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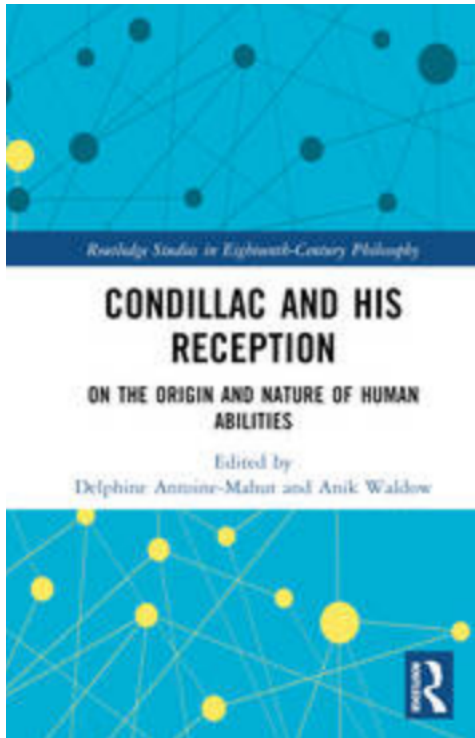
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## CH. 14 Representations of the Body and Self-

### Knowledge: Condillac's *Treatise on Sensations* and

### Contemporary Naturalistic Psychology

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#### Abstract

Condillac's *Treatise on Sensations* constitutes a spectacular departure from Locke and expounds an original philosophy of consciousness and self-consciousness.

Although there are other readings of the *Treatise*, this chapter sets out to

investigate the relevance of the correspondence between Condillac's analysis and contemporary naturalistic theories for his theses. Putting to one side Condillac's principle of the sentiment-based logical "generation" of the faculties, which is alien to post-Darwinism, I will consider the different forms of self-knowledge identified by Condillac as conditions of the emergence of self-consciousness. The aim of this is to establish a criterion for self-knowledge. By cross-referencing and translating two languages, two eras and two traditions, the chapter will then proceed to the discussion of arguments and claims shared by Condillac and contemporary naturalists: first, the thesis that only human beings have self-consciousness; second, that humans share elementary self-relations with animals; and, third, that representations of one's own body are essential to self-consciousness formation.

### **Keywords**

Sensation; Self-Knowledge; Body; Representation; Philosophy of Mind; Naturalism; Memory; Agency; Reflexivity; Locke

## **1. Introduction**

While nascent psychiatry, in the person of Pinel, recognised Condillac's philosophy as its primary reference,<sup>1</sup> contemporary psychology does not acknowledge any debt to it. However, reading the *Treatise*<sup>2</sup> reveals a certain number of propositions which bear strange resemblance to contemporary naturalistic theses: the assertion that there exists a non-discursive thought which makes it possible to explain animal action, the distinction between "sentience"—that is

to say, sentiment—and reflection, and the link between the capacity to locate in space and the representative faculty. It is true that Condillac does not yet define himself as a “naturalist” in 1754, the use of this term being confined to Buffon’s Cartesian philosophy, which Condillac criticises, or to mechanistic materialism, the presuppositions of which he challenges:

**Naturalism**, s.m

Mistake made by ones who believe that blind and necessary nature is the principle of all.

Naturalist, s.m

One who professes naturalism. But it is more usually said of those philosophers who study natural history and who have written on the productions of nature, such as metals, minerals, vegetables and animals, etc.<sup>3</sup>

The *Treatise* is undeniably a decisive stage on a journey that will lead Condillac to state that “logic is learned from nature itself.” We will seek to define hereafter the features of that “logical naturalism.” In response to Locke and Berkeley, Condillac maintains that the capacity to produce representations of one’s own body is a condition of explicit reflective knowledge. Like contemporary naturalists, Condillac attempts to explain the origin of human knowledge—the knowledge of the self is only a part of it—on the basis of forms of thought shared with animals. The *Treatise* constitutes a spectacular departure from Locke and expounds an original philosophy of consciousness and self-consciousness. Although I know there are other readings of the *Treatise*<sup>4</sup> and I am well aware of the many problems related to the ontology of the mind,

I will set out to highlight the correspondence between Condillac's analysis and contemporary naturalistic theories. Putting to one side Condillac's principle of the sentiment-based logical "generation" of faculties, which is alien to post-Darwinism, I will consider the different forms of self-knowledge identified by Condillac as conditions for the emergence of self-consciousness. Through this, I will obtain the criteria thereof. By cross-referencing and translating two languages, two eras and two traditions, I will establish the common arguments Condillac and contemporary naturalists used to develop parallel theses: first, the thesis that only human beings have self-consciousness; second, that humans share elementary relations to the self with animals; and, third, that representations of one's own body are essential to self-consciousness formation.

In the first part, I will strive to justify this comparison between contemporary naturalism and Condillac's philosophy on a general level. I will do this not by defending a systematic comparative method between the history of philosophy and contemporary philosophy but by pointing out significant and remarkable points of convergence. I will then endeavour to show how far this comparison may be extended by developing three main aspects of the problems raised by self-consciousness: theory of memory, function of representations of one's own body and imitation. Our purpose is to re-evaluate the *Treatise* by showing that the central role given by Condillac to "sentiment," which contemporary philosophers of perception have long considered to be an epistemological prejudice, should now be put on the agenda of naturalistic philosophers of the mind.

## 2. Does It Make Sense to Compare the *Treatise on Sensations* with Contemporary Naturalism?

Although this chapter does not seek to answer the objection that the proposed interpretation simply conforms to an intellectual fashion,<sup>5</sup> it is useful to provide further justification for the proposed angle. The *Treatise* is indeed often treated as a text much closer to Husserl's phenomenology than to naturalism: Condillac has a reputation for being a philosopher of consciousness, a successor of Locke, while contemporary naturalism is known to have struck consciousness off the list of problems worthy of interest.

