

OBSERVATIONS  
*sur les méthodes employées pour enseigner la  
morale.\**

Pierre Prévost

*Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et  
Belles-Lettres de Berlin* 1780, pp. 414–429<sup>†</sup>

Aristotle<sup>1</sup> declares at the beginning of his treatise on *morals* that this study is not made for children & he understands under this designation the children of every age; because, he says, *it matters little that one is young through years or through character*. This exclusion was consistent with the plan of his work,<sup>2</sup> but he would not know how to agree in a general manner with all the treatises on morals. I avow that it is necessary to have passed through the paths of life in order to be able to sense the justice of the directions which must serve to lead us, but when these directions are given with simplicity one grasps them before making use of them. If this simplicity is lacking often to the moralities, I believe that it is necessary to seek the cause in the method which they employ in order to treat it.

The different methods which one can follow in the education of morals, appears to me to be reduced to three; the method of principles, the method of sentiment, the method of experience.

If the question was to pose the foundations of this science, one could object to me that these three methods are inseparables. Experience is to morals as facts are to physics; it can march only to its illumination & would be without it only a blind science; sentiment, according to some ancient & modern moralities, hold to our nature & is nothing but a moral sense, or but a kind of instinct which makes part of our faculties, which are born with us & is developed as they; according to others, sentiment is a quick & prompt perception of certain truths of reason or of experience of which the results are so present to our thought, that reflection is not at all necessary for us to feel their justice; so that, according to this opinion which is without doubt the most clear, sentiment is so to speak only a conclusion of which the premises are evident to the eyes of the one who forms it, or are at least supposed such. The principles of morals can

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<sup>†</sup>Read 14 September 1780.

<sup>1</sup>*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup>Morals, according to Aristotle, is part of politics. He addresses this treatise to his son, as Cicero addresses to his, the one *on duty*. Perhaps it is from Nicomachus himself, *non video cur non potuerit patri similis esse filius*. Cicero, *de Finibus*. V.5.12

be based only on the nature of man & on his relations. When one sees the basis on which morals rest, one must employ all means possible to know the agent & the effects of the actions to which one can prescribe the rules. Experience & sentiment, under any point of view as one envisages it, enters into this category. The first illustrates the morality on the sequences of human actions & the second on the nature of the agent which occupies it.

My end is not in these observations to add anything at all to the numerous treatises published on this subject; but to seek the most proper manner to teach this doctrine that some others have reduced to principles, & consequently it appears to me that I can employ all at once or separately the methods that I have indicated.

The nature of man & his end are the first object of the demonstrative method. At the beginning of this course the diverse sentiments of the philosophers of all time on these two fundamental points of morals is offered to the researches of the one who intends to study thoroughly the principles of it. To cede to authority & to arrange oneself under the standards of some particular sect was a common usage, but of which one has sensed abuse; to turn his attention on himself, to study to know oneself, to analyze one's proper heart is a long & painful study, much superior to childhood. To make a table of different systems & to leave the choice to reason, or, without refuting errors, to propose as truths the most probable opinions, to consider them as so many principles, is that which one has right to await from the instructions of a master sage. The rules of morals must be the consequences of these premises.

Instruction by experience is much longer & more difficult, if one requires that a disciple attributes from it only to himself. But he must be permitted to unite that of others, since both show equally the sequences of moral actions & that their effects differ only in intensity: the tests to which one can submit a young disciple would be limited or dangerous, example instructs without peril.<sup>3</sup>

Finally in order to move the heart, it is necessary to direct with art this natural sensibility which characterizes childhood, to make it find in itself the source of all its desires, to make it cherish the practical in it, to sanctify by habit the fecund principles of virtuous actions & by some repeated acts to determine the character.<sup>4</sup>

An example will render these distinctions more sensible. It is scarcely by virtue more noble or more extraordinary to the eyes of the man who reflected that this high degree of courage which carries to throw away his life on perilous occasions. We examine the causes which can inspire it.

