



Pleasure in Sophie de Grouchy (1764–1822)

Karin Brown

San José State University

Sophie de Grouchy provides a moral theory based on sympathy. With the object of showing to what extent sympathy is grounded in human nature and in our physiology, she traces its origin to sensations of pleasure and pain. Similar to the mechanism of pain, earlier on as infants, we experience a specific pleasurable sensation at the hand of our caregivers, which is then followed by a general impression of pleasure that can continue to exist without the immediate pleasurable stimulus and can be renewed by the memory or sight of pleasure. Feeling pleasure upon seeing another person's joy is what is meant by having sympathy for another's well being. De Grouchy notes that the pleasure we feel when sympathizing with another's well being is even more intense had we been the ones who contributed to their happiness. It follows, as de Grouchy argues, that virtuous actions are pleasurable in and of themselves.

She claims that not only do we feel pleasure in doing good, but we also feel pleasure in having done good which becomes a "general and abstract sentiment". In essence, this general and abstract sentiment enables the long-lasting satisfaction of having done good and thus creates a moral inclination to do good. This inclination continues in following reason, and we feel pleasure in carrying out a moral obligation as well. Moreover, de Grouchy argues that similar to physical exercise, exercising and perfecting our moral faculties is a pleasurable activity and a source of personal empowerment. De Grouchy's concept of pleasure links morality and happiness such that our goodness is certainly an important component of our well being. In the end her goal is to argue that virtue is a natural and pleasurable disposition whereas vice results from corrupt social institutions and not human nature.

Primary Sources:

Brown, Karin & McClellan, James E. 2008. *Sophie de Grouchy Letters on Sympathy (1798): A Critical Edition*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society.

Secondary Sources:

Forget, Evelyn J. 2001. Cultivating Sympathy: Sophie de Grouchy's Letters on Sympathy, in: *The Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 23, 319–337.

Keywords:

pleasure, pain, suffering, sympathy