Discourse on Inequality

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU
1712–1778

Discourse on Inequality

Discours sur l'origine et les fondemens de l'inégalité parmi les hommes

Translated from the French with AI (Claude) and edited



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INTRODUCTION

In 1753 the Academy of Dijon asked: what is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law? Jean-Jacques Rousseau answered with this discourse, published in 1755. It did not win the prize, but it became one of the most influential books of the century.

Rousseau strips away everything society has added to human beings to imagine them as nature made them: solitary, healthy, without language or property, moved only by self-preservation and by pity for others who suffer. Then he tells how, step by step, people came to live together, compare themselves with one another, divide the land, and set up governments that turned the inequality of wealth into the inequality of power. "The first man who, having fenced off a piece of ground, took it into his head to say, this is mine…" begins the second part.

The discourse opens with a dedication to the Republic of Geneva and a preface. Rousseau's own notes, some of them essays in their own right, appear after the paragraphs that cite them.

Dedication: To the Republic of Geneva

À la République de Genève
Rousseau praises his native city as the free republic he would have chosen to be born in.

Ep. *What is natural must be studied not in things that are depraved, but in those that are in a good state according to nature. Aristotle, Politics, Book I.*[1]

Ded. 1 Magnificent, most honored and sovereign lords,[2]

Ded. 2 Convinced that only the virtuous citizen may offer his homeland honors it can acknowledge, I have been working for thirty years to deserve to offer you a public tribute. And since this happy occasion makes up in part for what my efforts could not achieve, I believed I might be allowed to consult here the zeal that moves me more than the right that ought to authorize me. Having had the good fortune to be born among you, how could I reflect on the equality that nature has placed among men, and on the inequality they have instituted, without thinking of the profound wisdom with which the two, happily combined in this State, work together—in the manner closest to natural law and most favorable to society—to maintain public order and the happiness of individuals? In seeking the best maxims that good sense can dictate for the constitution of a government, I was so struck to see them all put into practice in yours that, even had I not been born within your walls, I would have felt I

1 In Latin in the original: Aristotle, *Politics* 1.5 (1254a), in a Latin version.
2 The dedication is addressed to the governing councils of the Republic of Geneva, Rousseau's native city, whose magistrates bore these formal titles.

could not refrain from offering this picture of human society to that one of all peoples which seems to me to possess its greatest advantages and to have best guarded against its abuses.

Ded. 3 Had I been able to choose the place of my birth, I would have chosen a society whose size was limited by the reach of human faculties—that is, by the possibility of being well governed—and where, each person being equal to his task, no one would have been forced to hand over to others the duties entrusted to him: a State where, all private individuals knowing one another, neither the obscure maneuvers of vice nor the modesty of virtue could have escaped the eyes and judgment of the public, and where this pleasant habit of seeing and knowing one another would have made love of country a love of one's fellow citizens rather than of the soil.

Ded. 4 I would have wished to be born in a country where the sovereign and the people could have only one and the same interest, so that all the movements of the machine would tend only toward the common happiness. Since this cannot happen unless the people and the sovereign are one and the same person, it follows that I would have wished to be born under a democratic government, wisely tempered.

Ded. 5 I would have wished to live and die free—that is, so subject to the laws that neither I nor anyone else could shake off their honorable yoke: that wholesome and gentle yoke which the proudest heads bear all the more meekly because they are made to bear no other.

Ded. 6 I would therefore have wished that no one in the State could claim to be above the law, and that no one outside it could impose any law the State was obliged to recognize. For whatever the constitution of a government may be, if there is a single man in it who is not subject to the law, all the others are necessarily

at his mercy[3]. And if there is one national leader and another foreign one, however they may divide authority between them, it is impossible for both to be well obeyed and for the State to be well governed.

Ded. 7 I would not have wished to live in a newly founded republic, however good its laws might be, for fear that the government, perhaps constituted otherwise than the moment required, would not suit the new citizens, or the citizens the new government, and the State would be liable to be shaken and destroyed almost from its birth. For liberty is like those solid, rich foods or those full-bodied wines that nourish and strengthen robust constitutions accustomed to them, but overwhelm, ruin and intoxicate the weak and delicate who are not used to them. Peoples once accustomed to masters are no longer able to do without them. If they try to shake off the yoke, they move all the further from liberty, because, mistaking for it an unbridled license that is its opposite, their revolutions almost always deliver them to seducers who only make their chains heavier. The Roman people itself, that model of all free peoples,

3 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Herodotus relates that after the murder of the false Smerdis, when the seven liberators of Persia had assembled to deliberate on the form of government they would give the State, Otanes argued strongly for a republic—an opinion all the more extraordinary in the mouth of a satrap because, besides any claim he might have had to the empire, the great fear more than death a kind of government that forces them to respect men. Otanes, as one may well imagine, was not heeded; and seeing that they were about to proceed to the election of a monarch, he, who wished neither to obey nor to command, voluntarily yielded his right to the crown to the other contenders, asking as his only compensation that he and his descendants be free and independent. This was granted him. Even if Herodotus did not tell us of the restriction placed on this privilege, we would necessarily have to assume it; otherwise Otanes, recognizing no law of any kind and accountable to no one, would have been all-powerful in the State, and more powerful than the king himself. But it was hardly likely that a man capable, in such a case, of contenting himself with such a privilege would be capable of abusing it. And indeed, we do not see that this right ever caused the slightest trouble in the kingdom, either through the wise Otanes or through any of his descendants.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Herodotus, Histories 3.80–83. After the usurper posing as Smerdis, brother of Cambyses, was killed (522 BC), seven Persian nobles debated the best constitution; Darius was chosen king.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The restriction, per Herodotus, was that Otanes' house would be free only so long as it did not break Persian law.

was not able to govern itself when it emerged from the oppression of the Tarquins.[4] Debased by slavery and by the degrading labors the Tarquins had imposed on it, it was at first only a stupid rabble that had to be handled and governed with the greatest wisdom, so that, growing used little by little to breathing the wholesome air of liberty, these souls enfeebled, or rather brutalized, under tyranny might gradually acquire that severity of morals and that pride of courage which at last made them the most respected of all peoples. I would therefore have sought as my homeland a happy and peaceful republic whose antiquity was lost, as it were, in the night of time; which had suffered only such attacks as served to display and strengthen the courage and patriotism of its inhabitants; and where the citizens, long accustomed to a wise independence, were not only free but worthy of being so.