However, the upheavals that the philosophy of the mind has recently encountered oblige historians of philosophy to revise this view. It is true to say that today consciousness has become one of the principal focal points of the "naturalists."<sup>6</sup> It is not that the "functionalist" philosophy of perception has been renounced when a preponderant role was given to *qualia*; rather, the new awareness of the natural conditions of human self-consciousness has profoundly changed the way in which consciousness is understood.

Philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition have long dealt with self-consciousness by reasoning *a priori* on its conditions of possibility, according to a philosophy of language approach. Following Wittgenstein,<sup>7</sup> they have considered all propositions of subjective self-attribution to be invalid. They have defined a general problem—they call it the "problem of transition"—in the following terms: if self-knowledge implies that true thoughts can be formed as "I psi that P," where "psi" refers to a propositional attitude, "P" to its content and "I" to the person thinking this thought, on what conditions can the content "P" of a propositional attitude justify being attributed in the first person?

A large number of naturalists now reject this way of addressing the problem of self-consciousness and refute the argument of Wittgenstein, who asserts that propositions of subjective self-attribution are invalid.<sup>8</sup> Wittgenstein's argument, which was picked up on and developed by Shoemaker under the name of the "immunity of the subject to the error through misidentification,"<sup>9</sup> amounts to stating that the "I" as "subject" is not susceptible to false recognition and that propositions of subjective self-attribution are tautologies. In recent publications, naturalists not only reject the argument with an *a priori* metaphysical-type analysis justifying the conditions of subjective self-attribution, but they also highlight the actual conditions which enable a subject to think in order to act. With this shift, the problem is no longer that of the relations of the judgement by which the subject attributes to himself a thought with this occurrent thought; the problem is that of the role of self-attribution in practical reasoning with regard to the functional properties of action.<sup>10</sup> Argumentation is backed up by the study of the psychology of action seen from an etiological perspective, with regard to the evolution of organisms and human development.

It is worth noting that a number of conceptual distinctions established recently by naturalists overlap with the divisions drawn up by Condillac. Nonetheless, these distinctions enjoy opposite reputations in terms of technical difficulty. Indeed, the contemporary distinctions come across as jargon to the layman, while those of Condillac are expounded in a language so familiar to a French speaker that we may not notice them. However, as we will show later on, there is no need to dwell on the stylistic difference since, to take one example, the contemporary concept of "metacognition" is considerably closer to the elementary forms of

self-knowledge set out in the analysis of action in Condillac's *Treatise* than the difference in lexis might suggest.

In more general terms, we should stress that the *Treatise* constitutes a profound departure from the type of "philosophy of language" which is practised by Condillac in the *Essay*, and that this departure can be compared to the internal upheaval in contemporary philosophy of the mind that we mentioned earlier. In the *Essay*, Condillac makes reflection depend on language capacities,<sup>11</sup> as if a person's grammar were enough to explain explicit self-consciousness.

However, in *Treatise* and later in *Treatise on Animals*, he links reflection with action and grants animals reflective capacities that they were denied in the *Essay*.<sup>12</sup> These texts mark a decisive break with Locke, and constitute a crucial step down the path towards naturalism. Unlike Locke, Condillac no longer identifies consciousness with self-consciousness.<sup>13</sup> Self-consciousness is based on multiple mental capacities being exercised together, the most important of which is likely to be the production of representations of one's own body. Though contemporary philosophy of the mind often refers to Locke<sup>14</sup> on that topic, it never refers to Condillac for essential reasons. The truth is that reference to Locke is made as much out of reverence as it is to serve as a foil;<sup>15</sup> referring to Condillac would be less rhetorical and more to the point.

As a philosopher of consciousness, Condillac distinguishes himself by a sharp distinction between consciousness and self-consciousness. He also opposes memory and reflective capacities. In his *Treatise*, he dissociates, in an unprecedented fashion, simple consciousness (in which some contemporary philosophers might recognise "sentience") from self-consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, while the statue is then described as being "conscious of its internal states," in that it feels them, it nonetheless does not form concepts, nor is it capable of having a



representation of its own mind. The consciousness of internal modifications is not equivalent to a consciousness “of the self.”

We should stress that the genesis of faculties in the statue mental experiment is not considered by contemporary naturalism as a “logical generation.” Let’s take it this way: the “logical generation” establishes for Condillac the series of criteria necessary for self-knowledge. As such, Condillac’s analytical method is superior to the “plain and historical method” of Locke:<sup>17</sup> far from drawing up an inventory of faculties or pretending to describe the mind as it presents itself, Condillac’s method divides up what is given by experience into elementary components. Starting with the fact of self-knowledge and the phenomenon of consciousness, the method breaks them down, showing how divided elements are related to each other. The value of Condillac’s analysis lies in the rigorous nature of this decomposition, which does not take the easy option of using consciousness directly to explain self-knowledge. All the more, beyond Condillac’s self-interpretation of the human mind’s genesis, the fiction could also be construed as a paradigm, both speculative and heuristic, to help scientists understand the evolution from early stages of consciousness to self-consciousness. As a matter of fact, Condillac draws a link between children’s mental development and the conclusions drawn from his statue mental experiment.

In any case, it is worth noting that a number of general theses are common to both Condillac and contemporary naturalism:

– first, the thesis of the existence of thought without concepts;

– second, the thesis of reflectivity without language to support the idea of a “rationality” in animal behaviour, without stating that animals possess our scope for conceptual manipulation, our self-consciousness, our will, etc.;

– third, the need to distinguish between different modes of perception, including, at the very least, the perception of features (“traits”), the perception of objects (through categorisation and conceptualisation) and the perception of actions.

