

Amour, Ambition and Amitié:
Marie Thiroux D'Arconville on Passion, Agency and Virtue

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, I examine Marie Thiroux D'Arconville's moral psychology as presented in two of her works: *Des Passions* [On the Passions] and *De L'Amitié* [On Friendship]. This moral psychology is somewhat unique as it centers human action on three principal sentiments: *l'amour*, which is best understood as lust or a physical love; ambition, the principal human vice; and *l'amitié*, a characteristic friendship proper to the truly virtuous. I aim to show that these three passions tell a story of moral development. Through *amour* we come to form projects and engage in goal directed action, and thus become moral agents. While ambition is, for her, the cause of many of the horrors of human history, I suggest that Thiroux D'Arconville also sees it as the passion through which we come to form collective projects. Finally, in her account of *amitié* we can find her account of virtue. Interestingly, while Thiroux D'Arconville talks of virtue as a matter of choosing well, she does not offer a voluntarist account of choice. Rather, I argue, she models moral choices on a naturalist Stoic model. I will also discuss Thiroux D'Arconville's very interesting remarks on relations between the men and women, including those regarding sexual desires, marriage, and friendship.

KEYWORDS: ambition, love (amour), friendship (amitié), moral development, Stoicism

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Marie Thiroux D'Arconville does not herself explicitly offer a well worked out moral theory. Nonetheless, two of her works, *Des Passions* [On The Passions] and *De L'Amitié* [On Friendship], are suggestive of an account of our moral development. In this chapter, I want to explore these works with the principal aim of fleshing out this account. I also want to draw attention to some quite remarkable moments of the account that would seem to mark Thiroux D'Arconville as a very forward thinking theorist of gender and sexuality. Thiroux D'Arconville's account is worth fleshing out for she seems to want to balance two different, and perhaps competing, commitments with respect to our moral lives. On the one hand, she seems committed to a naturalist account of human moral behavior that ties our moral development to our physical development. This naturalistic story of moral development is at the fore of *Des Passions* in the accounts she offers there of *amour* and *ambition*. At the same time, however, she seems committed to a view that makes being virtuous a matter of making good choices. This view, which comes out in remarks about *amitié*, or true friendship, would seem to imply a kind of voluntarism, insofar as it would seem that making good choices is a matter of properly using the will. It is worth working out how this focus on good choices squares with her naturalism.

Typically, naturalist and voluntarist accounts of human moral behavior stand in tension with one another. Naturalist accounts of morality explain both our actions and their moral value in terms of features and processes of the natural world. Insofar as the

natural world is taken to be a determinist system, it can be hard for a naturalist to explain how we actually choose our actions such that we can be held morally responsible for them. Voluntarist accounts privilege the choice that allows for ascriptions of moral responsibility, but they take those choices as acts of a free will, that is, a faculty not wholly subject to the forces of nature. Thus, insofar as Thiroux D'Arconville's writings seem to have both naturalist and voluntarist strands, we might be better advised to take her writings as at best disjoint and at worst as baldly inconsistent. Nonetheless, I do take it that Thiroux D'Arconville aims to reconcile these two commitments. Let me explain why. First, while *Des Passions* and *De L'Amitié* were published independently, they were also published together in a single edition. While this edition contains no special introduction explaining why the works were published together, that they were suggests that they were taken to form a coherent whole.¹ Second, the dedication of *Des Passions* also suggests that they were conceived as fitting together. That work is dedicated 'to my friend', and there Thiroux D'Arconville sets up a contrast between the attraction of choice that characterizes *amitié* and that of an 'instinct of nature' she aligns with *amour*. However, in this same dedication, she characterizes this true friendship as nonetheless starting from a natural sympathy:

The attraction that draws me to you owes nothing to the instinct of nature. It is not by chance that you are owed my heart; it is by my choice. A fortunate sympathy gave birth to the taste that unites us, esteem accrued to it, and habit, far from diminishing its vivacity, seems to give new charms to it every day. (*Des Passions*,

1)

Thus, the thematic tensions I have identified are brought to the fore immediately. Right away, the choice involved in true friendship is set apart from the natural instinct characteristic of the passion of love. But the author finds herself in a position to have that friendship because of the natural sympathy that was originally experienced between herself and her anonymous friend. Somehow, the natural has led to a choice – what certainly seems to be the voluntary. Moreover, that this shift is a matter of moral development is clear from the very beginning of the work in its introduction. There, Thiroux D'Arconville positions herself as having moved beyond the passions, and to the domain of the voluntary, and so in a position to morally educate others. This moral education, it is implied, is her task in her works on the passions. But at the same time she recognizes both the importance and difficulty of properly depicting the passions. It would seem that in order to help others to understand the passions, and so to be able to develop as moral agents, one needs to depict them well, to capture their force, and in order to do that, it seems, one needs to be affected by them. But of course, in being affected by them one risks a moral lapse. The problem for anyone writing on the passions is thus that of striking a balance between a realism and temperance.² Her own position as an author is thus imbued with her own moral development as well as invested with the task of the moral education of her readers.

