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THE MORAL THEORY OF CONDILLAC: A PATH TOWARD UTILITARIANISM

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Résumé

À première vue, les idées morales de l'abbé de Condillac (1714-1780) – et contrairement à celles de son frère Mably – ne doivent pas être comptées au rang de ses succès. Sans postérité apparente, elles ont surtout souffert d'un étonnant manque de notoriété dès le siècle des Lumières et ce jusqu'à nos jours. Aucun des grands commentateurs, contemporains ou plus anciens, de la pensée du philosophe ne s'y est arrêté avant que deux thèses de doctorat récentes ne viennent remettre en cause cet état de fait. Leurs interprétations des idées morales de Condillac sont cependant assez divergentes. La première s'appuie principalement sur l'*Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) et conclut à une forme particulière de morale déontologique. Celle-ci s'appuierait sur la connaissance du principe de conservation de soi, limitatif de la volonté et créateur de devoirs, au travers du langage articulé des êtres humains. La seconde, s'appuyant sur le rôle des besoins et le « calcul des plaisirs et des peines », tente d'inscrire la morale condillacienne dans une optique plutôt utilitariste. Cet article s'inscrit clairement dans cette seconde perspective. Il s'attachera d'abord à présenter en quoi les principes de l'association humaine (de « l'état de nature » au « contrat ») et de la morale sont chez Condillac le résultat de la nécessité de « se conserver », cette dernière notion devant être entendu au sens large de la satisfaction de tous les besoins de l'homme social. Nous verrons ensuite comment Condillac propose un véritable « calcul moral » qui conduit les

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individus à agir vertueusement tout en n'ayant pour objet que leur intérêt propre. Enfin, la conclusion inscrira cette théorie morale au carrefour des conceptions de Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui et celles des utilitaristes français de la seconde moitié du XVIII[e] siècle, les idées de Condillac constituant finalement un pas supplémentaire, par rapport au droit naturel, vers une morale conséquentialiste.
Mots-clés : Condillac, Morale, Droit naturel, Utilitarisme

Abstract
Contrary to the ideas of his brother, Mably, Condillac's thoughts on morality are not considered to be among his most successful undertakings. Right from the beginning of the age of Enlightenment until the present day, none of the great scholars who studied or continue to study his philosophical works have paid much attention to the author's thoughts on this matter. It took two recent Ph. D. theses to question this point. However, these two studies of Condillac's ideas on morality diverge somewhat. The first focuses mainly on his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) and concludes that Condillac had a specific deontological morality. The second interpretation, which bases itself on the role of one's needs and one's "estimation of pleasure and pain", tries to fit Condillac's notion of morality into a more utilitarian perspective. Clearly based on this last perspective, the first objective of this article is to present how the principles of human association (the "state of nature" and the "contract") and morality are linked in Condillac's works and how both result from man's need for self-preservation. We shall then see how Condillac proposes a true "moral calculation" which leads individuals to act in a virtuous manner, their sole objective being to satisfy their self-interests. We will conclude by fitting this moral theory halfway between Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui's conceptions and those of the French utilitarians of the second half of the XVIII th century, bearing in mind that Condillac's ideas, when compared with the ideas of natural law theorists, constitute a step forward towards a consequentialist moral theory.
Key-words: Condillac, Moral, Natural Right, Utilitarianism

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophical ideas of Etienne Bonnot, abbé de Condillac (1714-1780), are structured around three main axes. The first relates to the development of the Lockean theory of knowledge through

our senses. It was indeed Condillac's wish to complete his famous predecessor's project by eradicating the remnants of innatism he believed were present in the English philosopher's works (see Cassirer 1951, chapter 2). He set out to handle the Operations of the Understanding in particular. By eliminating the notion of "ideas of reflection", Condillac presented these operations as a transformation of the sensation, which he saw as a raw material, in the same way that he believed the mind should be considered, in its most primitive state, as a *Tabula rasa*. There is no need to demonstrate the success of this undertaking in Continental Europe and, concerning this point, the "French Locke" as he was sometimes called (Sgard 1981, p. 60) [1], saw his project through to completion. The second field is more methodological. It concerns the Condillacian theory of "analysis", or how to dismantle a concept and reconstruct it so as to understand how it operates and, in this way, create clear and new ideas. Condillac wanted to make this notion an absolute methodological principle, capable of understanding and reconstructing all of the science thanks to a *langue bien faite*. By using mathematics as a general framework for his "analysis", Condillac's theory became one of the leading trends of thought during the eighteenth century (see Knight 1968, chapter 2). The last domain on which Condillac left his mark at the turn of the century was definitely his ideas on education, particularly under the *Directoire* (1795-1799) and the *Premier Empire* (1804-1814). Whether it had to do with the teaching of grammar, logic or even mathematics, all the ministers and teachers of the time referred to Condillac's notions of learning, which he had developed in his *Cours d'études pour l'instruction du prince de Parme* (1775) and his *Logique* (1780) (Quarfood 2001, p. 52) [2].

1. Sgard recalls what Voltaire and Rousseau thought of Condillac. The former himself had no hesitation in hailing Condillac as "one of the leading men in Europe by virtue of his ideas", adding that he "could have written the book on Human Understanding if Locke had not done so, and thank God it would have been shorter" (Sgard 1981, p. 87). Rousseau also put him in the first of Enlightenment philosophers: "Let us suppose a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot, a Duclos, a d'Alembert, a Condillac, or men of this temper" (pp. 60–61). Is there any need to invoke the authority of F. Venturi (1971, p. 68) to recall that in the Continental Europe of the 1760s "everyone saw things with the eyes of Locke and of Condillac"?