There thus appears a remarkable point of convergence between Condillac’s philosophy and contemporary naturalistic psychology: the discovery that reflexivity contributes to self-knowledge only in so far as it mobilises representations of one’s own acting body. In order to demonstrate that, we have chosen to develop three more specific points:

– the description of the means by which memory conditions self-consciousness;

– the role of representations of one’s own body in reflectivity;

– the role of physical imitation in the acquisition of concepts allowing self-knowledge as knowledge of a mind.

### **3. Memory, Reflection, Imitation: Representations of the Body as a Condition for Self-knowledge**

#### **3.1 Memory**

Memory is the elementary operation which would appear to be the most indispensable to self-knowledge. However, like in contemporary philosophy, there is not one single definition of

memory in Condillac's thought; nor does he confuse memory with reflective capacities more than contemporary philosophers do.

Like a great many philosophers active 250 years later, Condillac takes Locke's definition of the person as a starting point. In the *Essay*, Condillac's first work, he takes Locke's concept of reminiscence as his own, and in so doing ensures the unity of the "self" and guarantees the possibility of a reflection on "oneself."<sup>18</sup> One difference from Locke can be noted, in that Condillac does not refer to the abstract distinction between substance, soul and person.<sup>19</sup> He chooses instead to produce a grammatical analysis of the "subject" and to make reflective capacities directly dependent on language.<sup>20</sup> However, even though reflection depends on language, it is just as closely conditioned by reminiscence; as with Locke, it is the continuity produced by reminiscence, which ultimately ensures the unity of the person in the *Essay*.<sup>21</sup> The *Treatise* revolutionises Locke's legacy. In this text, the role Condillac attributes to memory pre-empts the theses advanced by contemporary naturalists on the same subject. This is hardly surprising, since the two analyses stem from deep meditations on Locke's theory. But the fact that they are so close to one another is nevertheless noteworthy: in a sense, the solutions proposed by Condillac foreshadow those of on-going research. Let us remind ourselves briefly of the two major objections levelled today at Locke's theory of memory by the majority of philosophers of the mind, be they involved in the project of "naturalisation of intentionality" or not.<sup>22</sup>

The first objection shows that memorial continuity produced by reminiscence does not provide a sufficient ground for personal identity.<sup>23</sup> The second reveals the existence of a circle that could lead one to presuppose the self<sup>24</sup> in itself. All the paths that are explored to counter these

objections have a common feature: they assert the necessity of ordering relations between the different forms of recollection, so as to constitute a unique memory chain which enables transitive relations. Working on that basis, different strategies and solutions have been envisaged to reply to the second objection regarding the circle. Some contemporary solutions could be criticised for falling short of Locke's distinctions, for example when personal identity is reduced to a purely artefactual relationship<sup>25</sup> or to a form of substantial unity.<sup>26</sup> However, the naturalistic strategy preserves what is interesting about Locke's conceptual invention while at the same time correcting it. This strategy involves sufficiently multiplying the constitutive strata of self-identity, more finely than Locke's notion of memory enables it to be done, and turns the approach to the problem on its head. Thus the identity of the person appears less as being composed of the abstract possibility of going through a continuous, ordered memory chain, and more as being constituted of a capacity to act with a "coherence of its own," bringing into play not just a "memory in action" but a reflectivity of a different order.<sup>27</sup> The naturalistic strategy is confirmed in a number of works on psychopathology and identity disorders,<sup>28</sup> as well as in the psychology of action and neurophysiology.<sup>29</sup>

On a philosophical level, the naturalistic solution has many assets of its own: it substantiates the intuitive view that memory is the most indispensable element of personality without identifying reflexivity and memory, and it allows a distinction to be drawn between the self as itself and the capacity to know oneself explicitly as such, which requires, as the expression goes, a "theory of the mind."

The role that Condillac reserves for memory in his *Treatise* comes near to the naturalistic solution. In this text, Condillac drops Locke's vocabulary of reminiscence and initial conception

of the person based entirely on language. Condillac defines different sorts of memory, not one of which corresponds to reminiscence; he distinguishes between an elementary memory which is involuntary and dynamic<sup>30</sup> and a memory which is controlled but still commanded by current events,<sup>31</sup> and he sets these first two types of memory apart from the discursive memory that allows orientation in a wider timeframe. The definition of this third type of memory, introduced in the *Essay*, appears unchanged in the *Treatise*,<sup>32</sup> and beyond. It emphasises the link between language and voluntary memory.

Condillac thus considers that knowledge of the self must be divided into distinct strata; he does not confuse memory continuity with personal identity, nor with reflective identity. As it is described in the *Treatise*, memory is a dynamic operation, of which the two most basic types have a kind of reflexivity always in phase with current events. Reduced to smell, the statue has a self, which can be defined, at every instant: "This is its personality. If it could say 'I,' it would say it every instant of its duration, and each time its 'I' would include every moment it remembered."<sup>33</sup>

The elementary activity of the self does not, therefore, involve any form of representation of the self, or any knowledge of the self as a mind. However, this activity allows the formation of a sort of implicit but functional "personality": "Its 'I' is only the collection of sensations it experiences, and of those that its memory recalls. In short, it is at once the consciousness of what it is and the memory of what it was."<sup>34</sup>

The personality of the statue confined to smell does not rest on an explicit self-consciousness but on a process whereby present sensations are linked to past sensations. It requires a basic memory, the reduced performance of which is not comparable to memory enabled by the use

of speech: basic memory does not permit voluntary recollections nor, therefore, voluntary access to the self.

The analysis proposed in the *Treatise* provides the same asset as the contemporary naturalistic perspective: not identifying memory with the reflectivity involved in knowledge of oneself as a mind, and highlighting a “proto-subjective function” of the self that cannot be reduced to knowledge of oneself as a mind. In either case, the refinement of the theory of memory once again gives rise to a new necessity: to produce mediations between the elementary operations of memory and discursive self-knowledge of oneself. From this point of view, too, there is a remarkable degree of proximity between the *Treatise* and contemporary naturalistic philosophy: Condillac attributes to the representation of one’s own body (which is enabled by the use of reflection linked to action) a decisive role in the genesis of an explicit self-consciousness. Let’s now compare the theory of reflectivity found in contemporary naturalistic philosophy with Condillac’s.