I investigate Thiroux D'Arconville's account of moral development by looking first at her account of *amour*, or love. Love, for her, is an essentially physical passion, but it nonetheless has a positive role to play in our moral development. It is through love that we come to be able to form projects and engage in goal directed action, and so to be able to be moral agents at all. I then consider her discussion of *ambition*, easily translated

by its English cognate. While ambition, for her, is the cause of much of the horrors of history, I suggest that Thiroux D'Arconville also sees it as the passion through which we can form collective projects. Too often, however, a collective project has been conceived to consist in using others to serve selfish ends. I turn last to her account of *amitié*, in which choice seems so central. I suggest that Thiroux D'Arconville is best understood not as a voluntarist but rather as conceiving of our choices on a Stoic model. On this naturalist model, choices are actions undertaken from a proper understanding of the relations between things, and grasp of these relations is a function of our situation in the world.

1. *Amour*

On Thiroux D'Arconville's account, *amour*, or love, is understood narrowly as an essentially physical passion. There seems to be no room on her account for the love of God, or any kind of intellectual love. In this section, I consider just what Thiroux D'Arconville intends by 'love' and the role she takes it to play in the initial stages of our moral psychological development.

After a cursory warning of the moral and epistemic dangers of love—that it is all consuming, blinding us to other things, that it involves an abandonment of all rational faculties, with the result that we ignore all truths about the object of our love—Thiroux D'Arconville focuses her attention on the nature of love itself. While in the introduction to the work, Thiroux D'Arconville seems to endorse a kind of Cartesian dualism,³ she does not, as does Descartes in his *Passions of the Soul*, offer an account of love as a mental state caused by some physiological state in the body. Instead, we are presented

with an account of the function of love both in the individual human being and in the species.

The principal function of love, from the point of view of human kind, is that of reproduction:

The author of nature in wanting that humans could reproduce themselves, gave to the two sexes in creating them a reciprocal attraction which developed as soon as it could result from their union... This is the invariable law of nature. (*Des Passions*, 13)

That is, on her account, love in its most basic form is simply sexual desire. Thiroux D'Arconville thus situates love squarely within our nature as animals:

Until time reignites the desire, [animals] do not appear agitated by any trouble or anxiety, because the past is lost to them, and they do not anticipate a need that they do not feel in the present moment. This is love properly speaking, such as nature inspires it; it is only the errors of our imagination, which has formed out of it the most fearsome passion. (*Des Passions*, 14)

Thiroux D'Arconville's account follows an internal logic to draw some conclusions about the psychology of love. If the function of the basic animal passion of love is to ensure the reproduction of the species, there need be nothing particularly enduring about the object of love. When an individual comes across another of the same kind but of the opposite sex, they can either find themselves attracted or not. If they are attracted, they feel love in that moment, and they desire the object of their attraction. Once that desire is satisfied, however, the attraction dissolves, and the love dissipates. An

individual will feel love again when she finds herself attracted to an object once again, and that object might be the same one as before, or a different one.

In this way, basic animal love assumes a very weak memory, but she does not mean to suggest that human love is, by its nature, so promiscuous. Human beings, after all, do have a more robust memory, and with this memory comes a disposition to form associations. We remember both our feelings of love and the object that caused those feelings, and this memory moves us to retrieve the pleasures of love by seeking out just the thing that caused it previously:

Memory is without exception the source of all our passions, and especially that of love, for without it we would have only needs. But the recollection of an agreeable sensation necessarily hatches in us the desire to see it reborn, and if this desire is accompanied by hope, it enflames the imagination. The image of the object that has struck our senses is engraved there with the traits of fire. The reaction of the moral on the physical in turn gives back more to the latter than it received from it. The movement augments, the senses are lit, and the burning becomes general. (*Des Passions*, 15-16)

In this way, we come to have objects of love with some consistency. Human feelings of love develop from the basic animal passion of sexual desire. As humans develop, we also develop memories and the patterns of associations that come with it. With those patterns of association, our feeling of love also develops, coming to take a durable rather than a fleeting object.⁴

With her discussion of the role of memory, we can begin to see how her naturalism can create some space for a kind of agency. For, insofar as it allows for us to

love a thing with some consistency, rather than simply feeling love when we happen to come across a thing we desire, memory allows for us to have projects and pursue courses of actions designed to achieve those projects. That is, memory allows for us to sustain a focus on the end of our project. Yet having an end in mind is not sufficient for pursuing a goal: we must also have a motivation to pursue that object. And the passions are central not only to our forming our ends but also to our being motivated to pursue them:

Passions accelerate the progress of the soul – giving us projects, enlarging the circle of ideas, and making us go down a path more rapidly. Love is the most powerful of the passions. (*Des Passions*, 18)

There is one more part of Thiroux D'Arconville's account of the nature of love. While memory allows for an enduring object of our passion and so affords us the capacity to develop projects, we cannot, of course, always return to the objects we have loved in the past. Thiroux D'Arconville recognizes that association, or imagination, plays as central a role as memory in determining the objects of love. We look to objects that resemble or otherwise relate to objects we have once loved with the hopes of finding new sources of satisfaction. Thus, for her, our forming our ends, as well as our being motivated to pursue them, is founded on natural principles of the mind: memory, physical passions, and associations of ideas. If we take being an agent to consist in forming ends and pursuing them in our actions, in her account of love she gives us a sketch of a naturalist account of agency.

