ECC

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by Women Philosophers

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Progress in Anne Sophie Swetchine (1782–1857)

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Following Chateaubriand's social apologetics for Catholicism, Mme Swetchine argues that Christianity is the principal motor of progress in civilization. It exerts its formative social influence indirectly through the moral illumination and conversion it operates on the individual human conscience: "Christianity has transformed the world by transforming the conscience. This occurs in the human heart; it penetrates the heart's most hidden folds. It only tries to save souls, but by an admirable chain of events and in an indirect but infallible way, what it brings about in the individual overflows on the entire society" (1875: 228). Christianity's struggle against the evils of pride and covetousness fostered society's welfare programs for the poor. The abolition of slavery flowed from the gospel's sense of charity and human dignity. The philanthropy of the eighteenth-century *philosophes* is drawn from Christian sources, despite their avowed anti-Christian positions. Like other *catholiques libéraux* of the period, Swetchine argues that Christianity cannot be identified with any particular political regime; it can co-exist with monarchy, aristocracy, or democracy. Its political influence must remain an indirect moral one.

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