2. L. Trenard (1982, p. 159) suggests that "more than Rousseau or Diderot, Condillac is the one who dominates didactics during the Revolution".

Contrary to the ideas of his brother Mably, Condillac's thoughts on morality are not considered to be among his most successful accomplishments. From the beginning of the age of Enlightenment until the present day, his moral ideas have suffered from a surprising lack of recognition. None of the great scholars who studied or continue to study his philosophical works have paid much attention to this [3]. It took two recent PhD. theses to highlight this fact [4]. However, these two studies of Condillac's ideas on morality diverge somewhat. The first one draws mainly on his *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746) and concludes that Condillac had a specific deontological understanding of morality. This last would rely on one's knowledge of the principle of self-preservation, will-restrictive, through the articulate language of human beings. The problem is that such an interpretation rejects as "incoherent" or "impoverishing" (Bertrand 1998, p. 311 and pp. 316-317) any passage taken from Condillac's *Traité des animaux* (1755) or from his *Cours d'études* (1775) which states that basic human needs generate moral ideas in the same way that an individual's moral behavior results from a well-planned calculation [5]. On the other hand, the second interpretation, which is based on the role of one's needs and one's "estimation of pleasure and pain", tries to fit Condillac's notion of morality into a more utilitarian perspective. It is a fact that I. Knight (1968) and L. Guerci's (1978) elusive remarks already referred to the "utilitarian" aspect of human association in Condillac's contractualistic fiction. However, not only do these scholars omit details on the philosopher's moral theory, but they do not discuss the place of the latter in the French utilitarian tradition either. Nor do they discuss the influences modern theoreticians of natural law have on Condillac's moral ideas.

Our first objective is to present how the principles of human association and morality in Condillac's works result from his

3. This is the case for S. Auroux (1992), G. Baguenault de Puchesse (1910), J. Derrida (1990), A. Lebeau (1903), G. Le Roy (1937), Ch. Quarfood (2001), U. Ricken (1982) and N. Rousseau (1986).

4. A. Bertrand (1998) and A. Orain (2004).

5. Condillac's whole argument in Chapter 7 of his *Traité des animaux*, which is entitled "Comment l'homme acquiert la connaissance des principes de la morale" ("How Man Acquires the Knowledge of Morality"), is thus swept away.

analysis of the state of nature. In this last, men are too weak and too disadvantaged, they understand immediately that they should cooperate if they want to fulfill their needs. The natural laws help them, thanks to perfect and imperfect duties, to ensure "self-preservation". But this concept has to be taken in its broadest sense and understood as the satisfaction of all of social man's needs (Condillac's definition of "happiness"). Next, we shall see how Condillac proposes a true "moral calculation" which leads individuals to act in a virtuous manner with the sole objective of satisfying their self-interests. By looking for their own "happiness" only, men will encourage the fulfillment of the needs of all. We shall conclude by fitting this moral theory halfway between Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui's conceptions and those of the Utilitarians of the second half of the 18th century, bearing in mind that Condillac's ideas, compared with natural laws, constitute a step forward in the direction of a consequentialist moral theory.

UTILITARIAN ASSOCIATION AND "NATURAL LAWS"

Chapter 7 of his *Traité des animaux* is entitled "How man acquires the knowledge of morality". In his very first sentences, Condillac interconnected the principles of human association to man's knowledge of what is fair or unfair.

> Experience makes it impossible for men to ignore the degree to which they would harm each other if, thinking of one's own happiness to the detriment of others, such an action were considered in a positive light since it would bring physical satisfaction to the one who did it. The more men ponder on their pleasures, sufferings and all the things they experience, the more they feel they must resort to mutual assistance. Thus, they commit themselves to one another regarding those things that are permitted or forbidden and their agreements evolve into laws which dictate their actions, and this is where morality begins. (Condillac 1755, p. 370a, 54)

These little fictions permit the introduction of the idea that "there is a natural law" (Condillac 1755, p. 370b, 37), because it is only thanks to the experiences of their natural faculties that this "agreement" is discovered by men. But what kind of experiences is he referring to? In other words, Condillac speaks about feelings, but

where does this "mutual assistance" *really* come from? The first part of the quotation is somewhat confusing: it seems to deal with the possibility of doing mutual harm. However, as we will see, according to Condillac's theory, men do not unite to escape a state of war: the philosopher considers human association to be a principle that differs from that of Hobbes'. In the previous quotation already, Condillac was only proposing a hypothesis, that of pleasure gained by someone at the expense of another. This is a possibility, not a fact (Condillac uses the conjunction "if") and, if the following sentence deals with suffering, it also mentions pleasure and experience in general. Two decades later, in his *Cours d'études pour l'instruction du prince de Parme* (1775), Condillac was more explicit, by placing his theory under the banner of the theoreticians of Modern Natural Law.

Here again, as in 1755, he interconnects human association and the knowledge of morality and provides us with more details about the natural laws he had only outlined in his *Traité des animaux*. This time, Condillac proposes a true contractualistic fiction.