2. Gender and Sexual Desire

Thiroux D'Arconville develops this account of the determination of the passions, and in particular love, by imagination in a remarkable discussion of the gender differences in feelings of sexual desire. While Thiroux D'Arconville has been taken to task for exaggerating features of the female anatomy,⁵ her analysis of the gender differences in sexual desire is remarkably forward thinking. Thiroux D'Arconville's discussion seems to take for granted that boys (and so men) have sexual desires; she is interested in arguing that girls do too. That girls do have natural sexual desires is evidenced, for her, in two different sorts of cases. First, even though the typical girl's education is designed to keep her ignorant of sex and sexual desires, those desires are nonetheless aroused by depictions of sex and sexual desire in art and literature, and sometimes more strongly than they otherwise would have been. Second, there are some girls who are somehow sequestered from these influences on the imagination, and even these girls can feel love: they just don't know where to direct it.

As no external cause has alerted them to the order established by the creator, they experience the first sensation of love much later than do others. Not only do they not know the means of satisfying their desires but they don't even know what they feel. Sad and anxious, having lost the taste for simple pleasures which filled the whole of their days, they search in vain for the cause of their ennui. ... This trouble and anxiety which is falsely attributed to the soul, has ordinarily no other cause than the movement of the senses: as it has no determinate object, their imagination presents them only with confused ideas which succeed one another rapidly ... What is missing, even though they cannot define it, makes insipid all

they do possess: everything seems cold to them because they are embraced and consumed by a fire that they do not know how to put out. (*Des Passions*, 21-23)

Thiroux D'Arconville here wants to maintain that both girls who have had their imagination 'heated' by representations of love, and those who have not, experience love. The difference between the two lies only in their ability to locate the object of the passion they are experiencing and thereby to find a way of articulately expressing and understanding their experience. The girl who has been sheltered is not protected from feelings of sexual desire. Rather, she is left confused and disoriented by what she feels. The feeling itself seems to demand an object, but because the sheltered girl has no appropriate object on which to direct the feeling, she is left at sea, moving from object to object, looking for something appropriately satisfying.

There are at least two ways to understand the point Thiroux D'Arconville is aiming to make here. She might want to suggest that if young girls, or indeed any young human being, male or female, were left to their own devices, their natures would be unbound by the forces of education, and their feelings of love would find their natural objects more easily. Allowing our nature to develop unfettered would free girls from the "trouble and anxiety" which are, in her time, characteristic of the first feelings of love. This line of interpretation also gains support from the picture of the frontispiece as well as her valorization of the love experienced by peasant couples. As the explication of the image tells it, the frontispiece depicts an Indian showing a fellow tribeswoman destruction in the distance. The two 'savages' by contrast enjoy a peaceful happiness surrounded by their children. Their peace contrasts with the turmoil surrounding those who deify love, that is those who manufacture stories and images to add to the pleasures

of love, and who thereby end up creating a framework wherein love, by being part of a game of courtship, breeds distrust and unhappiness. In Thiroux D'Arconville's discussion, she suggests that peasants live closest to the state of nature and are relatively immune from the social forces depicted in the background of the frontispiece, those that distort our natural instincts. She paints the love of peasant couples as adequate to leading a good life, though not one as virtuous as that guided by *amitié*.

However, there is another way to read this discussion. Thiroux D'Arconville might intend to be making the more complicated point, that while we by nature feel a set of passions that serve a function in perpetuating that nature – as love serves a reproductive function – it is also part of our nature that these passions require a discursive understanding. That is, we are naturally led to try to make sense of the sensations we experience, to figure out what we are feeling. In this way, our passions engage our cognitive faculties just as they engage our bodily functions. There is some indirect textual support for this interpretation as well. Early on in the work, Thiroux D'Arconville distinguishes two parts of our nature -- the physical and the moral -- and remarks that there are two species of passions, one proper to each aspect of our nature. The moral passions are not to be understood as having to do with morality, so much as they derive at least in part from our intellectual capacities.⁶ This distinction suggests that love, or sexual desire, might be best understood as having each of these two aspects. Insofar as love is physical, it is simply a sensation. And, as a sensation, it is “the work of an instant, it is a momentary effervescence which has no duration” (*Des Passions*, 27). However, as this sensation comes to have an enduring object, whether it be through the workings of memory, or through pushing back against some resistance, we aim to understand it in

some way. We take that object of desire as something to be pursued, and form projects around it. Insofar as we are able to articulate our feelings -- to know what we want and to explain our desires, the passion enters into our moral lives, and are rightly understood as moral passions. Thiroux D'Arconville does repeatedly identify the love she is discussing as a moral passion, and this usage supports the second reading.

Both interpretations, however, are consistent with Thiroux D'Arconville's explanation of the different manifestations of sexual desire in men and women. On her account,

the education of women being absolutely different than that of men, it must result also in a sensible difference in the exterior form of their passions, and particularly that of love (for at the base, they [the passions] are the same in the two sexes).

