, VI and VII, both headed with the line "The Same Subject Continued," is to derive a political economy from the moral principles outlined in Letter V. In Letter VI, Grouchy attempts to derive accounts of justice and property rights from reason and morality, showing how abstraction plays a role in mitigating the very particularistic aspect of sympathy in its original state. In Letter VII, she moves to an investigation of the mechanisms of injustice, identifying four main possible causes of unjust behavior: love, money, ambition, and vanity. In each case, she studies how the mechanics of sympathy may be interfered with so as to lead to these defects of character and reason. For instance, the sort of love, she says, that leads to crime is not the kind of love that one would naturally develop toward another human being if left to the natural movements of sympathy but, rather, is a kind perverted by unhealthy social customs and prejudices.

The final, Letter VIII, takes up where the last three left off and offers as a general conclusion that natural human sympathy and propensities toward reason, virtue, and justice have been perverted by the vicious institutions of the Ancien Régime and that these institutions must be destroyed and new ones carefully built if we are to regain the capacity for living together peacefully.

2.3 THE *LETTERS* AND *THE THEORY OF MORAL SENTIMENTS*

The *Letters on Sympathy* are introduced as a commentary and a response to Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. At several points in the *Letters*, Grouchy specifies that a particular argument constitutes a disagreement with Smith. At other times, although she does not do this, we have highlighted the disagreements in footnotes, referring the reader to the passages in Smith that we thought Grouchy was disagreeing with.

In *TMS*, Smith argues that morality arises out of the natural passions and sympathy, but that moral rules can only be developed through reason. Thus, he puts an end to the idea that either reason or sentiment by itself can give us a complete morality. The *Letters on Sympathy* especially engage with Smith's philosophical analysis of sympathy, but further than that, they have a distinct purpose, which is to bring a valuable political perspective to Smith's theory. While *TMS* is not devoid of political philosophy, it was left to Smith's readers—as had Wollstonecraft, Paine, and John Millar—to develop the full implications. In particular, Grouchy is highly interested in how understanding the mechanisms of sympathy could help the development of new social and political institutions after the revolution.

Although Grouchy is enthusiastic about Smith's views—she agrees with his fundamental view that moral sentiments and

judgments can be derived from our capacity for sympathy, but that we need to develop our rational abilities in order to render this capacity at all useful—she takes issue with certain aspects of his views. In particular, and this provides the formal justification for her taking up the topic, she feels that he has not dug sufficiently deep to understand what sympathy is: he has noted “its existence and expounding its principal effects,” but not gone back to “its first cause, and show why sympathy is the property of every sensible being susceptible to reflection” (Letter I). This first cause she traces back to infancy, and to the very physical relationship of a baby with its nurse. Grouchy does not talk about mothers there, however. She is careful to distinguish between the physical relationship (skin-on-skin, feeding) and the moral one (the duty a mother may have to nurture her children, and the duties of children to love and respect their mothers). Grouchy is looking for a physical trigger for the sensations of pleasure and pain that will eventually give rise to sentiments of sympathy, and this trigger has to be common to all human beings in order to account for the ubiquitous presence of sympathy in human societies. Every baby who survives to an age at which she may develop sentiments will have been fed by an other human being, and there will have been no previous universal experience suited to stimulate the sensations that can lead to these sentiments. Thus, Grouchy not only traces sympathy back to its origins but also presents an account that is distinctly naturalistic. This bears out in her description of the growth of sympathy and the birth of morality.

Morality, for Grouchy, is first and foremost something that is felt, that has its roots in the body itself. Sentiments come first from the body, through the senses and through the experience of pleasure and pain resulting from the sense impression of a particular experience (being separated from one’s nurse, or seeing one’s nurse in pain or upset). The concept of “sensibility,” which was extremely popular in

French Enlightenment thought,² itself implies a correlation between the physiological and the emotional.