The principles. Mornai<sup>5</sup> in the *Henriade*, similar to the heroes of the political, is intrepid in combats, because his life is prey to an inevitable fatality from it;<sup>6</sup> the opinion of a life to come would produce the same effect among the subjects of the elderly of

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<sup>3</sup>*Exemplis vitiorum quaeque notando. . . Translator's note:* So that I would avoid vicious faults by heeding bad examples.

<sup>4</sup>. . . *Sapiens vitatu, quidque petitu  
Sit melius, causas reddet tibi: mi satis est si  
Traditum ab antiquis morem &c.* Hor. Sat. I.4

"The philosopher will render to you the reasons each to avoid, to pursue: it is enough for me, if I can preserve the morals of my forefathers.

<sup>5</sup>*Translator's note:* This appears to refer to a figure in the poem, *La Henriade*, of Voltaire.

<sup>6</sup>The Turks think & act likewise.

Montagne & among those of that chief of a sect in Arabia<sup>7</sup> of whom the soldiers would wound themselves through obedience. The Epicureans on the contrary said that it is not necessary to fear death, because death is nothing & nothing can not be harmful.<sup>8</sup>

Experience can also produce courage. Here is how Xenophon spoke to the Greeks dismayed by the loss of their chiefs<sup>9</sup> “I have also remarked, fellow-soldiers, that such as are eager in the field to preserve their lives at any rate, for the most part perish wretchedly and ignominiously, while I see that such as reflect that death is to all men common and inevitable, and seek in battle only to fall with honor, more frequently, from whatever cause, arrive at old age, and live, while they live, with greater happiness.”

Finally when Charles XII,<sup>10</sup> emulator of Alexander, made the Turks tremble in his captivity, the quick sentiment of glory, & the habit of valor made the danger vanish & took the place of experience & principles for him.

The first two methods act on reason; the one by some anterior arguments, the other by some reasonings of fact & posterior: the third acts on the heart.

The philosophers of antiquity have much employed the first method & among the modern philosophers, the renovators of the Scholastic method. A good treatise of experimental morals is lacking to us & presumably it will be long time desired. But one has made usage always of the method of sentiment in order to teach true morals.<sup>11</sup> It is thus that from the height of the throne one must propose them to the people<sup>12</sup> & it is thus still that the poets & the eloquent writers work towards the progress of morals.

These examples must not be pressed too rigorously; it is nearly impossible to speak to the heart without illuminating the mind, & to instruct without touching, when it is a question of our happiness & of the one of our equals; one must therefore expect to find from custom these methods reunited; but one would not know how to deny that they can exist separately.

We choose in Society a man who has received an honest & liberal education, who has followed, without departing from it, the maxims of virtue which have been inculcated in him since childhood. We suppose that he has a great interest in committing a secret crime. What fear stops his arms? It is the persuasion that a supreme judge sees the secret actions & that they have some succession into another life. — I destroy these

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<sup>7</sup>Abu-Taher, chief of the Karmathes, a religious sect of Arabia, after having ravaged the country went to camp with 1000 men in front of Baghdad. Abusage at the head of 30000 said to him to surrender or to withdrawal: *your general has 30000 men*, said the Karmathe to the deputy, *Hoy! well you said to him on my part that he lacks three of them as mine*; at once one of his kind received the order to stab himself, & stabbed himself; another to cast himself into the Tigris, he cast himself into it; a third to cast himself from a high tower, he cast himself from it. Go, said Abu-Taher next, I am going to quarter you because you do only to obey your master; but count that you will see soon your master enchained among my dogs. *Hist. d'Asia, d'Afr. & d'Amér.*, cited in *J. Encycl. Juill.* 1771, p. 175. *Translator's note*: The Karmanthe were a Shiite Muslem sect.

<sup>8</sup>Lucr. *de rer. nat.* III.

*Nil igitur mors est, ad nos neque pertinet hilum.* *Translator's note*: *Death is nothing to us and no concern of ours.*

<sup>9</sup>*Anabasis* III.1.43. *Translator's note*: The English of the Bohn 1864 edition replaces the French text.

<sup>10</sup>*Translator's note*: Charles XII of Sweden ruled from 1697 to 1718. After being defeated by Peter the Great of Russia, he resided at Bender, then in Turkish territory, until 1714 where he continued to plot war..