(Des Passions, 29)

As Thiroux D'Arconville observes, the images of love and sexual desire presented to boys and girls are quite different. Boys are not sheltered from representations of sexual activity, whereas girls are. Now it might be that boys' education might afford them a less mediated expression of their desires. This line would be consistent with the first interpretation. On the other hand, it might be that Thiroux D'Arconville wants to suggest that both boys and girls have their sexual desires colored by their education. The representations of sexual desires and sexual behavior with which they are each presented informs their imagination, these resources available in the imagination in turn inform their experiences of the sensations of the passions. Insofar as love seeks out an object of desire, it will turn to those objects with which similar feelings have been associated in the past. So

young girls are prevented from seeing paintings and reading books which can instruct them on the true end of love; but we often leave them in the hands of those who can seduce their hearts, all the more surely as the image there of vice is veiled, and they cannot perceive any danger. All that they read of this sort can only excite their vanity (a sentiment innate to women). In these books, they see everywhere men enslaved to their sex. This depiction flatters their self-love, and makes them desire to be the same object of worship; love is only painted for their eyes under the form of gallantry. (*Des Passions*, 31-32)

Throughout this prolonged discussion she suggests that were women's education more concerned with conveying information about the nature of love, as sexual desire, and about the function it serves in the natural economy, and less concerned with depicting the artifices of courtly romance, women would be less confused about their desires, and generally experience the passions in a more temperate and less disordered way.

To conclude my discussion of Thiroux D'Arconville's account of love, let me note three things. First, for her, love amounts to natural sexual desire. While it involves essentially a desire to possess the object of our attraction, love is not essentially wholly self-interested. She does acknowledge that many manifestations of love, including those of the peasant couples she takes to be both the closest to the state of nature and *those most closely approaching virtue (although they do not fully attain it)*, involve a substantive concern for the welfare of the loved one. One can see how this might well be so—after all, a lover is more likely to succeed in keeping hold of the object of her love if she cares for it. This brings me to the second point. In her account of love, Thiroux D'Arconville notes that through the natural faculties of memory and association, the

object of love provides us with projects—we want to secure the object of our desire—and these goals serve to guide our action just as the passion itself motivates to act to achieve our goals. In this way, Thiroux D’Arconville’s naturalist account of love already contains a suggestion of how it might be reconciled with her concern with choice. Presumably we make the choices we do because of the projects we have. The very fact that we have projects all, on Thiroux D’Arconville’s account, derives from the passions we naturally feel. However, Thiroux D’Arconville also seems to acknowledge that we are not wholly determined by these natural passions as we first feel them, and this is the third point. In her discussion of the complicated sexuality of girls, she suggests that our natural instincts are shaped through education, and in particular, that if we are given the proper tools through which to understand our feelings we can control our passions to approach virtue.

3. Ambition

Rather than pursue how these features of love contribute to our moral development, Thiroux D’Arconville turns her interest to ambition—a passion she takes to be intimately tied to our moral downfall and to vice. While her discussion is centered on the moral dangers of ambition, it does seem that through it she introduces a second dimension to our moral psychology. If love enables us to form projects of our own, ambition can connect us with others to form collective projects, though this function is often perverted.

Thiroux D’Arconville begins her discussion of ambition with a survey of the disastrous effects of that passion on human affairs, making good on her claims that ‘painting a picture of ambition is to tell the story of the crimes for which the world is the

sad theatre' (*Des Passions*, 117) and that ambition is 'the most cruel passion and the most contrary to humanity' (*Des Passions*, 125). The reader is presented with a history of atrocities against humanity. Thiroux D'Arconville starts from her frontispiece depicting Caesar and the destruction of Rome and remarks that 'the ambition of Caesar is stopped neither by this spectacle nor by the tears of his homeland who extends her arms to him in reproaching his parricide' (*Des Passions*, 117). From there, she moves through the use of brute force by Attila, the use of 'the most refined politics' by Mohammed to serve his ambition, and an extended discussion of the tyranny of Oliver Cromwell.

From these tales of ambition-run-amok, Thiroux D'Arconville extracts what she presents as the defining feature of ambition: the desire for domination. The ambitious are those who usurp power and subjugate others, and it is for this reason that ambition is 'contrary to humanity': the 'slavery and servitude' which result from it are 'contrary to nature.' For any one who finds himself enslaved 'must desire to escape from it and puts all his efforts towards putting himself in the order established by the creator.' However, acting virtuously is insufficient to escape this subjugation. Instead, 'he must flatter his passions that open the ways to crime, diminish his weaknesses, become ambitious and tyrannical like his master, base courtesan at last and consequently the most vile of men' (*Des Passions*, 146-8). Thus, ambition moves us to dominate others, but in so far as we are successful in our achieving our ambitions, we harm others at the core of their nature, for it is not natural to be dominated. Further, in order for the subjugated to restore themselves, they need to become ambitious themselves and seek to dominate, thereby perpetuating the cycle of domination and subjugation.