When Mary Wollstonecraft criticized her century for its cultivation of sensibility, what she meant was that upper-class men and women were trained from childhood to overreact in a ridiculous fashion to a minor event—for example, to faint at the sight of a mouse, cry over nothing, or fall in love too easily. For Grouchy, though, to exercise sensibility is not that type of thing. Rather, she understands sensibility as the disposition to feel someone else's pain and pleasure. To be sure, it's sensibility with suffering and the strong desire to relieve it that is central to her approach to sympathy. (This brings her closer to Rousseau than to Smith.) For Grouchy, sensibility, or the capacity to feel pain and pleasure, is to be understood as the basis of sympathy. Someone who does not recognize pain or pleasure in himself is not likely to sense it in others. Crucially, for Grouchy, sensibility is itself something that can be cultivated (see Letter II).

Grouchy claims that there is a progression from the ability to recognize pain and pleasure in one's own body, to the ability to recognize pain and pleasure in the bodies of others, and then the ability to recognize what she calls moral—that is, psychological pain or pleasure. Grouchy is in agreement with Smith in arguing that sympathy is a complex emotion, which contains a number of judgments about who the person is, the pain he or she experiences, and whether the individual deserves that pain or not. Grouchy points out that the process whereby sensibility—the reaction to seeing somebody's pain or pleasure—becomes sympathy requires education. Unlike sensibility, sympathy is not a preexisting condition that can be either refined or blunted by social practices; rather, it is a complex emotion that requires intellectual input and, in turn, knowledge about people

2. Jessica Riskin, *Science in the Age of Sensibility: The Sentimental Empiricists of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

and the ways they suffer, as well as the ability to think rapidly and abstractly about the complexity of human life.³ Therefore, Grouchy argues, practical and theoretical education is necessary for the development of sympathy.

An important difference between Smith's and Grouchy's accounts is that for Smith, the disposition to sympathize arises out of the experience of being judged by others in childhood, whereas for Grouchy, it develops from the first relationship an infant experiences. According to her, infants learn to depend on someone to satisfy their needs, and then they learn to communicate with that person to make it easier for them to do so—that is, they cry until they get fed. This means that the first lesson must be that when we suffer, others can relieve our pain. Sympathy, therefore, arises out of that very first close relationship we experience as a baby with a nurse. Early human experiences always link pain and pleasure to the presence or absence of another person. The first thing we learn is not how to look after ourselves but, rather, how to be dependent on one another. While Smith notes the infant's dependence on others in his epistemology (published in his posthumous *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*), this is not emphasized in his moral psychology. Rather, the first step toward the recognition of one's moral responsibilities is the experience of being judged by others in play or at school.

There are two ways to read this difference between Smith and Grouchy. The first is to see it as a progression rather than a departure. Smith and Grouchy both emphasize the role(s) interactions with others play in the development of the relevant dispositions and skills of morality, but Smith has left out dependency, which

3. For background, see Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Adam Smith and Virtue," in *The Oxford Handbook of Adam Smith*, ed. C. Berry, C. Smith, and M. P. Paganelli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 230–232; and Eric Schliesser, "Counterfactual Causal Reasoning in Smithian Sympathy," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 3 (2014): 307–316.

Grouchy considers a fundamental form of intersubjectivity. This is not an accident. While Smith has quite a bit to say about child development in his account of the senses and the development of language faculty, Smith paradigmatically treats social life as an exchange of needs and wants among approximate equals. That is, he associates dependency with feudal hierarchy. From Grouchy's perspective, Smith ignores the original dependency of infants on others.⁴ Another possible reading suggests that Grouchy is intuiting theories about human development and psychology that were not discussed until very recently, but that Smith, understandably, is not. This would be the concept of shared attention and the theory that infant development is tied to this capacity to communicate the object of one's needs to another human being.⁵