### **3.2 Reflectivity**

Naturalistic philosophers state that there are reflective functional structures which give sense to propositions of subjective self-attribution.<sup>35</sup> Let us note, first of all, that while these structures are linked to action, they are distinct from both the mere capacity to act and the capacity to represent one’s own mind. Reflectivity is not the general condition of action, since it is easy to show with ethological data that not all actions presuppose reflectivity;<sup>36</sup> reflectivity is neither “theoretical” knowledge of what a mind can do in the sense of being a capacity for “metarepresentations,” nor does it give us a “theory of the mind.” Naturalistic philosophers call

“metacognition” the type of implicit self-knowledge which is involved in the monitoring and control that a mind has over its own mental states. Metacognition is thus opposed to metarepresentation, which is the conceptual knowledge that a mind has of its own mental states.<sup>37</sup>

Is reflectivity specifically human, or can it be found in animals, that is in beings deprived of language? It has long been accepted that the necessary condition for a subject to arrive at reflective consciousness lies in the aptitude to form metarepresentations concerning the thought content of “simple” representations.<sup>38</sup> In other words, it has long been held that the access to concepts of the type “I had that thought” was necessary to establish the existence of any reflective capacity. It has been supposed that the ability to refer to the self, independently of any context, was a necessary condition of all reflectivity, which is certainly an excessive condition. Moreover, some recent studies show that animals, apparently incapable of metarepresentations, are capable of resolving metacognitive problems and thus display “reflectivity.”<sup>39</sup> Ethological research tends to show that metacognition does not depend on metarepresentations, while, however, any metarepresentative capacity necessarily presupposes metacognitive capacities. In this sense, reflectivity appears as a necessary but not sufficient condition of “self-consciousness” and does not necessarily suppose “theoretical” knowledge of what a mind in general is.

Procedural reflectivity involved in metacognition is only a property which allows one to evaluate one’s mental states, to review them and to modify them in order to act. It presupposes a faculty to carry out “mental actions” that is to say, to perform actions which, like all actions, are caused by desires and beliefs, but “whose intentional content is to obtain a new

mental property, using for that purpose means which are themselves mental.”<sup>40</sup> Controlled attention is a prime example of “mental action,” controlled memory provides another example and deliberate modification of preferences provides a third example. Any animal capable of controlled attention thereby possesses reflective capacities.

This is the thesis found in the *Treatise* and the *Treatise on Animals*, and some of the reasons why it is supported today are identical to those given by Condillac. Having reflected on the difficulties that he experienced in the *Essay* to explain how speech is born from communication through actions, Condillac introduced a new step between involuntary communication of emotions and the use of instituted signs. Unlike what he had first maintained, he admitted that reflection independent of the use of instituted signs conditioned spoken language. To describe this reflection, he later used a distinction which he included in the corrected edition of *Treatise* by contrasting the non-theoretical mode of self-knowledge with the theoretical knowledge enabled by speech:

But one must distinguish, as I did above, between theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. It is for the former that we need a form of language, because it consists of a sequence of distinct ideas, and consequently, signs have been needed to classify them in an orderly manner and to determine them.

...These judgments which it does not notice are the instincts which guide it, and the habits of action which it has contracted according to these judgments, are what I understand by *practical knowledge*. While I am obliged to develop these judgments in order to make them known I am not claiming that it develops them itself. It



cannot do so, since in having no language, it lacks the means to conduct an analysis.<sup>41</sup>

According to Condillac, self-knowledge related to action is practical knowledge, or, in other words, an implicit knowledge which “regulates our actions without our being able to notice it.”

This does not mean that we are talking about unconscious and automatic learning, since, on the contrary, practical knowledge is the result of judgements. What is implicit here is that we do not know “how practical knowledge makes us act”; we do not know how it regulates our actions, since they are no equivalent of “a theoretical knowledge of our own mind.”

The existence of implicit mental operations, as some think, is not an inconceivable phenomenon for a “philosopher of consciousness,” or even for a philosopher who, like Condillac, sets out to show that all our faculties are generated on the basis of sensations. However, the *Treatise*, one might think, is aimed at understanding, making explicit and analysing those implicit functions that allow us to act without realising what we are doing. Condillac heralds this in the opening lines of his work:

To notice what we are learning, we must already know something. We must experience some ideas in order to observe that we experience ideas that we once lacked. This reflective memory, which now makes it so evident when we go from one bit of knowledge to another, cannot work its way back to original knowledge; on the contrary, it presupposes that knowledge, and this is the origin of our propensity to believe that we were born with it.<sup>42</sup>

What is valid for perception is equally valid for knowledge and action, but also for self-knowledge. Condillac persistently makes explicit the mental operations which are at work while the mind is not capable of noticing them.<sup>43</sup> Before proceeding any further, an item of vocabulary needs to be clarified. Condillac does not use the term “reflectivity” to describe the implicit self-knowledge that an organism endowed with certain natural abilities uses in order to act. But he considers this implicit “knowledge” of the self as the product of “reflection” and gives new meaning to this concept in the *Treatise*. Reflection is a mode of thought linked to action: it is linked to tactile capacities which enable location in space.<sup>44</sup> It is characterised by a deliberate mode of attention, which is quite distinct from elementary attention. While elementary attention only allows one to isolate sensorial traits, reflective attention enables one to represent spatial units and to define characteristics to be attributed to them. It enables one to categorise objects and to relatively pre-empt the effects of one’s actions in the world.<sup>45</sup> By enabling these representations, reflection becomes a condition of controlled action. It generates “practical knowledge,” including “practical” knowledge of one’s self. This “practical” knowledge of the self presupposes the mental manipulation of representations of the body in action and the possibility of reviewing its judgements and beliefs in order to act. Condillac does not, therefore, identify this practical knowledge either with the capacity to represent minds as minds—or to possess a general “theory” of the mind—or with self-knowledge made possible through discursivity. However, this practical knowledge entails a mode of self-knowledge which is quite distinct from mere consciousness and considerably more complex than what is involved in mere memory.

