

Appendix: 'Philosophe'

Other men are impelled to act without feeling or knowing the causes which lead them to do so. The *philosophe* on the contrary works out the causes as far as he can, and often even anticipates them, and accepts them with understanding: he is like a clock which, you might say, sometimes winds itself up. So he avoids objects which can arouse in him feelings which are not conducive to well-being or to being a reasonable person, and seeks those which can give rise to reactions on his part which fit in with his own situation. Reason is, for the *philosophe*, what grace is to the Christian. It is grace which impels the Christian to act; it is reason which impels the *philosophe*.

Other men are swept along by their passions without reflecting before they take action: they are men who walk in darkness; on the other hand the *philosophe*, even in his passions, acts only after reflecting; he is walking at night, but there is a torch in front of him.

The *philosophe* bases his principles on an infinite number of particular observations. The people adopt the principle without thinking about the observations which have led to it: they think that the maxim exists as it were on its own, but the *philosophe* goes back to the sources of the maxim; he examines its origins, he knows its true value, and uses as much of it as suits him.

[From this knowledge that principles are derived only from particular observations the *philosophe* derives a respect for the science of facts; he likes to learn about details and about all that is not guesswork; so he considers that a mind which concentrates on meditation alone and which holds that man arrives at the truth from within himself is a fundamentally unenlightened mind.]²

For the *philosophe* truth is not a mistress who corrupts his imagination and which he believes he can find everywhere; he limits himself to being able to distinguish it when he can perceive it. He does not confuse it with probability; he takes as true what is true, as false what is false, as doubtful what is doubtful and as probable what is only probable. He does more, in that a great strength of the *philosophe* is that, when he has no reason to judge, he can suspend judgement.

So the philosophic mind concentrates on observation and precision, which take everything back to its fundamental principles; but it is not only the mind which the *philosophe* cultivates, his attention and his concerns go further than this.

² Square brackets here indicate a summary of a passage that has been omitted.

Man is not a monster who must live only at the bottom of the sea or in the depths of a forest. The needs of everyday life mean that he needs to associate with other people; and whatever his circumstances may be, his own needs and well-being commit him to living in society. Therefore reason requires him to know, study and work to acquire sociable qualities.

Our *philosophe* does not think he is in exile in this world; he does not think he is in a hostile country; as a sensible manager he wants to enjoy the benefits which nature offers him; he wants to find pleasure in the company of others; and to find this he has to give it; so he tries to fit in with those among whom he lives by chance or by his own choice; and at the same time he finds what suits himself: he is a civilized man who wants to give pleasure and make himself useful.

Most people of high rank, whose many activities do not leave them enough time for meditation, are ferocious to those who in their view are not their equals. Ordinary philosophers who meditate too much, or rather who are bad at meditation, are ferocious to everyone; they escape from men and men avoid them. But our *philosophe*, who is able to divide his time between solitude and human society, is full of humanity. He is like Terence's³ Chremes who feels that he is a man and that his very humanity makes him concerned with the bad or good fortunes of his neighbour. *Homo sum humani a me nihil alienum puto.*⁴

It should be unnecessary to point out here how much concern the *philosophe* has for everything called honour and integrity. Civil society is in a sense a divinity on earth to him; he praises it warmly, honours it with integrity, with exact attention to his duties and by a sincere desire not to be a useless or tiresome member of it. Feeling for integrity plays as great a part in the mechanical constitution of the *philosophe* as the enlightenment of the mind. The more reason you find in a man, the more integrity you find. On the other hand, where fanaticism and

³ Publius Terentius Afer (Terence c.190–159 BCE), a Roman playwright. Chremes was a character in his play *Heauton timoroumenos* (*The self-tormentor*).

⁴ I am a man and nothing which is human is foreign to me.

superstition dominate, passions and anger dominate. The *philosophe's* temperament is to act according to a sense of order or to reason; as he is strongly attached to society, it is much more important for him than for other men to do everything that he can to produce only effects which fit in with the idea of a civilized man. There is no fear that, because no one is keeping an eye on him, he will embark on an action which betrays his integrity. No. Such an action in no way fits the mechanism of a civilized man; you might say he is kneaded with the yeast of order and rules; he is filled with the idea of the good of civil society; he knows the principles of it better than other men. Crime would be too much against his nature, he would have to destroy too many natural and too many acquired ideas. His capacity to act is, as it were, turned to a certain note like a string of a musical instrument; it cannot produce a different one. He is afraid of being out of tune, of not being in harmony with himself; and that reminds me of what Velleius said of Cato of Utica:⁵ 'He never', he said, 'did good actions in order to be seen to be doing them, but because it was not in his nature to act otherwise.'

This love of society, which is so essential to the *philosophe*, shows how true the Emperor Antoninus'⁶ remark was: 'How happy peoples will be when kings are philosophers or when philosophers are kings!'

The true *philosophe*, then, is a civilized man who acts in all things according to reason, and who combines a spirit of reflection and precision with social manners and qualities. Graft a sovereign on to a philosopher of like quality and you will have a perfect sovereign.

Source: Anonymous (1765) 'Philosophe', in D. Diderot (ed.) *Encyclopédie*, vol.xii, Paris, pp.509–11; trans. S. Clennell.

⁵ Velleius was a character in a work by the Roman orator, Cicero. Cato of Utica, 'the conscience of Rome', was a Roman statesman.

⁶ Titus Aurelius Fulius Antoninus Pius (CE 86–161), Roman emperor.