There are three further important disagreements between Smith and Grouchy. First, as noted earlier, for Grouchy, fellow-feeling with the suffering of others is central to her account of sympathy. We are motivated to relieve the misery of others because it makes us feel better to see their distress removed. Smith associates versions of such a view with the selfish hypothesis of Mandeville, Hobbes, and Rousseau, but it is fundamentally a naturalization, even a secularization of Christian charity. For Smith, fellow-feeling—often the outcome of a sympathetic process—is always pleasing; the desire for this (second-order) feeling is itself action guiding. This means that for Smith, we are driven in social life primarily to a certain kind of

4. This difference between Grouchy and Smith seems to anticipate, as Karin Brown noted in the introduction to the critical edition of Sophie de Grouchy, *Letters on Sympathy* (ed. Karin Brown, trans. James Edwards McClellan III, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 98 [Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 2008]), the arguments of care theorists who point out that the liberal values of independence fail to take into account the fact that no human being is independent throughout his or her life, and that we all require someone to care for us at some point or other.

5. We thank Mary Ellen Waithe and Heidi Maibom for suggestions that have improved his paragraph.

companionship and mutual accommodation, and without the mediation of language, are less prone to charity.

Second, we have noted that Grouchy is silent on the impartial spectator. But Grouchy also makes no place for, and completely ignores, one of the other central concepts in Smith's moral psychology: propriety. Judgments of propriety fundamentally are judgments of aptness about another's intentions, given the circumstances of a situation. This gives Smith's moral theory, when it comes to individual morality, a strongly deontic or even situationist flavor. For Smith, moral judgments are really about judgments of particular characters in particular circumstances. Because she bypasses propriety altogether, these features are absent in Grouchy's moral theory.

This is connected to a third difference. For Grouchy, a properly developed human being, who lives in a society that does not actively discourage sympathy—that is, with good laws and institutions and no excessive inequality—will feel sympathy for anyone who suffers. This is because, on her account, one learns to feel for humanity in general; this she associates with reason. For her, fellow-feeling with suffering is constitutive of the feeling of humanity, but it requires reflection and abstraction to become a true moral feeling. The full feeling of humanity—universal sympathy, which originates in a relation of dependency—is a social and intellectual achievement that we can all act on.

In Smith's writings, humanity is also an important principle of morality that transcends principles of justice and equity. But he treats it as a "soft power" (*TMS* III.3.4) and "soft virtue" (*TMS* III.3.37); that is, he thinks the feeling of humanity is motivationally weak. For him, we primarily sympathize with particular individuals, not with abstractions (this is very clear in Smith's criticism of Hume's moral theory). So, for Smith, the "dictates" of humanity can be proper norms of judgment, but they are rarely action guiding. This is probably the

case because, from Smith's perspective, humanity is associated with intellectual achievement and is too refined a thought. While Grouchy and Smith both advocate for public enlightenment, Grouchy is de facto more optimistic about its full possibility, once society's institutions have been properly reformed, than is Smith.

2.4 OTHER WRITINGS

Although we are not aware of existing manuscripts by Grouchy—indeed, even the manuscript of the *Letters* is lost, so that we had to work with the first edition—it seems that she did write more. In her testament, she left papers pertaining to financial matters and to Condorcet's oeuvre to her daughter, Eliza Condorcet O'Connor. But she left other papers—which we have not been able to trace—to her sister, Charlotte Cabanis. It is possible that among these papers were other manuscripts in Sophie's hand. We know that in 1792, she had started to draft a novel, but she didn't think it would be very good, as she wrote to Etienne Dumont:

As to the other mess, it contains as yet only a few weak traces of a development of character and passions, and that is not yet strengthened by any of the circumstances that make a novel interesting. One of the main causes of my laziness when it comes to working on it is (1) difficulty in obtaining good advice (will some arrive from overseas!), (2) the fear of not having the means of executing the ideas which, in other hands could enrich the subject matter, but in mine, will probably make it less.

This was the same letter in which she had asked Dumont to comment on the draft of the *Letters*. Dumont did not, apparently, offer