<sup>11</sup>I have remarked above that it is thus that Horace have been instructed by his father. Some Scottish moralists has reduced this method to a system.

<sup>12</sup>Jesus Christ spoke with authority.

principles; have I destroyed its repugnance? Propose an assassination to this man of which the belief is perverted; see if he trembles with less violence. Let one demand of him the reasons for the horror that the murder inspires in him. How they will be offered in crowds to a man who thinks! that of examples of secret crimes that chance or human wisdom have produced in broad daylight! that of guilts are disclosed by imprudence or by weakness! How many hidden relationships enter a criminal action & the actions which follow it! between an instant & life! But suppose that the one who exposes to a temptation of this kind is not able to render account of these last motives which are some reasons of experience, will there not remain to him yet an insurmountable aversion for the effusion of blood? Would it not be necessary to give to his character a determination contrary to that which is the result of all his habits, in order to make him surmount this sentiment of horror which produces within the heart a sorrow as real & stronger than the torments of the body & which is rather known under the name of remorse & of conscience? It does not enter into my subject to decide the question that I have enunciated at the beginning of these observations touching the origin of this interior sentiment. Let one envision it as the result of our habits, this is indifferent in itself, since these habits are such that they produce it necessarily in some given circumstances, & as for the distinctions which occupy me, the contrary hypothesis would render them still more sensible; but this is not a reason to admit it.

If finally a character more marked to the three methods is necessary than I have designated, one seeks the motives to virtue & defined its nature according to some considerations strange to this life & often strange to ourselves; the other envisions nothing beyond our temporal interest, & the third participates in the two preceding, in this that occupied all of the interests of this life, it transports nonetheless in some way the individual outside of the circle of his egoism & force, in order thus to say, the individual virtues to be extended & to be elevated to a rank of social virtues.

If I have well defined the diverse methods which one can follow in the teaching of morals, this same definition must decide the degree of preference which one must give to each according to the differences seen in which we will wish to use them.

The method of the principles must appear at first glance the most certain & most beautiful. A profound study of the nature of man & his end seems to be that which must lead us to the knowledge of the truths which interest us; by envisioning the end one must be less separated from it & one must find the consequences in studying deeply the principles.

I wish not at all to press down a method that some great men have followed & that without doubt can lead to some discoveries; but I believe that it is no less proper to the young minds than to the mature minds, to teach the truth than to discover it. Different reasons permit me to believe it.

In reading the treatises of ancient philosophers, one is struck by the beauty of their precepts & by the singularity of their principles. As much as I love Plato proposing with grace & simplicity the maxims of his illustrious master, as much it seems frivolous to me when he wishes to base the edifice of virtue on his chimerical systems: the imitation of the supreme being, beauty, wealth, the ideal world & other brilliant but arbitrary conceptions can well amuse the mind, embellish the imagination; but in order to teach virtue, there is a simpler route, some details of Meno or of the first Alcibiades instruct more than these theories & the heart is more touched by them.

His immortal disciple offers us on the morals of the refined & judicious observations & in these mutilated works we untangle the philosophy which had lived among the men. The definitions of the virtues, the rules of conduct applicable to all times will make always to seek the moral works of Aristotle;<sup>13</sup> but what fruit to hope from these interminable researches on the good ruler<sup>14</sup> & on the end of man<sup>15</sup> to which this philosopher is abandoned? And who will believe that he necessarily employed much reasoning in order to conclude that man desires to be happy.<sup>16</sup> I know that he can push further these metaphysical discussions & that he arrives to demonstrate that an active virtue must be the common object of our desires.<sup>17</sup> If this definition of the good ruler seems to not merit the efforts that one has made in order to attain it, if the principles on which it is established are either less clear or more doubtful; & if the consequences which one draws from it are in reality only the results of experience, at least this principle is simple & less susceptible to equivocation than those of many philosophers who have enjoyed celebrity.