In order to highlight the foundation of a social contract among men, the philosopher used in his *Histoire Ancienne* the theoretical framework of the state of nature[6]. In this, there is no law and there are no arts or governments "We will only observe in men those needs and faculties that have been bestowed by the author of nature" (Condillac 1775, p. 122a, 42). But there are no details about these "needs" and "faculties". We can however make a few remarks concerning this question. One should pause for a moment on Condillac's judgment concerning his predecessors in the field. The philosopher praises Grotius because, even if his book is not without faults, "his opinions were healthy: one cannot say the same of Thomas Hobbes'views" (Condillac 1775, p. 228a, 25). Condillac blames his excessive zeal for the monarchy, for power based on strength, which he assimilates to "despotism". There is in this an important feature for our object of study, because if Hobbes' conclusions are false, it is because his first hypothesis is erroneous:

6. A state of nature which he considers as a mere fiction (Condillac 1775, p. 122a, 47).

> In order to establish despotism, he seeks the principles of law in a state of nature which perceives human beings as being in a constant state of war. According to this hypothesis, it is obvious that the strongest individuals obtain whatever they want, that only force determines the character of the law and that, consequently, even the most unjust authority is legitimized if it is backed by force. (Condillac 1775, p. 228b, 15)

Condillac does not believe in a violent state of nature, and just after this statement he praises the work "as being the most methodical and the best reasoned argument that had ever been expressed up until that time", the *De jure naturae et gentium* of Pufendorf (Condillac 1775, p. 228b, 50). We know that Pufendorf discusses the Hobbesian state of nature from the point of view of the Bible and the history of Ancient peoples (Goyard-Fabre 1994, pp. 69-70) (Terrel 2001, p. 307). He wants to prove that a violent state of nature could not be deduced on this basis (war could only be an "hypothesis", and not the better one): during the first stages of humanity, peoples were so remote from one another and the land so vast that the occasions for conflict were rare. But there is a note of caution: his view of nature is not bereft of injury and violence (Goyard-Fabre 1994, p. 70). There are some "roguish and ambitious" men who create dissension, who turn against others, and it is possible that a balance of power occurs: "But it must be confessed that this natural peace is but a weak and untrustworthy thing and, therefore, that it is, without other safeguards, but a poor custodian of man's safety. […] The reason for that is the evil genius of men, their unbridled lust to increase their power, and their cupidity which menaces the possessions of others" (Pufendorf 1672, II, II, § 12). Actually, men are too weak and too disadvantaged in this state of nature. They understand immediately that they should cooperate if they want to survive. This sociability, the fundamental idea of Pufendorf's theory, is deduced from the utility of self-preservation:

> It is quite clear that man is an animal that strives to protect himself, and subject to his needs, and who is unable to survive without the help of his fellow-creatures. […] For such an animal to live and enjoy the good things that this world offers, it is necessary that he be sociable, that is, that he be willing to unite with others like him. (Pufendorf 1672, II, III, § 15)

From a state of war, Hobbes comes to a political solution, that of the State. On the contrary, Pufendorf has a moral solution: he defends the idea that men are too weak to survive alone (Larrère 1992, p. 35). Condillac is clearly attracted to the tradition of the latter.

Even if he considers the state of nature as a fiction, Condillac always takes "the most primitive stage of societies" or "the savages" as approximations of this abstraction. Thanks to the "examples" from the Old Testament, he explains that the first men did not do harm to each other, "because there were huge expanses of land that belonged to no one" (Condillac 1775, p. 14b, 25) and that "the first monarchies were too far apart to have to fight each other" (Condillac 1775, p. 18b, 26). As in the previous quotation from the *Traité des animaux*, Condillac wants to show throughout the *Histoire Ancienne* that competition, and even violence, is a possible element in nature, but not the common state of affairs (it is for this reason that men could experience pleasure and not only suffering). Pufendorf's[7] general idea of this state of nature is endlessly repeated[8]: if they want to survive, men need to meet and cooperate with each other. In other words, they must assist each other if they want to satisfy their needs:

> Too weak to insure their self-preservation on their own, men had no choice but to resort to mutual assistance. Thus, many agreed to live together and, this agreement was the very foundation of society […] The obstacles they had to face in order to insure their self-preservation were such that they had no choice but to unite. (Condillac 1775, p. 16a, 38 and 16b, 14)

Before this union, the freedom of each individual was unlimited, but it was incapable of fulfilling his basic needs. The birth of society

7. Burlamaqui develops this idea (1748, IV. 2): "Another primitive and original state, is that wherein men find themselves in respect to one another. They are all inhabitants of the same globe, placed in a kind of vicinity to each other; and it is only by mutual assistance they are capable of attaining a state of ease and tranquility. Hence we observe a natural inclination in mankind that draws them towards each other, and establishes a commerce of services and benevolence between them, is a state of union and society; society being nothing more than the union of several persons for their common advantage".

8. See for instance Condillac (1775, p. 15b, 18; p. 16a, 38; p. 16b, 14; p. 95a, 38; p. 123a, 45).

limited freedom for a precise goal: "to obtain, in exchange, the assistance that every individual required" (Condillac 1775, p. 16a, 57). To his young pupil, the Prince of Parma, Condillac explained that this movement is "natural" and "tacit": "acting in concert with each other, they all laboured to achieve the common good, and from that time on, everyone has limited the extent of his individual freedom" (Condillac 1775, p. 16b, 16). Then, the "manners" that seem to encourage this cooperation are introduced, "naturally" and "according to the circumstances". These "manners" were not written but they had the same strength as if they had been: "one can call them natural laws" (Condillac 1775, p. 16b, 43)[9]. At this moment, the philosopher stops reasoning and indicates in a footnote that he will give more details about them (that is, the "natural laws") in another part of his work. Several chapters later, but still in his *Histoire ancienne*, Condillac goes over police rules, civil laws and, finally, the natural laws. There are three of these:

> 1. "The first natural law is to worship God" (Condillac 1775, p. 122b, 1)
>
> 2. "The second natural law is that all men are born equal" (Condillac 1775, p. 122b, 11)
>
> 3. "As a consequence, the third is that all men have the same right to self-preservation, that no one should threaten someone else's survival and that one should do unto others that which he would have them do unto him" (Condillac 1775, p. 122b, 15).