Despite her warnings about the evils of ambition, Thiroux D'Arconville does acknowledge that there is some positive value in ambition. She writes:

Ambition is innate in human beings just as much as is love [*amour*]. The Creator put these two passions in them for reproduction of individuals and the happiness of human kind. The one [love] gives us existence, and the other [ambition] gets us all the goods we enjoy by the emulation it inspires. (*Des Passions*, 114)

Ambition thus does serve a purpose in human flourishing. While it is hard to know what she has in mind, she suggests that through ambition human beings form a community around a leader. When it functions as it should, ambition leads individuals to strive to acquire goods. But at the same time, the pursuit of these goods sets a model for others to emulate. Insofar as others do follow this example, human beings can work together to achieve a goal in common, to share a common project, and so share in a common good. Ambition, then, seems to be the foundation of human social organization. Nonetheless, as the examples on which she focuses her attention show, an individual's pursuit of his own glory under the guise of pursuing the common good can pervert this structure, so that the community ends up following a leader who subverts the good of the whole for his own good.

It is hard to know what Thiroux D'Arconville takes the relation between love and ambition to be. The discussion of ambition-run-amok suggests that ambition is a kind of perversion of love. Rather than simply desiring an object of attraction and so wanting to enjoy another, the ambitious person wants to dominate others. However, her discussion of the more positive dimension of ambition suggests something different. Whereas in love we desire someone and aim to satisfy those personal desires, and so structure our

goals around our own individual goods, in ambition we form goals *with* others, share desires and structure our goals around those common goods. When ambition works as it should, we share goals, along with our shared efforts to achieve them, and build stable human relationships. Ambition goes astray just when we treat others as mere means, that is, when we manipulate others to serve our own purposes. The problematically ambitious person thus perversely takes all projects to be *his* projects. Others are simply assumed to agree with his ends and are forced to go along if they do not.

Thiroux D'Arconville also suggests another sort of relation between love and ambition. While she does take ambition as innate to human beings, she does not think that we *feel* ambition from birth. Rather, we begin to experience the passion of ambition only at a certain stage of life. In particular, ambition emerges once the feelings of love or sexual desire that dominate our youth begin to temper themselves:

Love grabs hold of all the faculties. While this physical passion dominates, all the moral passions cede it the empire, and have power only as love directs them.

Greed, vanity, jealousy, anger, envy, ambition itself, all become tools for it. Love speaks, and everything obeys. But the empire of sensations having a limited term, love soon loses its rights when the body loses its power. ... The soul, accustomed to the agitation that the effervescence of the senses excites in it, searches to fill the void left by a passion so spirited as love. Ambition soon offers itself to this heart greedy for confusion and for chains. (*Des Passions*, 218-19)⁷

Thiroux D'Arconville thus marks love as a passion of youth, and ambition as one of adulthood. There are two distinct ways of understanding this claim. First, Thiroux D'Arconville might simply be suggesting that love is correlated with youth and ambition

with adulthood. Our being able to feel each of the passions depends on our being at a certain stage of development physiologically, but the passions themselves are only accidentally connected with one another. While the stages of physiological development are obviously causally connected, the stages of moral development need not be. On the second reading, however, there is a closer connection between the two passions.

Ambition, to gain expression, requires a loss of the physiological force that drives love. That is, an ambitious person might still feel love through memory and association, but he also experiences the loss of ability to act on these feelings. While this loss of power is natural to human development, in ambition, it is experienced as sexual disempowerment. In ambition, this feeling of impotency gets channeled in other ways – towards goals and projects that can be realized – to restore one’s power. It is not clear from the text which of these two options Thiroux D’Arconville subscribes to. The former explanation might seem to be more consistent with her views about the potential benefits of ambition, whereas the second suits well the history of the horrors of unbridled ambition.

However, we might modify the second explanation so that it can allow for ambition to serve its proper purpose of allowing for collective action. In the early stages of life, love dominates our psychology, allowing us to develop as individuals by forming projects of our own. With the natural course of development, we will become well-defined in who we are, and it is thus only natural that love will subside. At that point, ambition arises, but rather than experience our maturation as a kind of disempowerment, we experience a positive desire to emulate others and enter into collective projects. The move from love to ambition would thus be integral to our natural moral development, and not merely accidental. On this naturalist account of ambition, ambition in and of itself

need not lead to any desire to dominate. Rather, that perverse desire comes when the loss of sexual desire, or love, is felt in a problematic way. An attempt to retrieve that lost feeling of love involves a denial of the natural physical development proper to ambition. An acceptance of the natural course of human development brings with it a very different experience of ambition – one which leads us to collective action.

It is worth noting an interesting feature of Thiroux D'Arconville's account that does not bear directly on how to understand her account of moral development. Thiroux D'Arconville claims that each of these passions serves as the organizing principle, or master passion, of all our other passions during its proper time of life. As the passage quoted above indicates, in our youth, a set of passions serves the interests of love. We can see how this might go: With love comes self-love and vanity, as we take pleasure in ourselves in the satisfaction of our desires. But equally, when others secure the object of our desires before we do, love brings with it envy and jealousy, and we find ourselves greedy to have what others have. And when the objects of our love either do not desire us or cease to do so, it excites anger and vengeance. As we mature, ambition takes over as the organizer of our other passions:

As soon as the physical quiets down, ambition awakens forever; all the courtesie that accompanied love reassembles around it. Vanity, self-love, envy, jealousy, anger, hate, vengeance, all these agents are united to extend its empire and aid it in surmounting the obstacles that can oppose its despotic power. (*Des Passions*, 112)

Again we can imagine how the story goes. An ambitious person sets his own power above all else. To maintain this position he must be convinced that his projects are to be

valued above all else, and vanity and self-love assure this. The success of others is met with envy and jealousy, and later anger and hatred, since their successes are seen to undermine the greatness of the ambitious person. To secure power, others must be eliminated, and so the ambitious man seeks vengeance against the wrong that he perceives to have been done to him.