One does not know how to disagree, for example, that this idea of Zeno<sup>18</sup> that *it is necessary to live conformably to nature* has nothing grand & who imposes it; but study deeply his theory & you will see that by force of subtlety, this first dogma of the porch<sup>19</sup> was truly useless, one can even say ridiculous; because how to characterize by another name a principle that each follower enunciates & twists in his manner & from which one can deduce all that which one has rightly at heart to prove; so that, although it appears that nature ordains to the poor of life, one will say to him that death is less contrary than the theft of his organic constitution.<sup>20</sup> The passage that I cited is quite beautiful, but it demonstrates only better the inutility of the principles.

Aristotle<sup>21</sup> at least has need to warn his Readers that the objects of this kind are not susceptible of rigorous demonstrations: if all the philosophers had imitated his frankness, one would have less commission of errors; but one has believed sometimes that instead of the science one could supply by the *scientific* method. It appears that ordinarily one has envisioned the consequences before posing the principles. Because when one starts from the diverse or even opposed principles, if one arrives to the same consequences, it is without doubt very probable that these have been foreseen.

I will apply here a remark of the sage Locke. "That men should keep their compacts is certainly a great and undeniable rule in morality. But yet, if a Christian, who has the view of happiness and misery in another life, be asked why a man must keep his word, he will give this as a reason:- Because God, who has the power of eternal life and

<sup>13</sup>*Magn. mor. passim.* How much justice & finesse in the manner in which this philosopher determined the *maximum* of virtue! There is much truth in this comparison. From a given center it is easy to trace a circle, but to find the center of a circle already traced, is a less easy problem. See *Magn. mor.* I.9

<sup>14</sup>Locke judged thus on these researches: he finds also ridiculous to dispute on the good ruler, as to seek if the most exquisite taste is in pears or in apples. *An Essay concerning human understanding.* II.XXI § 55.

<sup>15</sup>*Ad Nicom.* I.

<sup>16</sup>*Ethic. Nicom.* I.5.

<sup>17</sup>*Ethic. Nicom.* 10.6.

<sup>18</sup>*Translator's note:* Of Citium in Cyprus. He flourished c. 300 BC and founded the Stoic school of philosophy. The name derives from the fact that he taught in the Stoa.

<sup>19</sup>*Translator's note:* The Stoa was a roofed colonnade with a wall to one side. Thus, it was as a porch.

<sup>20</sup>*Cic. Off.* III.5

<sup>21</sup>*Ethic. Nicom.* I.1

death, requires it of us. But if a Hobbist be asked why? he will answer:- Because the public requires it, and the Leviathan will punish you if you do not. And if one of the old philosophers had been asked, he would have answered:- Because it was dishonest, below the dignity of a man, and opposite to virtue, the highest perfection of human nature, to do otherwise.”<sup>22</sup>

We say finally sharply that the method that I attack as method of teaching is subject to this inconvenience, that it subjected morals to the errors of our theories & links it eternally to the prejudices which tyrannize us.<sup>23</sup> Say that since a divine religion has right to command us, the prejudices are more doubtful, it is to deny experience. However faint & pure that it can be in its principle, a religion is never offered to man without some impure alloy & the error has always shown from the height of the heavens its menacing head, *horribili super aspectu mortalibus instans*.<sup>24</sup> Without citing recent examples, the belief in a bloodthirsty God has made human blood flow on the altars, & when the sages have wished to preach virtue, it has been necessary that they unite with these monstrous opinions.

If one examines with care these supposed principles on which one wishes to buttress morals, one will perceive without pain that the liaison which one believes to see among the premises & the consequence is an association of arbitrary ideas; & if one seeks the source of it, one will find from two things the one, either that the philosophers who have found the truth have forced it to be amalgamated to the received dogmas; or that the dogmatic forces to admit certain truths have had another part to take only to envision them as some consequences of their systems. Whence I conclude that it is to desire that morals be taught without the systems, which in the foundation have often only an arbitrary relationship, of necessity of circumstances, & not of logical necessity.<sup>25</sup>

How much was this liaison between principle & consequence not loosened in the greater part of those philosophical doctrines which have had numerous & zealous followers. From the impossibility to attain to virtue, the Stoics had ought, it seems, to conclude that it was useless to pursue it:<sup>26</sup> they invented nevertheless a manner to appreciate the imperfect virtues, which according to their principles were indifferent & null.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup>*An essay concerning human understanding*. I.2 § 5. Translator’s note: Prévost claims to quote Locke here, but does not. Consequently, the actual text of Locke has been inserted.