We shall now deal directly with the last two laws[10]. So as to ensure survival, Modern Natural Law develops a universal ethic, but its maxims do not oblige people to do good, they mainly forbid them from doing harm (Larrère 1992, p. 27). In Pufendorf, this idea is clearly established and the German jurist insists on the right for

9. "They can be named *natural laws*, because man does not need to meditate to discover them" (Condillac 1775, p. 16b, 43). Any human being, because of his conformation and thanks to the understanding operations he develops, can apprehend them. Condillac, and in his time the following words are considered banal, explains that, since God made man, he gave him the means to know natural laws.

10. We will not study here the reasoning which leads men to have to love their Creator. We refer you to Chapter VI of the *Traité des animaux* (Condillac 1755, p. 365b ff).

safety. Is this the same in Condillac's theory? In his natural laws, and even if the third one is ambiguous, this is almost the case. But we shall see in the next section that Condillac wants to displace the problem: it is not so much to forbid evil or force the adoption of good, than to encourage rational beings to do good in their own interest.

Since all men are the same, they are subject only to God and, for that reason, they are equal. Condillac infers a third law based on this statement. The first idea derives from the previous one. We understand that equality among men implies the same right for each individual to defend his own life and, as a consequence, no one should threaten another person's ability to protect himself. This statement does not take into account the possibility of improving one's ability to protect oneself. The second idea ("that no one should threaten his fellow man") has a negative sense in that it is an obligation; and we can find exactly the same idea in Pufendorf (1672, III, I, § 1). The third statement is the "golden rule" expressed in Christian terms. It seems to contain hints of an obligation to contribute positively to the common welfare. However, how much should we "do unto others"? Following Grotius, Pufendorf makes a distinction between what, nowadays, we call perfect and imperfect duties [11]. More specifically, he distinguishes between "duties of justice", which originate from the *Droit rigoureux*, and "duties of humanity" or "charity" (Pufendorf 1672, III, IV, § 1). The first are necessary to create society and violating them is punished by an express or tacit law, whereas the second is needed to improve the welfare of mankind [12], but cannot be imposed by any authority. If these last laws are unenforceable, they remain, nonetheless, very necessary. "Natural law", "commits us to interest ourselves in the welfare of our peers" (Pufendorf 1672, III, III, § 1) [13]. Condillac

11. For a complete presentation of perfect and imperfect duties in the seventeenth century see Edmundson (2004).

12. "(B)e willing to join himself with others like him, and conduct himself towards them in such a way that, far from having any cause to do him harm, they may feel that there is reason to preserve and increase his good fortune" (Pufendorf 1672, II, III, § 15).

13. Pufendorf explains that "It is, indeed, a little thing not to have hurt another, or not to have taken from him his proper esteem, which things do but remove any just reason for hatred. But some benefit as well must be conferred upon another, if the minds of men are to be united by a still firmer bond" (Pufendorf 1672, III, III, § 1).

defends the same point of view: no one should harm anyone else, it is an obligation (*i.e.* the beginning of the third natural law). And even if there is no obligation to contribute positively to the common welfare in Condillac's third law, the statement "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" means that in each of his intentional acts, the agent must be careful of the external consequences that are generated if he does not want to violate the natural law. As in Pufendorf's theory, and at this stage of Condillac's thought, this imperfect duty is no less important to insure the promise of the birth of society: to fulfill the needs of every individual.

Now that he has explained the laws that govern society, Condillac explains that a "social contract" is established between men, but being a tacit contract only, it actually comes into existence as soon as needs push men to unite:

> And thus, they get closer to one another and find themselves committed, without having even thought of doing so beforehand. The contract is established and it is a social contract since it is the very foundation of this new society. It is an act through which everyone tacitly commits himself to others, and others to each and every person. (Condillac 1775, p. 123b, 3)

In other words, the association is the contract itself. In addition, equality being a natural law, men must still to be equal when the contract is concluded [14]. However, in a Lockean perspective, Condillac also explains that people's right to self-preservation implies that they enjoy the fruits of their efforts. "Yet, not everybody will work in a similar manner, nor show the same care and talent. As a result, the fruits of the people's efforts will not be shared in an equal way" (Condillac 1775, p. 123b, 34), and inequality will derive from equality itself. One must remain careful about what Condillac has in mind here: if men become unequal through wealth, they remain equal through their rights and the first of these rights is the "protection of society" (Condillac 1775, p. 123b, 48). This last expression cannot be understood in its criminal law sense only, that is to say, relative to mere civil equality. It must be taken in the

14. Condillac (1775, p. 123b, 19).

broadest sense of the word. The contract grants everyone their needs; society "owes everyone what they need to survive, and, as a result, the laws guarantee everybody's self-preservation without any distinction" (Condillac 1775, p. 123b, 50). This point of view is implied by Condillac's conception of men association. If men are equal in terms of their difficulty to satisfy their needs before they associate, they know that matters cannot possibly get worse once they agree on a social contract. This contract guarantees that, once they form an association, everyone will satisfy their needs with even more energy.