Thiroux D'Arconville opens her work on the passions by saying she hopes to be able to paint a compelling picture of how they actually work, so that we can best avoid their dangers. And it does seem that her account of love and ambition paints a vivid picture of the pitfalls of these passions, but at the same time she presents these as simply facts of our nature as human beings. Human beings, on her account, go through a process of moral development that parallels our physical development. And, for her, our passions are essential to that moral development. Through love, we come to have projects which we pursue, and we, thus, become fledgling moral agents. At this stage, however, all our projects are self-interested. I have been suggesting that, for Thiroux D'Arconville, ambition is a natural mechanism through which our interests come to be other-directed. Insofar as others emulate an ambitious person, that passion can lead us to form collective projects and work together towards a common goal. Moreover, at different stages of life, the different passions dominate our psychology and organize our behavior towards our fellow human beings.

Nonetheless, it seems inevitable that these passions will lead us to act in ways that conflict with morality. This is especially true of ambition, the passion that emerges as we grow into adulthood. How are we to avoid the temptations of ambition to dominate others, and instead act in ways that are more in concert with human flourishing? Thiroux

D'Arconville does not seem to think reason can provide the answer. For the passions have already gained their foothold by the time reasons are brought to bear to regulate them. While reason can serve as a 'light preventative' it does not have the force to dislodge these passions that shape our entire motivational psychology.

A beginning of an answer to this question is suggested at the very end of *Des Passions*. Continuing from the passage quoted at length above, Thiroux D'Arconville writes:

Ambition soon offers itself to this heart greedy for confusion and for chains. Gripped despite itself by this anxiety natural to unhappy mortals, it searches in vain for the happiness that flees it without fail. Happy again when the errors of men don't lead them to commit crimes, and [happy] that the horrors of vice, or the repentance at having been seduced by its deceiving charms, bring them [men] back to the path of virtue. (*Des Passions*, 219-20)

The very picture she has painted of the adverse effects of ambition jar us to step back; they generate new passions in us that give us pause: we feel anxiety and horror and repent the errors of our ways. These passions, it seems, can steer us back to 'the path of virtue'. But what is that, on her view? Thiroux D'Arconville does not answer this question directly, but insofar as she does have something to say in this regard, it is to be found in her account of *amitié*, for this true friendship has its origin in virtue. Moreover, earlier in *Des Passions*, Thiroux D'Arconville claims that *amitié* 'can purify love.' Thus, she suggests that *amitié* is a means to regulating at least the passion of love. Thus, to further our understanding of Thiroux D'Arconville's account of our moral psychology, we need to look at her account of *amitié*.

4. *Amitié*

Thiroux D'Arconville opens her work *De L'Amitié* with a definition of a sort: *L'amitié* is a feeling where our senses have no part. Our soul alone is affected; it is the link of virtuous and sensible hearts; it is their food. Without them, left to ourselves, moving without end from desire to desire, we search, by a kind of instinct, an object worthy of our attachment and which can satisfy the need we have to love. Unhappy are those who do not feel it. They may sometimes have pleasure, but they never know happiness [*bonheur*]. (DA 3-4)

She goes on to contrast this true friendship with the merely apparent friendship that she takes most human relationships to instantiate. Indeed, Thiroux D'Arconville says little directly about the *amitié* she takes to exemplify the relationship between virtuous individuals, but rather throughout this work she sets out to describe it by indicating what it is not. True friendship is not fleeting but constant; it does not gain exaggerated expression but is rather tender and equilibrated; it is not proper to those between whom there is a difference in authority or power, but rather can only exist between equals; it cannot thrive where there is jealousy or emulation, that is, where there is any kind of rivalry; it is not compatible with vanity, excessive self-love, or ambition; it is not a matter of habit or convenience. This last point is perhaps the most important. Thiroux D'Arconville consistently maintains that true friendship arises through a choice we make. She does not, however, say much more than that. She does not say anything about how she conceives of our ability to make a choice, or about the nature of human freedom, nor does she say much about the positive reasons for which we enter true friendship. To

conclude my discussion of Thiroux D'Arconville's moral psychology, then, I want to extrapolate from her discussion to arrive at a more positive account of true friendship than she herself offers. Doing so will afford further insight into her account of virtue and what it is to make a good choice on her view. With this account in place, I will then offer some thoughts about how her naturalism is actually compatible with what she says of the choice of true friendship.