<sup>23</sup>Helvetius makes another remark above. *De l’homme*. II. Sect. IX. Note 28. See also Xenoph. *Anab.* VII.7.

<sup>24</sup>Translator’s note: Lucretius I.65.

<sup>25</sup>Who doubts that our Moralists who declare slavery contrary to natural law, have not with the same good faith sustained its legitimacy if they had lived 2000 years ago? and that the same estimable philosopher who affirms that *a person is not born enslaved, only a person can become enslaved* (*Phil. mor.* p. 167) had said with Tribonien, *servi nascuntur aut fiunt?* (§ 4. *Inst. de jure perf.*) Those of whom fortune depends on commerce with Negroes find that it is based on natural Law. — One is pitied at Rome in the time of Nero, that the doctrine of the other world that some would wish to introduce, excited the greatness of soul, cooled the soldiers, rendered them more timid and more uncertain, took off the first consolation to the unhappy, doubled finally death by producing fear to suffer again after this life, See Pliny cited *hist. crit. de la phil.* by Deslandes I. p 359. — It is the sentiment that Euripides set in the mouth of Macaria. *Heraclid.* v. 594.

<sup>26</sup>See Lucian *περι αἰρεσιων* I. p. 426. *Basileae* 1555 & *al. passim*.

<sup>27</sup>I avoid by design to enter into subtle distinctions that one can see among others *Finib.* III *pass.* Diog. Laert. in *Zeno*: a purely speculative & inaccessible virtue, a perfect & imaginary sage, of the duties of an absolute & impracticable *rectitude* would have been proper only to repulse the man who senses his weakness, if Zeno had not bent the rule & had not admitted some distinction among the mean or indifferent Actions. *Ita*

Cicero wishing to give to his son a treatise on morals truly practical, & applicable to the usages of life, abandons the preliminary questions by which his predecessors opened the entry of this Science. If one has too exalted the merit of this work, it is at least only by his conforming to the Stoic distinctions that one has been able to deny that in the intention of the author this is a complete system of morals.<sup>28</sup> The word *officia media* which Cicero employs in speaking of the duties of which he treats, signifies not at all that these duties are of little importance, since all the duties which are attributed to civil life, such as they can be practiced humanely, are contained under this denomination.<sup>29</sup> The researches on which the philosophers occupied themselves in his century & that Cicero had made himself, were on foundations little proper to support the edifice which he wished to raise.<sup>30</sup> He reserved for other treatises<sup>31</sup> these abstract discussions & he envisioned morals as a noble & independent science, which is sufficient in itself & which wants for support only *sentiment & experience*.

In the plan of this treatise the method of experience is applied easily to this part of our duties which is based on utility. But in the part where one is occupied on that which is beautiful & honest, how to employ it? this is not always possible; one lacks experience, one lacks combinations, experiences are difficult & too often little conclusive. What makes then morality? it is addressed to our heart<sup>32</sup> & forces us in some way to confound our proper interest with general interest, it supplied to the weakness of our reason through enthusiasm of virtue.

It is thus that Seneca excites understanding.<sup>33</sup> *Praise God that we could prevail on men to never use coercion against their debtors! to employ in contracts no formality & to commit of it the execution with justice & with good faith. But it would be more unprofitable if one had not at all action against them: No, it would be less, one would place better his kindness. — Eh! what! unprofitable must it be unpunished? Eh! what! impiety is it unpunished? the merchant, the miser, the weak, the cruel are they unpunished? — You give the name of unfortunate to the one who is deprived of the sense of sight or of hearing, & you will not call unhappy the man who has lost the sentiment of kindness?*

With what nobility, with what energy Cicero raises the dignity of man, & the scorn of the voluptuous!<sup>34</sup> as it inspires the love of glory, even prescribing to him some