How can this happen? In the preceding quote, Condillac appeals to "laws", but what does this *really* mean? In other words, are the perfect and imperfect duties of natural law sufficient to realize the promises of the social contract? In fact, – and it is here that Condillac stops following Pufendorf – the notion of "self-preservation" is, according to his theory, not limited to guaranteeing safety or even a minimum of self-preservation. As we shall see, it covers all the passions and needs of mankind, even in developed societies. As a consequence, Condillac's moral theory deals now with "happiness" [15], that-is-to-say the fulfillment of all ours needs, as in Burlamaqui's [16] (Larrère 1992, p. 46, footnote 1, and p. 47), in a consequentialist way: the goal of morality is to maximize the happiness of individuals. In this respect, the three basic natural laws are no longer sufficient. We shall see that individuals must make real "calculations" that lead them, in both a natural and an artificial manner (through punishments and rewards) to act morally, that is to say, virtuously, towards their fellow men, so that the promise kept in the social contract can actually be realized. It is not really fear and mistrust which lead men to act in accordance with the principles of the contract but rather their enlightened interest and the first steps

15. Condillac uses the word 27 times in the *Traité des sensations*.

16. After Grotius, Hobbes and Pufendorf, Condillac gives no names, but he says that during the eighteenth century, "Much has been written on the law of nature and man; and the most important questions appear to have been sufficiently clarified" (Condillac 1775, p. 229a, 3).

of this way of thinking are explicitly rooted in late Modern Natural Law [17].

A MORAL "CALCULATION"

I. Knight [18] and L. Guerci [19] call the Condillacian principle of human association "utilitarian". Indeed, they establish a link between the natural sociability of human beings and the principle of action that the philosopher considers the root of all behaviour: that of pleasure and suffering. With the famous statue in his *Traité des sensations* (1754a) is established the idea – an idea that will be repeated over and over during the century – that man is only driven by the desire to banish suffering and seek pleasure.

> If man did not care about his feelings, the impressions that objects make on him would be like fleeting shadows and would leave no imprints. Years later, he would be the same person as on the first day, having acquired no knowledge and with no other faculty but that of feeling. But the very nature of his feelings takes him out of such lethargy. Since they necessarily are either pleasant or unpleasant, he is interested in seeking some of them and fleeing the others. (Condillac 1754b, p. 324b, 18)

Pleasure and suffering are man's only sources of understanding [20] and are the driving forces behind his desires and individual actions. In animals or human beings, it is the satisfaction of "self-love" that

17. Moreover, after having praised the Modern Natural Law theorists, Condillac expressed, in the same paragraph, that Natural Law is now only a part of a wider science of welfare, what he calls "public economics" "It is especially during the XVIIIth century that scholars concentrated on applying this sort of study […]. They wrote about governments, laws, public law, the art of negotiation, finance, commerce, manufacturing, agriculture, the art of war; in a word, about all the dimensions of public economy" (Condillac 1775, p. 229a, 19).

18. "Men can gain a higher ratio of pleasure to pain if they join together in cooperative effort than if each man pursues his own advantage in isolation from or in competition with other men. Society is founded on this utilitarian basis" (Knight 1968, p. 135-6).

19. "Anche delle leggi naturali viene data quindiun'interpretazione nettamente utilitaristica" (Guerci 1978, p. 168).

20. "Pleasure and suffering are the only principles which determine all the operations of his soul, and thus elevate it, progressively, to the level of knowledge it is capable of reaching" (Condillac 1754a, p. 225a, 42).

leads to this aversion to suffering and the quest for pleasure. However, at this stage, Condillac makes a clear distinction between the isolated man and animals, on the one hand, and social man on the other.

The statue[21] and the beasts[22] see animals dying in front of their very own eyes, but cannot grasp the meaning of death. For Condillac, the consciousness of death is not linked to a sensitive perception, like that of touching a lifeless body. This consciousness is the result of verbal exchange (Bertrand 1998, p. 286). Thanks to an articulate form of language, which differs from natural language (cries and pantomimes), human beings transmit to one another "everything they feel and everything they do not feel" (Condillac 1755, p. 372a, 40). As a result, each member of a community can try to ask questions to the person who has just died and realize that the person cannot answer. The dead "stop saying that they exist" (Condillac 1755, p. 372a, 45). What Condillac means is that, even if the suffering that death causes cannot be felt until the decisive moment, men know that it is the supreme form of suffering and that no other kind can be worse. "Consequently, self-love is not the only desire man has to banish suffering, it is the desire for self-preservation" (Condillac 1755, p. 372a, 48). Immediately after this sentence, Condillac explains that this self-love, specific to man, this desire for self-preservation, must be understood in the broad sense of the word: there are hundreds of ways of "preserving" oneself, according to one's needs and passions, one's individual rank and according to the historical situation of societies. Therefore, the "utilitarian" association, this natural sociability, is not the prerogative of all animal societies: it is thanks to their articulate language that men share their needs, their pleasures and sufferings. The

21. The statue's actions, in Condillac's famous experiment of thought in *Traité des sensations*, focus on one thing only, that of banishing pain, because it does not know what death is: "The universe is a theatre and it is only a spectator; it cannot envisage that, one day, it might have to shed blood on stage" (Condillac 1754a, p. 322b, 26).

22. Beasts are in the same situation as the statue, and are "incapable of thinking about themselves; it does not occur to any of them, seeing the others deprived of movement, that: they have reached the end of their lives and I will too one day. The notion of death is foreign to them; they only know life through feeling; they die without having planned on dying; and, when they struggle to survive, their main care is to banish suffering" (Condillac 1755, p. 372a, 23).

following passage, taken from Chapter 8, sheds light on the expressions used in the preceding chapter. It is together that men "reflect on their needs", together that they objectify their natural laws. And, indeed, once he has specified what makes man's self-love unique, Condillac comes back to the object of his *Traité*, that is, morality:

> But our self-love has yet another trait which cannot apply to that of animals. It is virtuous or malicious, because we are capable of knowing what our duties are and we can go back to the principles of natural laws. Animals'self-love is instinctive and only deals with physical good or evil. This very distinction allows us to feel pleasures and sufferings, notions which animals could not grasp, because virtuous inclinations are a source of pleasant feelings and malicious inclinations are a source of unpleasant feelings. (Condillac 1755, p. 372b, 3)