We are now able to take a further step towards connecting the *Treatise* with recent developments in naturalistic philosophy. As it is defined in this work, reflection produces “mental actions” which are similar to those performed by the metacognitive reflectivity of contemporary naturalism, since they allow for the evaluation and revision of beliefs in order to act; reflection makes it possible to explain the formation of a link between intentions to act and representations of the acting body. Such a link, now called a “cognitive loop,” is nowadays put forward as the principle for explaining “pre-theoretical” self-knowledge.

“Practical” self-knowledge, as defined by Condillac, is thus not a “theory of the mind” applied to one’s self at all, but rather a representation of one’s self as agent or acting body, which is something quite different. It could be said that it brings into play an “imaginative representation” of agency rather than a (conceptual) “theory of the mind.”

How then does one make the transition from practical self-knowledge to “theoretical” self-knowledge? How does the disposal of concepts of mind, intention and desire enabled by language dovetail with “practical” knowledge?

Condillac sees an intermediary stage between “practical” self-knowledge and theoretical knowledge; this stage involves a random use of representations of action to judge the actions of the other (s).<sup>46</sup> Practical knowledge of oneself is then extended to others by way of a spontaneous expansion: the intentions and beliefs that allow one’s own actions to be controlled are deemed to be the cause of all action. The perception of the actions of others is achieved by attributing to them by analogy representations of actions of oneself. However, this attribution by analogy is flawed in two ways:

1. it applies in the same way to both actions, which are actually intentional and those which are not, as well as to even to simple natural movements;
2. it confuses the effect of the actions on oneself with the intentions that cause them.

All this happens as if the “loop,” which first links the intentions to act with the perception of actions, were extended to include the intentions of others as if they were linked to my own body: indeed, other people’s intentions to act are therefore linked to their own actions, but on the basis of the effect that they have on me.

The statue believes that everything acting on it does so by design. The statue feels at every instant how dependent it is on everything that surrounds it. If objects often respond to its wishes, they also controvert its projects almost as often: they make it unhappy or give it only a portion of the happiness that it desires. Persuaded that it does nothing without having the intention to do it, the statue believes that it sees a plan wherever it discovers some action. In truth, it can only judge such things according to what it perceives in itself; and it would require many observations indeed to guide its judgments better. The statue thinks then that what is pleasing to it has its pleasure as a goal and what is offensive has as a goal to offend it.<sup>47</sup>

If a closer look is taken, this stage is marked by a maximum extension of the “practical” concepts based on the givens of perception. What is missing here is a “theoretical” concept of mind, which alone is likely to enable intentions and beliefs to be correctly attributed. The other does not appear to me as an agent endowed with a mind of his own, absolutely irreducible to me, but as an agent directly causing certain effects on my body and my environment. It is on

the basis of the perception of the actions of the other on myself that the representation of action is formed, and not on the basis of a link between the perception of his action and “his mind.” The perception of actions, including those of the other, remains ego-centred. However, in spite of its imperfections, this intermediary stage conditions the theoretical knowledge of oneself and the other as a “mind.” As it happens, a number of contemporary naturalistic philosophers share this conviction: they state that representations of the actions of others are found in children and are used randomly before they can be used discriminatingly; and they also believe that having the ability to understand the intentions of other minds and to achieve knowledge of oneself as a mind constitutes a decisive stage. For a third and final time, we have to admit that there exists a striking parallel between the solution envisaged by Condillac and the path being traced today by naturalistic psychology.

### **3.3 Simulation, Language of Action and Knowledge of the Self as Mind**

The *Treatise* does not in itself allow us to understand Condillac’s conception of the knowledge of oneself and other(s) as minds, because it sets out to study the faculties of an “isolated” man, *mettant en abyme*, through reading, a logical situation of interlocution.<sup>48</sup> In order to retrace the passage from “practical” knowledge of oneself and other(s) to theoretical knowledge, we must go back to Condillac’s *Grammar* and *Logic*.<sup>49</sup> The extent to which Condillac’s thinking has changed on that subject since the *Essay* is striking.

In the *Essay*, Condillac describes the existence of a language of action which enables the existence of an immediate and non-reflected communication between human beings, independently of language.<sup>50</sup> This spontaneous communication rests on innate properties of

the mind linked to the existence of “natural signs” constituted by emotions.<sup>51</sup> As instituted signs are progressively acquired, the elementary modes of communication become the object of hypotheses and reasoning.<sup>52</sup> Knowledge of oneself and of others as “minds” are thus the results of observations and deductions; this knowledge consists of a “theory” of the mind which can be applied to oneself and to others. The development of this theory is made possible by the spontaneous use of communication through emotions: through mutual imitation, human beings succeed in representing the mind of others as being analogous to their own. In the scenario set out in the *Essay*, knowledge of the self and the other is directly dependent on the acquisition of spoken language. The *Treatise* contradicts the thesis that language and language alone enable the acquisition of the concepts of belief, desire and intention,<sup>53</sup> at least as practical concepts. Unlike the former text, the *Treatise* shows that the use of such concepts is involved in voluntary action and affirms the existence of implicit self-knowledge linked to action. As we have seen, this implicit self-knowledge is not enough to form representations of the mind “in general” or independent of any context; however, “practical” knowledge of oneself must nevertheless be considered an indispensable intermediary stage in the acquisition of a concept of mind.