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*est quoddam commune officium sapientis & insipientis, ex quo efficitur versari in iis quae media dicamus. Sec cum ab his omnia proficiscantur &c. Fin. III.*

<sup>28</sup>Hutcheson, *moral phil. pré.*

<sup>29</sup>*Off.* III 3.4 & I.3 & *Fin.* III.33 *Coll.* & de *Fin. passim*. By comparing these citations one will be assured that this distinction is only a subtlety of the porch & can not at all serve to prove that Cicero has taken the feather only in order to recommend to his son some virtues of little importance. I agree that, as Hutcheson says, this work is particularly destined to those who are called to replenish the first employed in the administration of the States (*Off.* I.21 & 42) but not exclusively, & I deny that all is attributed to glory & fortune. See *Off.* I.24. Item I.19. *Vera autem & sapiens animi magnitudo honestum illud quod maxime natura sequitur, in factis positum non in gloria judicat, principemque se esse mavult quam videri.*

<sup>30</sup>*Off.* 2.10. Laelius 5. *Negant enim quemquam virum bonum &c.*

<sup>31</sup>De Nat. deor. de fin. de Leg. Tuscul.

<sup>32</sup>*Off.* III.7 Ut geometrae solent &c.

<sup>33</sup>Sen. *Benef.* III.15. *Translator's note:* Prévost gives a very loose translation of Seneca.

<sup>34</sup>*Off.* II.1 *fin.*

boundaries!<sup>35</sup> As tyranny faded!<sup>36</sup> *Capitalis Eteocles* (says he in citing a word of Euripides who excuses the usurpers) *Capitalis Eteocles vel potius Euripides, qui id unum quod omnium sceleratissimum suerat exceperit. — Potest enim, Dii immortales! cuiquam esse utile foedissimum & terribilimum parricidium patriae, quamvis is qui se eo obstrinxerit ab oppressis civibus*<sup>37</sup> *parens nominetur. . .* I could perhaps undertake to justify Euripides & to put him to cover this formidable anathema, but absorbed in the grandeur of this sublime thought, I am forced only to admire it.

To this method of sentiment is attributed the authorities of illustrious men that one proposes as models. And in this genre again Cicero has a great advantage, it is that he can himself cite himself. He belongs to the great men to speak of virtue: their example & their authority persuade better than the finest dialectic.

The method of sentiment differs from that of experience not only by its nature (because one acts on the spirit & the other moves the heart) but yet by its extent. “The great principle of morality,” says Locke, “ ‘To do as one would be done to,’ is more commended than practiced. But the breach of this rule cannot be a greater vice, than to teach others, that it is no moral rule, nor obligatory, would be thought madness, and contrary to that interest men sacrifice to, when they break it themselves.”<sup>38</sup> Without admitting his opinion, without stopping myself to refute it, I cite this incidental remark, because it explicates the nature of the truths of sentiment & their influence on conduct. Is it useful to each individual to follow this rule of morals? This is a question. Is it useful to each individual that the other men follow this rule in his regard? This is an axiom. It is therefore to the heart that it is necessary to engrave it & to make it degenerate into habit.

But we avoid the generalities & try to indicate some way to fix the rules which experience prescribes to us & to determine those that one must commit to sentiment.

I myself attach to the treatise of Cicero, however imperfect that is can be, because it is very generally known & because it has the advantage to be at least impartial in regard to modern opinions. In admitting his divisions of duties, which is essentially that of Panaetius<sup>39</sup> & of all the Stoics, I would wish to give more precision to the two fundamental ideas which make the base of it. Cicero employs an entire chapter to define the word *honest* & in order to summarize this description he borrows a good expression of Plato.<sup>40</sup> The duties relative to *utility* are explicated with more clarity.<sup>41</sup> Here is

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<sup>35</sup>*Off.* II.12 & *al. pass.*

<sup>36</sup>*Off.* III.21. *Translator’s note:* Cicero never mentions Eteocles, a character in *The Phoenician Women* of Euripides.— “For, oh ye immortal gods! can the most horrible and hideous of all murders – that of fatherland – bring advantage to anybody, even though he who has committed such a crime receives from his enslaved fellow-citizens the title of “Father of his Country”? Expediency, therefore, must be measured by the standard of moral rectitude, and in such a way, too, that these two words shall seem in sound only to be different but in real meaning to be one and the same.” (Trans. of Cicero by Walter Miller)

<sup>37</sup>Apropos of Caesar who takes the name of *father of the people*. *Translator’s note:* This phrase is indeed used in *Off.* III.21.