This quote gives a new structure to morality and the principle of pleasure and suffering. Indeed, we know that mutual assistance increases the level of individual satisfaction through the physical pleasures it entails (satisfaction of one's needs). But that is not all, because to "do good deeds" and to cooperate mean to act in a virtuous manner, and this is the source of another form of pleasure which is moral this time. Condillac explains that man is thus capable of experiencing a different type of pleasure than that of animals (and the isolated man), which he names the "moral qualities" of the objects [23]. These "moral qualities widen our vision of the objects around us, they constantly bring new pleasures, threaten us with new sufferings, create infinite needs, and, therefore, spark interest in us" (Condillac 1755, p. 372b, 54). From this point on, Condillac explains that men learn "not to differentiate between the notions of good and honesty, happiness and virtue" (Condillac 1755, p. 373b, 20), that is to say, between what pleases them and what complies with natural laws (Condillac 1948, p. 355a, 12). In these pages, the

23. "Moral qualities" belong to the category of intellectual pleasures and sufferings, but this last category is larger than that of moral feelings alone: "There are two kinds of pleasures and sufferings. Some are more particularly bound to the body; they are sensitive: the others are in our memory and in all the faculties of our soul; they are intellectual or spiritual" (Condillac 1754a, p. 227b, 21).

philosopher brings morality back to something which somehow resembles a "calculation". The actor feels pleasure and suffering according to the results his actions have on other men and on society. And he has to take pleasure and suffering into account if his own interests are to come first. Again in his *Traité des animaux*, Condillac adds that, indeed:

> *Our enlightened self-interest* [*Notre intérêt bien entendu*] leads us to correct our bad habits, and to maintain and even strengthen the good ones, and to acquire better ones still. […] One need only reflect on the repulsion felt after a crime is committed to provoke a sensation of repentance which torments us; and, likewise the peaceful and voluptuous feeling which accompanies all honest acts. One need only vividly imagine the consideration from which the virtuous man benefits, the shame of the malicious man; one need only imagine the rewards and the punishments which are their destiny in this world and in the next. (Condillac 1755, p. 375a and 377a, *My emphasis*)

Men are naturally inclined to do good deeds since it is in their best interest to act in a virtuous manner. The last part of the quotation offers three processes through which human beings feel moral pleasure or suffering and which drive them to include these elements in their "calculations". First of all, Condillac mentions that man "naturally" identifies the idea of pleasure with an honest action, and that of suffering with a malicious one. In order to understand this idea, we must refer back to a passage taken from Condillac's first work *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746). The philosopher imagines two children who wander around, each on their own and who cannot use any language. Then they encounter each other.

> When they lived together, their mutual company allowed them to associate the perception of each passion of which they were the natural signs of expression. They accompanied these cries with some movement, some gestures or some action, the expression of which was even more sensitive. For example, the one who was suffering, because he was deprived of an object that he needed, did not limit himself to uttering cries: he tried to obtain it, he shook his head, his arms and all the other parts of his body. His companion, moved by this spectacle, fixed his eyes on the same object; and, feeling sentiments pass through his soul of which he was not

> capable of understanding, he suffered from seeing this miserable being's suffering. From that moment on, he was interested in relieving him and he did all that was in his power to obey this sentiment. (Condillac 1746, p. 35)

As Rousseau did after him, Condillac seems to be invoking here "natural pity". He who sees another suffering cannot in fact "understand" what he is feeling, yet, he is naturally "moved by the spectacle". Here, Condillac is flirting with the future innatism of the citizen of Geneva, which considers that, in addition to the instinct for self-preservation, men are subject to feeling pity without necessarily understanding what it is [24]. One can also understand this as "sympathy", in the sense that the second child puts himself in the shoes of the other, interiorizing the needs of the first child. It is because he has been conformed in the same way and that he has experienced the same difficulties, that he is in a position to identify with the other child's feelings. If this is not precisely what Condillac is explaining, it seems that the phrase "he was suffering from seeing this miserable being's suffering" permits such an interpretation. This phrase indicates that the suffering of others provokes in us suffering. We understand, at that point, why the crime, the vice or any action which harms others can provoke suffering and influence our choices.

Afterward, the identification between virtuous or malicious actions and moral pleasure and suffering pass through a second element: one's opinion of others, that is to say, elements relative to "consideration" and "shame". To understand what it is about, one must this time search in the *Cours d'études*. Condillac, who was reflecting on the form of governments, explains the role of public opinion.

> Rights are established to maintain order; however, without disturbing this order, one does not need to do everything one can to maintain it; one can indirectly disrupt it […]. However, the culprits would have to face punishment; the judgment the public passes on them on account of their behavior is their punishment. And thus, one's opinion becomes a law which judges people's acts and of which civil law has no knowledge. Contempt causes

24. See J. Starobinski (1996, p. 724).

> suffering, whereas esteem brings a reward. (Condillac 1775, p. 117a, 43)

In this quotation, we return to the prevailing idea of the social pact: it is not because we do not commit any crimes or any offences that we act in a moral manner, and public opinion is there to remind us of this fact. It allows man to know and interiorize moral pleasure and suffering. Beyond his own feelings of what is right or wrong, public opinion enables him to make the right calculations, for himself and for society as a whole.