The opposition between the *Treatise* and *Essay* foreshadows the debate now taking place among naturalistic philosophers regarding the modes of acquisition which allow knowledge of the self as a mind. This debate divides the proponents of a theoretical “theory” of mind from those who consider that simulation is at the heart of the acquisition processes through which a concept of mind forms. Indeed, unlike the advocates of the “theoretical” theory of the mind, Condillac does not believe that the manipulation of concepts depends on a mental module that

immediately becomes operational; on the contrary, the *Essay* stresses the gradual and acquired nature of the use of these concepts and, moreover, the *Treatise* does nothing to change this essential thesis. Yet what is comparable here is the way in which the link between the acquisition of concepts of mind and action is dealt with. Like advocates of the “theoretical” theory of the mind, Condillac starts by admitting that concepts of mind are applied directly to the analysis of elementary communication through the effect of reasoning based on information gathered during imitation.<sup>54</sup> He maintains at first that the application of these concepts is made directly to actions, be they “my own” or not.

Later, however, Condillac considers that he has read too much into the reasoning and that he has not succeeded in sufficiently explaining how this reasoning applies.<sup>55,56</sup> This is exactly the kind of objection levelled at proponents of a “theoretical” theory of the mind by the advocates of simulation theory. In order to overcome this difficulty, the *Treatise* introduces the idea of “practical” self-knowledge linked to action, which will provide support for constructing concepts which allow for conceiving of the activity of the mind. In the *Grammar and Logic*, Condillac asserts that the language of action is the instrument used to construct mental concepts: the language of action is thus defined as an analytical method of action and not just as the vehicle for communication through emotions.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, imitation is not an empirical research tool enabling signs of action to be established and used in the most appropriate way, but a method by which the individual distinguishes himself/herself from others and constructs the knowledge that he/she has of himself/herself.<sup>58</sup>

In the latter part of his work, Condillac’s position can be compared to that of the advocates of the “executive theory of mentalisation,” who assert that acquiring a sense of the self depends

on relating the non-conceptual contents of action to the concepts which allow us to conceive of the mind, called “mental concepts” for short. The “executive theory of mentalization” assumes that the knowledge of each individual of his own mental states is conditioned by the procedural reflectivity at work in action. As we have seen, procedural reflectivity is the process which enables one to apprehend oneself as an agent independently of the use of concepts that enable one to represent one’s own mind. The proponents of the “executive theory of mentalization” challenge the idea of a direct application of mental concepts to the analysis of actions and assert, on the contrary, that it is procedural reflectivity which conditions the representation of oneself as mind and the representation of the mind of the other(s).

In his theory of the language of action, Condillac says the same: he highlights the antecedence of “practical” knowledge of oneself over “theoretical” knowledge, and he shows that the latter is the condition of the former.<sup>59</sup> Yet he goes further than that: he maintains that the use of concepts of intentions, desires and beliefs stems from the *explicitation* of the reflection at work in the execution of actions. He sees the language of action as the method of *explicitation* enabling the division of thought at work in action. The language of action transforms practical self-knowledge into explicit knowledge through the manipulation of signs of action. It presupposes the recognition, in oneself and the other, of internal states having a defined behavioural meaning. However, the “explicit” self-knowledge implemented in the language of action and characterised by the intentional use of signs of action remains in a way “practical” knowledge, since it is limited by its use in defined circumstances;<sup>60</sup> but, even though it is not yet theoretical knowledge, it is the most immediate condition of the possibility of this knowledge, for in practical knowledge the first concepts of mind are applied to something other than



emotional communication. “Practical” self-knowledge, that is the totality of judgements implemented in order to act and communicate, is thus at the centre of the process by which knowledge of the self as a mind is developed.

In other words, to put this in contemporary terms, the reflectivity at work when the body acts and communicates is a constituent part of the “theory of mind” that is constructed through imitation. This is sufficient for us to see in Condillac a forerunner of a form of “executive theory of mentalisation.”

Thus, self-knowledge does not appear in the *Treatise* as a pure phenomenon of consciousness, but, furthermore, it is essentially conditioned by representations of the body in action. In marked contrast to Locke, Condillac dissociates self-consciousness from consciousness, and shows that the relationship with one’s own body is a constituent part of knowledge of the self as “mind.” The body is not joined to the soul in a relationship of ownership based on theology, but it is at the core of the processes which command the knowledge of the mind by itself. Much more so than Locke, Condillac ought to be the reference of those who seek to “naturalise” self-knowledge. In so doing, one must resolve not to be daunted by the role that this Enlightenment philosopher nonetheless attributes to consciousness.

In conclusion, I will show that re-assessing Condillac’s work does not necessarily involve establishing a radical critical distance from his conception of consciousness. In this way, rather than downplaying the place of consciousness in Condillac’s philosophy, I will end by putting forward several arguments which plead in favour of a reading that embraces this consciousness. I do this both because, right from the *Treatise*, consciousness is a capacity to feel or to feel oneself in action and not an abstract consciousness, and because contemporary

naturalistic philosophy itself ascribes a notable role to the “consciousness to act” and not only to “representations” of the body in action.

In the process which leads to self-knowledge, a preponderant role is today attributed to consciousness on two different levels: first, because consciousness allows one to apprehend oneself in action by providing an elementary experience of oneself, and second, because it offers a “donation” of all the elements which will be used to conceptualise mental states. These two levels are clearly not unrelated to one another, but a distinction must be drawn between them. As for the first level, we have reviewed the reasons why consciousness to act should be considered as a first apprehension of oneself in a non-conceptual mode. This does not mean that all the mechanisms enabling one to act are conscious. Quite the reverse. The experience of action cannot be dissociated from the “consciousness” of being in action. The consciousness of “being in action” is indeed not just a consciousness of wanting or “believing,” which could be exclusively internal, nor a sensitive consciousness produced by sensations of the body in action, but it is precisely where the two come together, and it is in this respect that it is a constituent part of the experience of action.<sup>61</sup> The concordance between the executive and the perceptive cannot be reduced to the simple addition of execution and volition; it can operate only by a common reference to the acting body. Yet this common reference is not the only common denominator of calculations necessary for action to be realised, as if it were a pure frame of reference or a set of abstract coordinates. Thanks to continuing modifications of sensations, this common reference is experienced in a direct apprehension of oneself.