<sup>38</sup>*An essay concerning human understanding* I.2 § 7. *Translator’s note:* The actual text of Locke here replaces the text Prévost claims to quote from the author.

<sup>39</sup>*Translator’s note:* Lived c. 180 to c. 110 BC, of Rhodes. He greatly influenced Roman thought. Panaetius was the author of a lost treatise On Duties on which Cicero based his *De Officiis*.

<sup>40</sup>*Formam autem ipsam, Marce fili, & tanquam faciem honesti vides, quae si oculis cerneretur, mirabiles amores, ut ait Plato, excitaret sapientiae.* *Off.* I. 5.

<sup>41</sup>*Pertinent ad vitae cultum & ad earum rerum quibus utuntur homines facultatem, ad opes, ad copias.*

the simple determination which I would love to substitute for these vague definitions. *Utility* is that which is returned to our personal interest: *honest*, is that which tends to general utility.

If these notions are as just as they are clear & intelligible, it will cost us little in order to pose the limits of sentiment & of experience envisioned as moving from virtue. Experience, always exact & calculated, furnishes the precepts relative to utility: sentiment, which overheats the heart & dilates it, must be joined to experience in order to inspire the virtues which are attributed to honesty.

Here is presented a question often discussed & supremely interesting. That which is honest, is it also useful? or in other terms, does that which makes the general good make the particular good? is virtue always reasoned? — I myself abstain to cite here the severe authorities of the philosophers of all the ages & nearly all the sects which have terminated this question without resolving it. Indeed would it suffice from this beautiful word of Cicero who says that *the imagined distinction between honest and useful is the most deadly curse which afflicts humanity?*<sup>42</sup> would this be enough to affirm in order to convince?

There remains a labor to do & it is the work of the philosophers & of the times, a labor of which the importance would outweigh the difficulties & that one can not delay to undertake. To elevate on one side the edifice of the social virtues & on the other the one of the individual virtues; to compare these two edifices; as much as it is possible to give them the same base; to mark with frankness the feeble parts & which threaten ruin. But where to find the Architects capable & disinterested?

In order to form a table of the social virtues the enthusiasm & the wisdom of a Cosmopolite are necessary qualities. Superior to the vulgar opinions as the universe is to a people, he would trace the route of felicity & each action would be sorted in proportion to the good that it procures to human kind. He would keep at hand the flame of experience, the eye of the calculation would direct his march, impartiality his judgments.

Will I cite an example of the useful reforms that he would dare to undertake? I see some crimes fading away & some virtues disappearing, an action set at the first rank of justice or of wickedness makes room near for indifferent actions, & such that one envisions with difficulty, takes a character of grandeur or of deformity. To enter here in more detail would be to usurp the title of reformer.

I will observe only that it would be especially important to distinguish well the general & common interests to all the individuals from those which are particular to certain classes of men. “The philosopher, for example, has some needs & some interests that know not vulgarity; the necessity of not refuting in public the principles that he has preached in obscurity & the habit to love virtue for itself. Some men of this kind would be the happiness of a nation.”<sup>43</sup>

A modern philosopher who has outlined a Course of morals where there are more fine & profound views than in many voluminous works, terminates it by a vow which causes to sense the importance of a method of which I occupy myself. He would wish

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*Off.* II.1.

<sup>42</sup>*Off.* II.3

<sup>43</sup>*Traité des délits & des peines* § 41. Demosthenes says the same. *Philipp.* 4.

that a Citizen philosopher was for the children a Catechism<sup>44</sup> of morals. It is in this respectable view that a dialogue has been composed of which I will cite only a phrase quite proper to characterize its august Author: *It is good to do the unprofitable, it is infamous of the being.*<sup>45</sup>

But besides the end of it is particular,<sup>46</sup> I believe that there remains to make many observations before ending a work of which perfection demands the experience of many centuries. If ever one undertook it, one will establish it on facts, & one will be aided by the calculus, but it is in the heart that one must engrave the results.