Finally, the third and last element which gives rise to our moral pleasure and suffering is granted to us through man's laws and God's laws. This is what Condillac calls "the rewards and the punishments in this world and in the next" (Condillac 1755, p. 377a, 32). Once again, he develops this point of view in his *Cours d'études*. It is not so much the civil laws which reprimand malicious behavior, "this is what indecency, insults, quarrels, etc. are", but "police regulations": "Just as it is the goal of civil laws to protect property and, consequently, to prevent crime, it is the goal of police regulations to maintain standards and, consequently, to prevent that they are lowered" (Condillac 1755, p. 120a, 33). Punishments (Condillac does not dwell on rewards), which public authority inflicts on us, cause moral suffering that we will have to consider in our "calculations" before we act in such a way that it violates natural laws. And it is not important if legislators have not envisaged some specific acts, because there are moralists who reveal to us what men's duties are – Condillac, in a way, comes back to the notion of public opinion [25].

Now, let us return to the notion of "calculation". In the *Traité des sensations,* the purpose of the statue was to balance pleasure and suffering before focusing on an object.

> Now that it understands through experience how to ease or anticipate its needs, the statue reflects on the choices it has to make.

25. "If the law does not apply to every case, there are wise men to interpret them, and, through their enlightenment, spread the knowledge which prevents the honest man from making mistakes with regard to his duties. No one can confuse vice and virtue any longer; and, if there are still some malicious men who wish to apologize, their very efforts to do so, prove that they feel guilty" (Condillac 1755, p. 375b, 30).

> It examines the advantages and drawbacks of the objects it has, so far, either fled or sought. It remembers the mistakes it has made through precipitous decisions, and for having blindly obeyed its first passions. It regrets not having behaved better. Now, it knows that it is its choice to regulate itself according to the knowledge it has acquired. It accustoms itself to use it and, little by little, it learns to resist its desires and to even overcome them. Since it is interested in avoiding suffering, it reduces the influence of its passions to increase the influence reason must have on its will and to become free. (Condillac 1754a, p. 300b, 5)

The same is true for the social man who must not only exercise his judgment on the physical qualities of the objects, but also on their moral qualities. Before acting, the human being living in society must calculate, in a eudemonist and consequentialist light, what consequences his acts will have on his pleasure-vs-suffering balance. From this point of view, Condillac considers that "malicious passions presuppose some wrong judgment" (Condillac 1755, p. 375a, 32), that is to say, that an error in their "calculations" drives men to violate natural laws. Indeed, the philosopher explains that moral pleasures and sufferings are superior to physical pleasures and sufferings [26]. Thus, choosing malice as a unique, immediate satisfaction, while violating good moral standards, causes one to run the risk of being subjected to deeper moral suffering than the initial physical pleasures it has procured. And, in the end, the hedonistic balance is very negative. On the other hand, those who are subjected to physical suffering, but who, thanks to their acts, improve men's well-being, will be rewarded with more pleasures than sufferings – through "sympathy", public opinion and public authority. To act in a moral way is to practice cooperation and to seek to amplify our fellow men's satisfaction. And what does Condillac tell us? That human beings'psychophysical organization, which enjoins them to seek pleasure and to flee suffering, constrains them to act in a virtuous manner.

26. "In a sense, in man's eyes, physical qualities, when compared to moral qualities, tend to vanish. The first can be at the root of our happiness or misfortune. The moral qualities alone can bring either one to a climax: from being probably good or bad, they always become the best or the worst" (Condillac 1755, p. 373a, 52).

To sum up, morality does not allow us to base our individual happiness on murder or plunder. There is nothing unusual in these words. But neither does it allow such behavior which, even if it were not deliberately harmful to others, would, nonetheless, be non-cooperative. Condillac adds that it is impossible to interact with our fellow men in order to satisfy our own needs without helping them satisfy their own, unless we do not know how to "calculate". From the agent's point of view, helping others brings optimal satisfaction. One may say that, for Condillac, one must strive for other people's happiness in order to achieve one's own. In such a configuration, the role that Condillac assigns public authority is twofold. Even if he never clearly says this, Condillac considers that the manipulation of public opinion can eventually influence one's behavior. However, he remains quite skeptical about the possibility of activating this lever and he concludes by saying that, if such a thing is not impossible, "some circumstances are required to condition people's opinions in order to start a useful revolution" (Condillac 1775, p. 120a, 13). Quite the contrary, Condillac is very explicit about the role of laws. By encouraging some acts and punishing others, the lawmaker can constrain the person most directly concerned to behave in a virtuous manner. This is what Solon managed to do. He encouraged the work and the industry of the lower classes and thus avoided overly important inequalities [27]. The modern lawmaker will have to do the same by liberalizing grain trade and the economy in general. In his *Le commerce et le gouvernement* (1776), Condillac proposes that punishing monopolistic practices of all kinds will lead to wealth and will allow the reduction of inequalities by reducing the luxury and fortune of the ruling classes (Orain 2003, p. 397 ff.). Here again, it will be the civil laws which will determine the behavior of the "calculators" and, for their own good, lead them to respect the natural laws.

As a theoretician of the human mind, Condillac wishes to insist on the fairness of judgment. Indeed, we have seen that the philosopher always presupposes that malicious acts are the result of an error of appreciation on our individual happiness. It is thus

27. See Condillac (1775, p. 127b, 28).

necessary, through education [28], to teach the social man to be a good calculator.

> We must begin by ignoring what we have learned so far, reconsider each *genre* and, in an orderly manner, all the ideas that we need to develop and precisely determine and accurately analyze them; not to mention comparing them and basing our judgment exclusively on the links that derive from these comparisons: in one word, we must almost learn again to touch, to see and to judge. We must reconstruct the system of all our habits. (Condillac 1755, p. 376b, 3)

The main principle of such an education plan is for the pupil to be aware that the ideas – that is to say, the arguments – that form his choices have to be rigorously determined before he makes any decision. If he manages to rid himself of his prejudices, to understand the wrong links in his ideas, which lead him to act in a malicious way, to discover the public punishments and rewards and those of the lawmaker, then, this young man will realize that virtue is at the root of immense pleasures. "If, in man's system of habits, there exists a form of disorder that does not exist in the animal world, then, it is possible to re-establish that order. It is for us, and only for us, to benefit from such an advantage and to protect ourselves from the drawbacks it very often entails. This is where we are infinitely superior to all other animals" (Condillac 1755, p. 377a, 52).