To see what Thiroux D'Arconville's positive account might be, let me begin by considering two clear philosophical allusions implicit in her account. First, her conception of true friendship is remarkably similar to Aristotle's notion of character friendship.⁸ In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book VIII, Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of friendship, that of utility, that of love, and character friendship. All involve the friends having goodwill towards one another, and consciously wishing the other well (NE 1156a4-6). However, the first two varieties of friendship are accidental, and so potentially fleeting. The last kind, however, 'is the friendship of good people similar in virtue; for they wish goods in the same way to each other in so far as they are good, and they are good in themselves. [Hence they wish goods to each other for each other's own sake]' (NE 1156b6-9).⁹ Just as is Thiroux D'Arconville's *amitié*, Aristotle's character friendship is enduring, unconditional, and between equals. And in her discussion of the various human relationships that are not constitutive of *amitié*, Thiroux D'Arconville outlines some of the species of friendship that Aristotle marks as of utility or of pleasure: friendships born of gratitude, of convenience, of habit, and then of esteem and choice, and finally of taste. It is clear from Aristotle's definition of character friendship that virtue is central to that species of friendship. Character friends love one another for what

is good in each other, and this presupposes that each friend is good or virtuous. Insofar as Thiroux D'Arconville is adopting Aristotle's model, it is clear that her account of *amitié* holds clues to her account of virtue.

Let me now turn to the second of Thiroux D'Arconville's philosophical allusions. Thiroux D'Arconville's account of *amitié* alludes to Stoic accounts of virtue almost as much as it does to Aristotle's account of character friendship¹⁰. On the Stoic account, a sage, or virtuous person, exhibits complete self-mastery so that her desires are aligned with the order of nature. She achieves this self-mastery in following a complete set of *kathêkonta*, usually translated as 'duties' or 'obligations' but also as 'proper functions' and 'befitting actions'. These *kathêkonta* aim to set out just how the sage would act in every imaginable situation; they govern every action of daily life. Within this set of rules, some are conceived as general, or 'unconditional obligations'; they are rules a sage would adhere to in his actions in all circumstances. What is of more interest for a reading of Thiroux D'Arconville are the other *kathêkonta* -- highly particular rules, or 'circumstantial obligations'. These rules set out how the virtuous person, or sage, would act in very specific circumstances.

While Thiroux D'Arconville's discussion of friendship does not seem to engage directly with Stoic unconditional obligations, it does offer a code of conduct similar to that of Stoic circumstantial obligations. For one, her discussion proceeds systematically through an array of human relationships. She begins with the family, examining parent-child relations, grandfather-grandchild relations, and relations between siblings; she then turns to non-familial two-person relationships, considering relations between children, between children and teachers, between relations, between husbands and wives, between

women and men, between women, between men; finally, she examines more social or class-based relations, including those between superiors and inferiors, between great men, between men of the world, between the bourgeois, between commoners, between literary men, between mediocre people, between fools, between those who live communally, and between those of different ages. In each case, she describes the norms governing the relations, and explains how those norms do not meet the demands of *amitié*. Nonetheless, she does seem to be prescribing codes of conduct for interpersonal interactions of various kinds. I want to suggest that, following the Stoic model, the set of codes of conduct Thiroux D'Arconville details for all manners of interpersonal relations effectively lay out a set of circumstantial obligations.

We can then ask what the function of this set of norms is for Thiroux D'Arconville. What insight does it give us into her account of virtue? One thing to remark is that the norms of interpersonal interactions are meant to reflect the value of individuals. For instance, *amitié* between parent and child is simply not possible because of the intrinsic inequality between them -- there is no way the value of a child can come to be on a par with that of an adult -- despite the natural love they feel for one another. In following these norms of conduct, then, an individual will implicitly act in accord with the true value of persons. We might thus think that in acting in accord with these norms, we might somehow come to appreciate these true values. Such an appreciation of value would be integral to virtue understood as having our desires account with the order of nature.

Thiroux D'Arconville's order of presentation supports this sort of reading. She begins her discussion of interpersonal relations by attending to parent-child relations,

with a particular attention to the perspective of the child; she then moves on to individual adult relations, those of family, and then to those proper to social relations. In this regard too, she seems to follow the Stoics. Central to Stoic ethics was the notion of *oikeiosis*, a process of appropriating something, that is, of literally, making it one's own. Importantly, for the Stoics, *oikeiosis* is an essentially developmental process: at different stages of life, different things are appropriate to a human being. At the first stages of life, we take our bodily constitution as *oikeion*, but as we mature, and in particular as we develop our rational faculty, what is *oikeion* changes. While we still take our bodily constitution as proper to us, the scope of what we appropriate or attach ourselves to enlarges. In the course of our development, we come to see ourselves as parts of successively larger and larger wholes. Importantly, our seeing ourselves as parts of a whole in this way is essential to human rationality. Doing so shapes our motivations and reasons for actions. The task of a fully rational agent is to recognize the proper relation of part to whole, and so to be moved to act in the proper way, that is, to be virtuous.

Thiroux D'Arconville's claim that love and ambition are each proper to certain stages of life fits well into the Stoic model of *oikeiosis*, and we can see Thiroux D'Arconville's discussion of friendship as tracing out another part of a human developmental process. In her specification of the code of conduct proper to the relationships that dominate each life-stage, we can see her as tracing out the proper relation of part to whole for that stage. Insofar as individuals follow that code, they will have the proper motivations and reasons to action, and ultimately, insofar as they do achieve virtue, it will be appropriate for them to enter into relations of *amitié*.