On the second level, we have seen that the consciousness to act is the result of multiple mechanisms allowing action to be controlled. Numerous recent studies have interpreted

pathologies marked by intermittences or deficiencies of self-consciousness, particularly schizophrenia, by highlighting the deficiency of one or other of the underlying reflective processes which command action.<sup>62</sup> Even though this was not the precise purpose of these studies, they show the extent to which the “consciousness to act” is correlated with the mechanisms which command action. Thus, they accord to “pretheoretical consciousness” of the self an epistemic value which philosophers of perception refuse to accord to *qualia* or sensations.

However, “consciousness to act” plays a much more important role when it is related to the acquisition of the concepts which allow the mind to be conceived of; it actually finds itself at the interface between “mental” concepts and the objects of application of these concepts.

“Consciousness to act” provides a non-conceptual given to which mental concepts apply with few ambiguities in defined contexts, since it “expresses” the totality of operations of the mind that enable action.

If we look more closely, there is nothing all that surprising about Condillac making consciousness of one’s own body, as an acting body, the essential condition of consciousness of the self as a mind. Starting with the *Essay*, he set out to show how language has come about; to this end, he has consistently pursued the elementary modes of knowledge and communication that have conditioned the use of speech. As an Enlightenment philosopher, he could have chosen a more radical materialist position, granting consciousness an epiphenomenal role. If the statue in *Treatise* is not a machine, if it is first and foremost “the scent of a rose,” it is not because Condillac is making some obscure sacrifice to the manes of Locke and Descartes. It is because the solution to the enigma of the origin of language presupposes acceptance of a form

of self-consciousness and the other preconditions of language. This elementary self-consciousness, which gives meaning to the imitation of the other and enables progress in the language of action, is “consciousness to act,” of which sensations are an essential component. Let us finish by highlighting a paradox: what allowed Condillac to sense the fundamental role of representations of action in self-knowledge is the very thing which has for so long comprised a barrier to reading his work, i.e. the preponderance of sentiment in all the solutions that he proposes to the problems of the theory of knowledge. His *Treatise* has long been viewed as a prime example of a victim of the epistemological prejudice of philosophies of consciousness. Condillac is not content to describe sensations as the source or one of the sources of knowledge. He makes them the principle of all knowledge, and claims to explain the possibility of representations on the basis of sensations. Such a claim is probably open to criticism, as contemporary philosophers of perception have persistently pointed out: sensations do not account for all perceptive mechanisms and are probably not the origin of representations. However, Condillac’s singular undertaking had at least one extremely positive aspect, far from being insignificant, which can be considered a discovery: it bound psychology in with the body and shed light on, long before the latest research, how much is owed by self-knowledge as a mind endowed with desire, intention and belief to the disposal of representations of the body in action. That this undertaking achieved what it did is due to the attention that it paid to “sensations” and not just to “perceptive information” or even to the primary qualities of the body in Locke’s philosophy, the vocabulary and grounds of which it challenges in part.

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<sup>1</sup> Pinel, 1800; Riese, 1968; Paradis, 1993. See also Samuel L  z   in this volume.

<sup>2</sup> The abbreviations *Essay* and *Sensations* refer respectively to *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* and *Treatise on Sensations*.

<sup>3</sup> Condillac (1715–1780) III. *Dictionnaire des synonymes*, p. 398. Condillac’s works will be quoted in Georges Le Roy’s edition, *OP* in an abbreviated form. Where an English translation still exists, it will be indicated in a footnote. In this paper, the most frequently used translation is Franklin Philip’s, Condillac, 2014. But *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* will be quoted in Hans Aarsleff’s translation, Condillac, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth mentioning Derrida, 1980 and Anne Devarieux in this volume, without forgetting the more literary or historically approaches to the *Treatise on Sensations*. See also Markovits, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Trying to define Condillac’s naturalism is not an absolutely new undertaking. See Schaupp, 1891, and, to a lesser extent, Dewaule, 1891. Although our view is quite different, these earlier works provide arguments to our current reading of *Treatise on Sensations*.

<sup>6</sup> Among the impressive number of publications on this subject, see more particularly, Dennett, 1992; Lycan, 1995; Chalmers, 1997a, 1997b; Seager, 1999; Catalano, 2000; Rowlands, 2001; Bennett and Hacker, 2003. It is also worth mentioning the website of the electronic journal *Psyche*, organ of The Association for the Scientific Study of Consciousness, <http://psyche.cs.monash.edu.au>



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<sup>7</sup> See Wittgenstein, 1958.

<sup>8</sup> For further details of this debate, and particularly the refutation of the different classical solutions of the “transition problem” and the problem’s resumption based on a functional study of action, see Proust, 2000, 2003.

<sup>9</sup> Shoemaker, 1968, 1984; Evans, 1982; Peacocke, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> One issue of *Consciousness and Cognition*, number 12 (2003) is entirely devoted to this question. It collects the proceedings of the Max Planck Institute Symposium, “Self and Action,” which took place in October 2002.

<sup>11</sup> *Essay*, I, II, ch. V.

<sup>12</sup> Condillac (1947–1951), *Traité des animaux*, II, ch. 5, *OP. vol. 1*, p. 363 ; *Essay*, I, II, 4, § 43.