It is important to observe here that it is of the cases where experience & the calculus is applied so with difficulty that they can not give useful and certain results. Sometimes *the number of unknowns is too great proportionally to the number of knowns. . . Man is of all terrestrial beings the most complicated.*<sup>47</sup> An example will be able to serve to indicate the cases where this observation is verified.

I suppose that in laboring to give to our moral principles a more assured base, one wished to fix the degree of value that one must attribute to money, the ratio which exists between the increase of the wealth of a fortune & the enjoyments which they procure. I do not believe that one was able to reduce this estimation to a general formula, without regard to the fortune & the state of each individual,<sup>48</sup> nor to affirm, as one has made,<sup>49</sup> in a universal manner what *2 is in the moral & in reality only the  $\frac{9}{5}$  of it, that two thousand Livres are only eighteen hundred Livres &c.*, because by admitting this principle the unfortunate who has only one thousand sous per year with which he dies from famine, would not be two times richer with two thousand sous which would give to him a comfortable life; according to this same principle the millionaire who has all the possible pleasures that money can procure to him, would nearly double these pleasures in doubling his fortune. Without entering into detail of the reasoning which had led to this consequence, we say that it is impossible to give the expression of a similar formula which is applicable to all men & in all cases, because the same proportion which takes place for me, has no place for my neighbor: better; the proportion which exists in this instant, does not exist in the instant which is going to follow. Beyond the degree of our pleasures is a quantity with appreciable difficulty.

It is from a solution of a question relative to chance which one has believed possible to deduce this appreciation of wealth. But it appears to me that this game of Pierre & of Paul proposed in the Mémoires de Petersbourg<sup>50</sup> & on which M. de Buffon has based this theory, can not serve him as base. One has moreover forgotten an essential consideration in the solution of this problem; another consideration which one has indicated is susceptible perhaps of new clarifications. These two considerations hold to two tacit hypotheses on which rests the estimation that the calculators make the

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<sup>44</sup>*El. de Phil.* p. 139

<sup>45</sup>Translator's note: *Dialogue de morale à l'usage de la jeune Noblesse* (1770) by Frédéric II le grand, p. 29.

<sup>46</sup>This dialogue de morale is dedicated à la jeune Noblesse.

<sup>47</sup>Bonnet, *Paling*. Vol. II p. 243.

<sup>48</sup>Dan. Bernoulli estimates the value of money relative to fortune of the one who expects it. *Mém. de Pétersb.* V.

<sup>49</sup>*Oeuvres de Buffon* in X. *Essai d'Arithm. morale* p. 129.

<sup>50</sup>T. V. ad annos 1730, 1731. p. 290.

fortuitous gains. I will try to develop them in another Memoir.<sup>51</sup>

In awaiting I will observe that the 2048 Experiences which Mr. de Buffon<sup>52</sup> has made have given a very small result for the expectation of Pierre. One can repeat these Experiences with ease by playing at *pair ou non* on the Numbers exiting from some Lottery. I have counted in this manner what would have been the lot of a player who would have made a similar Game on each of the numbers exited successively in the drawings from the Loterie Royale de France<sup>53</sup> since its creation to the 103<sup>rd</sup> drawing, this which makes in all 512 Games. Wagering therefore for *not even* in the same conditions that Pierre had supposed for *heads* in the Experiences of Mr. de Buffon; I have found that the 512 Games would have produced in this game the sum of 6350 Écus. This which makes around twelve Écus & half for the stake of each Game, in estimating it as Mr. de Buffon, that is to say, by dividing the total product by the number of Games. The Experiences of Mr. de Buffon had given only about five Écus for each stake.

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<sup>51</sup>See the Memoir following on the principles of this calculation.

<sup>52</sup>*Essai d'Arithm. mor.* p. 123

<sup>53</sup>From 90 Numbers, & of the form of the Genoís Lottery.