5. Conclusion

If I am correct that Thiroux D'Arconville's account of *amitié* is best read through the lens of Stoicism, we can complete the story of reconciliation between the naturalism of *Des Passions* and the emphasis on choice in her remarks regarding *amitié*. We have already seen that Thiroux D'Arconville's accounts of love and ambition provide the beginnings of a naturalist account of agency. That is, she can explain our capacity for action simply by appealing to features and processes of the natural world. Our feelings of love, on her account, along with the basic faculties of memory and imagination, enable us to form projects and to pursue goal-directed actions we take to be intrinsic to moral action. Our projects arising from love, however, are inherently self-interested: we want to satisfy our own desires. Ambition, a second basic passion, affords us the possibility of moving beyond ourselves to join with others in forming collective projects and pursuing common goals. In this way, her account of ambition expands what it is to be a moral agent: some of our projects must involve others, even while other projects continue to be self-interested. However, ambition also can and often does go horribly awry. And so with ambition, more than with love, we are pressed for norms governing both our projects and our actions. We want an account not simply of how it is that we come to do what we do, but of how we can come to do the right thing. That is, we want an account that does more than explain our choices; we want one that can guide those actions. I have suggested that with her discussion of *amitié* Thiroux D'Arconville provides such an account. *Amitié*, for Thiroux D'Arconville, is a character friendship, a relationship two virtuous people enter into in recognizing one another as good, and so the discussion of *amitié* contains her account of virtue and right action. But rather than detail a positive account of virtue,

Thiroux D'Arconville aims to provide an account of the norms governing our interpersonal interactions. These norms are, rather than a matter of convention, a reflection of the true relations between individuals. I have suggested, for this reason, that as we adhere to these norms, we come to understand the order of things and act in accordance with nature. That is, we come to be virtuous agents.

On this reading, Thiroux D'Arconville's claim in the introduction of *De l'amitié* that true friendship is a relationship of choice, rather than of nature, is deceiving. She ought not to be read as claiming that an act of will overrides our natural inclinations in true friendship. Rather, she is gesturing towards the end of a natural process of moral development. We can be said to choose these true friendships insofar as we recognize the proper relations of the parts to the whole. In that event, we ourselves are virtuous, but we also recognize the virtue of others, and are naturally disposed to enter into relations – friendships – with them. The account is thus one that aims to preserve the naturalism inherent in the works on the passions rather than one that introduces a faculty of will meant to rule over our passions.

¹ It is worth noting that at least one printing of the two-work edition was mistakenly attributed to Denis Diderot—the British Library catalogues an edition of the work under his name. (See the edition of 1770, published in Frankfurt). Also in both the 1764 and

1770 two-work editions, *Des Passions* was advertised in the frontispiece as being by the same author as *De L'Amitie*.

² Marie Thiroux D'Arconville, *Des Passions* (London [Paris], 1764), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 9: 'As our being is composed of two distinct substances, though one is subordinate to the other....'

⁴ There is, perhaps, an alternative way of reading Thiroux D'Arconville here. She might be taken to be distinguishing mere desires or needs from passions properly speaking, which intrinsically involve the imagination. I do not think this can be correct. For one, throughout her discussion Thiroux D'Arconville refers to love, which she has clearly marked as a passion. For another, Thiroux D'Arconville is clear that even basic animal love does have an object – that to which we are attracted. Insofar as it involves some kind of representation, even basic animal love would seem to involve the imagination.

⁵ See Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex? Women and the Origins of Modern Science* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 195-98. Schiebinger argues that Thiroux D'Arconville's anatomical drawings exaggerated features of the female anatomy to cartoonish levels: women's skulls were disproportionately small, their pelvises disproportionately large, ribs narrow, and spines more curved. The skeleton thus effectively confirmed stereotypes driving political debates about the status of women: women were taken to be less intelligent and designed to carry children.

⁶ Thiroux D'Arconville, *Des Passions*, 8-9.

⁷ See also *ibid.*, 114 and 169.

⁸ While there it is hard to know what Thiroux D'Arconville might have read, it is clear from her eclectic interests that she was quite widely read in the sciences, from her

translation of and work in chemistry, and in literature. While it might seem reasonable to think that she would have read Aristotle's, it does not seem that there were many editions of Aristotle's ethical works published in the early part of the 18th century in France.

(There were, however, many editions of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.) It thus seems likely she would have gotten her understanding of Aristotelian friendship second hand, though it is hard to ascertain her specific source.

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translator Terence Irwin (Hackett Publishing, 1985). The words in square brackets are added by Irwin, who notes that they are not found in manuscripts.

¹⁰ While one might assume that the Stoic thought that greatly influenced 17th century philosophy had lost sway in the 18th century, I think this is misguided. By the 18th century figures an array of ancient philosophies -- Scepticism, Epicureanism, Platonism, as well as Stoicism -- had been revived, and authors were able to pick and choose strands of each to weave them together. That Stoic thought was still influential is evidenced by the large number of editions of Cicero (in French) in the first half of the 18th century. These editions include his essays on old age (*De la vieillesse* [*De senectute*]) and friendship (*De l'amitié* [*De amicitia*]), in particular.