<sup>13</sup> This thesis, which also serves as a starting point for contemporary naturalistic philosophers, boils down to stating that it is impossible to deduce the existence of self-consciousness from the mere existence of any current thought; a thought may be analysed in terms of “it thinks,” in other words, in the third person, without involving any self-knowledge from oneself as subject. Condillac stresses this point when he writes that the statue is “the scent of rose” or that it “is entirely the impression which is made on its organs,” without being able to say “I” at the very first moment it exists. *Sensations*, I, 1.

<sup>14</sup> The polemic engaged in by Paul Ricœur against Derek Parfit perfectly illustrates this link with Locke; see Parfit, 1984; Ricœur, 1990 .

<sup>15</sup> Locke is frequently used to condemn the confusion between consciousness and self-consciousness, or the inadequacy of the memory theory as a foundation for self-consciousness.

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<sup>16</sup> “If we present it with a rose, to us it will be a statue that smells a rose; but to itself, it will be the smell itself of this flower,” *Sensations*, I, 1, § 2.

<sup>17</sup> Locke, 1975, Introduction, p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> *Essay*, I, sect. 2, ch.1, § 15.

<sup>19</sup> Locke, 1975, pp. 331–348.

<sup>20</sup> *Essay*, II, sect. I, ch. 8 et ch. 9.

<sup>21</sup> “It follows that consciousness not only give us knowledge of ours perceptions, but furthermore, if those perceptions are repeated, it often makes us aware that we had them before and makes us recognize them as belonging to us or as affecting a being that is constantly the same ‘self’ despite their variety and succession. Seen in relation to these new effects, consciousness is a new operation which is at our service every instant and is the foundation of experience,” *Essay*, I. 2., 1, §15.

<sup>22</sup> These objections mainly extend the first criticism addressed to Locke in the English language by Joseph Butler and Thomas Reid, Butler, 1736; Reid, 1785, pp. 333–334.

<sup>23</sup> Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984, pp. 67–132.

<sup>24</sup> Shomaker, 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Dennett, 1991.

<sup>26</sup> Gallagher, 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Proust, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Schizophrenia and autism are the most frequently studied pathologies in this perspective. Proust and Grivois, 1998; Campbell Schizophrenia, 1999; Stephen and Graham, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Jeannerod, 1994.

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<sup>30</sup> *Sensations*, I, 2, § 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Sensations*, II, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Condillac, 1947–1951, *De l'Art de penser, OP.* vol. 2, p.733.

<sup>33</sup> *Sensations*, I, 6, § 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Sensations*, I, 6, § 3.

<sup>35</sup> The specification and the description of these structures became the focus of many debates, which are partly set out in Roessler and Eilan, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Gallistel, 1990.

<sup>37</sup> Guttenplan, 1994; Sperber, 2000.

<sup>38</sup> The study of links between metacognition and representation was the purpose of the seminar *Action, Perception, Intention, Consciousness* 2004–2005, supervised by Joëlle Proust, Elisabeth Pacherie and Jérôme Dokic, in the Institut Jean Nicod (Paris). See also Joëlle Proust, 2003.

<sup>39</sup> Therefore, dolphins and monkeys, which are apparently unable to form metarepresentations, display abilities to solve relatively complex metacognitive problems; Smith, Hields, and Washburn, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Proust, p. 183.

<sup>41</sup> *Sensations*, IV, pp. 512–513.

<sup>42</sup> *Sensations, The Plan of This Work*, p. 305.

<sup>43</sup> Drawing general implications from this idea, see Derrida, 1980.

<sup>44</sup> *Sensations*, II, 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Sensations*, III & IV.

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<sup>46</sup> *Sensations*, IV, 5.

<sup>47</sup> *Sensations*, IV, 4, p. 533.

<sup>48</sup> *Sensations*, IV.

<sup>49</sup> Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1 Grammaire*, I, ch. 1, pp. 428–431 ; *OP. vol. 2, La Logique*, II, ch. 2, pp. 396–398.

<sup>50</sup> *Essay*, II, sect. I, ch. 1.

<sup>51</sup> *Essay*, I, II, ch.4, §35.

<sup>52</sup> “Their memory began to have some exercise; they gained command to their imagination, and little by little they succeeded in doing by reflection what they had formerly done only by instinct.” *Essay*, II, sect.1, 4, § 3; see also, *Essai*, II, I, X, §105.

<sup>53</sup> *Sensations*, IV, II, §2.

<sup>54</sup> *Essay*, I, II, ch. 6, § 58.

<sup>55</sup> *Essay*, I, sect. 2 , 1, §3. Let us compare to “But if this man had not noticed what his body does in such cases, he would not have learned to recognise desire in the movements of another. He would therefore not understand the meaning of the movements made in front of him: he would therefore not be able to make similar movements on purpose to make himself be understood.” Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1, Grammaire*, I, ch.1, p. 429.

<sup>56</sup> The modification of the definition of institutional signs, qualified in the *Grammar* as artificial signs and no longer as arbitrary signs, aims to resolve part of this difficulty. Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1, Grammaire*, I , ch. 1, p. 429.

<sup>57</sup> Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 2, La logique*.

<sup>58</sup> Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1, Traité des animaux*, II, 3, pp. 358–359.

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<sup>59</sup> “The decomposition of a thought presupposes the existence of that thought; and it would be absurd to say that I only begin to judge and reason when I begin to be able to represent successively what I know when I judge and when I reason.” Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1, Grammaire*, I, ch.3, *OP*, p. 436.

<sup>60</sup> “These ideas will only be decomposed insofar as circumstances will determine to point out, one after the other, the movements which are the natural signs of them.” Condillac (1947–1951), *OP. vol. 1, Grammaire*, I, ch. 7, *OP*, p. 444.

<sup>61</sup> Grivois and Proust 1998, p. 18.

<sup>62</sup> Grivois and Proust 1998, p. 19.