CONCLUSION: CONDILLACIAN MORALITY BETWEEN MODERN NATURAL RIGHT AND UTILITARIANISM

Of course, Condillac's moral theory poses two major problems. The first is linked to moral pleasure and suffering. If one leaves aside the case of people who have no pity or who take pleasure in other people's suffering – a case which Condillac does not consider – his thesis still poses other problems: there must exist some people who do not care at all about what others think of them. Besides, does the opinion which distributes either respect or scorn

28. "I get the feeling that education could prevent the vast majority of our mistakes" (Condillac 1755, p. 375b, 54).

remain unchanged, praising at one moment what it will despise the next? The second problem deals with the difficulty that confronts the actor in gauging the consequences of his act correctly. People often suggest this criticism against consequentialism in general: how can one know if his choices, the consequences of which are often quite broad, have improved or deteriorated his fellow men's situation? Unfortunately, and, like most of the 18th century French philosophers (Sève 2000, p. 82), Condillac does not penetrate the mysteries of calculating subjective preference, the consequences of which should be rigorously measured the way Bentham did at the end of the century. So, in his days, where does Condillac's moral theory stand and what can be said about his posterity?

Condillac's starting point is definitely the School of Modern Natural Right which has always sought to present a

> *media sententia* between virtue and happiness, duty and self-interest which, historically, is at the root of utilitarianism and of its first phase, theological utilitarianism, along with people like Cumberland, Gay, Brown, Tucker, Priestley and Paley. In a nutshell, by considering that, *at the same time*, natural laws are real laws or commandments dictated by God, from which man's duties derive, *and that*, since God is good, obeying these rules promotes our interests, the School of Natural Law establishes as a fundamental principle the duty to be happy. (Sève 2000, p. 80)

Of course, such a clearly stated position is to be naturally found in Burlamaqui's work. It is only later, in the second half of the century, that the rupture between "pure" utilitarianism, on the one hand, and "deontological" conceptions on the other (particularly in Kant's works) will occur. Condillac, who in many respects is close to Burlamaqui (Larrère 1992, pp. 44-45) [29], goes a step further toward future utilitarianism.

In the first place, and despite his own declarations on a natural law "which has its foundation in God's will", Condillac secularizes morality by adding immediately that we discover this law "through the sole use of our faculties" (Condillac 1755, p. 370b, 37). Indeed, the philosopher clearly rejects any religious arguments, as his

29. Among the modern theoreticians on natural Right, Burlamaqui is the one who gives a psychological orientation to this doctrine.

genesis of morality and, as a result, that of moral behavior per se can do without any mention of the Divinity. As A. Bertrand pointed out, for Condillac "it is not the idea of God that induces us to believe in the naturality of morality, it is the existence of moral laws which leads to the idea of God" (Bertrand 1998, p. 315). This first displacement in contrast with Modern theories on Natural Law, is followed by a second one relating to moral "calculation". Condillac will indeed systematize the idea according to which a human being respects natural laws *only* because he finds this self-pleasing. In so doing, he goes even further than Burlamaqui who embarked on this course only taking into account the sympathy operator[30]. If we consider Elie Halévy's typology (Halévy 1901, p. 22), Condillac's moral theory finds itself at the very intersection of these two theses. It relates back to the principle of "fusion of interests" in the sense that the moral qualities of the objects impose themselves on us through the "sympathy" factor which naturally leads us to be virtuous. However, this moral theory also fits into the principle of the "artificial identification of interests", since laws and public opinion can be modified, or turned around, in order to force individuals to feel moral pleasure or suffering and, as a result, behave in a virtuous manner. We can add that, through education, the foundations are laid for the teaching of a true "moral calculation" that will enable men to opt for virtue in a rational way.

We will find these elements a few years later in Helvétius and Beccaria's works: 1) the accomplishment of virtuous actions under the influence of an interest that is well-understood; 2) "the artificial identification of interests" through the lawmaker; 3) the intervention of a "deontologist" who will teach others to make correct decisions. However, the two aforementioned authors will radicalize Condillac's principles by eliminating the sympathy operator, by objecting to the idea of "moral qualities", and by reducing pleasure and suffering to sheer physical sensitivity[31]. If Condillac's influence

30. Burlamaqui insists a lot more on the sympathy process by explicitly quoting Hutcheson (*Principes,* Part II, Chap. 3, § 2). It is through this approach that virtuous actions bring pleasure to man, and that he is thus "naturally" driven (see *Principes*, Part II, Chap. 3 § 2).

31. See Audidière (2006).

on these authors has been shown repeatedly [32], it was important to demonstrate how his moral theory can be considered as a step forward toward consequentialism and is, in a way, the "missing link" between Burlamaqui and continental utilitarianism.

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32. Condillac's influence on Helvétius (and Holbach) is common knowledge, and, on this point, one can consult (Auroux 1997). Concerning Beccaria, this is what he writes to the Abbé Morellet (Venturi 1965, p. 14): "I have drawn much knowledge from Abbé de Condillac's works. They are masterpieces of precision, of clearness and of good metaphysics. Lately, I have had the honor of meeting him in Milan and becoming one of his friends".

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