Ded. 8 I would have wished to choose for myself a homeland kept by a happy powerlessness from the ferocious love of conquest, and protected by a still happier position from the fear of becoming itself the conquest of another State: a free city, set among several peoples none of whom had an interest in invading it, and each of whom had an interest in preventing the others from invading it; a republic, in a word, that would not tempt the ambition of its neighbors and could reasonably count on their help in need. It follows that, in so fortunate a position, it would have had nothing to fear but itself; and if its citizens had trained in arms, it would have been to keep alive among them that martial ardor and pride of courage which so become liberty and feed the taste for it, rather than from any need to provide for their own defense.

Ded. 9 I would have sought a country where the right of legislation was common to all citizens; for who can know better than they under what conditions it suits them to live together in one society? But I would not have approved of plebiscites like those of the Romans, in which the heads of the State and those most

4 The Tarquins were the last kings of Rome, expelled around 509 BC, when the Republic was founded.

concerned with its preservation were excluded from deliberations on which its safety often depended, and in which, by an absurd inconsistency, the magistrates were deprived of rights enjoyed by ordinary citizens.[5]

Ded. 10 On the contrary, I would have wished that, to check self-interested and ill-conceived schemes and the dangerous innovations that finally ruined the Athenians, not everyone should have the power to propose new laws at his whim; that this right should belong to the magistrates alone; that they should use it with great circumspection; that the people, for its part, should be so cautious in giving its consent to these laws, and that their promulgation could take place only with such solemnity, that before the constitution was shaken there would be time to become convinced that it is above all the great antiquity of laws that makes them holy and venerable; that the people soon despises laws it sees changing every day; and that by growing used to neglecting ancient customs on the pretext of improving things, one often introduces great evils in order to correct lesser ones.

Ded. 11 Above all I would have fled, as necessarily ill governed, a republic where the people, believing it could do without its magistrates or leave them only a precarious authority, had imprudently kept for itself the administration of civil affairs and the execution of its own laws. Such must have been the crude constitution of the first governments emerging directly from the state of nature, and such, too, was one of the vices that ruined the Republic of Athens.

Ded. 12 But I would have chosen one where private individuals, content to give sanction to the laws and to decide as a body, on the report of their leaders, the most important public affairs, would establish respected courts, carefully distinguish their various departments, and elect from year to year the most capable and upright of their fellow citizens to administer justice and govern the State; and where, the virtue of the magistrates

5 Roman plebiscites were measures voted by the assembly of the plebs alone, from which patricians—and so many magistrates—were excluded.

thus bearing witness to the wisdom of the people, each would do honor to the other. So that if ever fatal misunderstandings came to disturb public concord, even those times of blindness and error would be marked by signs of moderation, mutual esteem and a shared respect for the laws—omens and pledges of a sincere and lasting reconciliation.

Ded. 13 Such, magnificent, most honored and sovereign lords, are the advantages I would have sought in the homeland I had chosen for myself. And if Providence had added a charming setting, a temperate climate, a fertile country and the most delightful prospect under heaven, I would have desired, to crown my happiness, only to enjoy all these goods in the bosom of that happy homeland, living peacefully in pleasant company with my fellow citizens, practicing toward them, and after their example, humanity, friendship and all the virtues, and leaving behind me the honorable memory of a good man and an honest and virtuous patriot.

Ded. 14 If, less fortunate or wise too late, I had found myself reduced to ending a frail and languishing course in other climes, vainly regretting the rest and peace of which an imprudent youth had deprived me, I would at least have nourished in my soul the same feelings I could not have put to use in my own country; and, filled with a tender and disinterested affection for my distant fellow citizens, I would have addressed to them from the bottom of my heart something like the following speech.

THE ADDRESS TO THE CITIZENS

Rousseau speaks to his fellow Genevans, praising their constitution and urging them to preserve their union.

Ded. 15 My dear fellow citizens, or rather my brothers, since the ties of blood as well as the laws unite almost all of us: it is sweet to me that I cannot think of you without thinking at the same time of all the goods you enjoy, whose value none of you perhaps feels better than I, who have lost them. The more I reflect

on your political and civil situation, the less I can imagine that the nature of human affairs could allow a better one. In all other governments, when it is a question of securing the greatest good of the State, everything is always confined to projects on paper, and at most to mere possibilities. As for you, your happiness is ready-made; you have only to enjoy it; and to become perfectly happy you need nothing more than to know how to be content with being so. Your sovereignty, won or recovered at the point of the sword and preserved for two centuries by dint of valor and wisdom, is at last fully and universally recognized. Honorable treaties fix your borders, secure your rights and strengthen your peace.[6] Your constitution is excellent, dictated by the most sublime reason and guaranteed by friendly and respectable powers. Your State is at peace; you have neither wars nor conquerors to fear. You have no other masters than wise laws you have made yourselves, administered by upright magistrates of your own choosing. You are neither rich enough to grow soft with luxury and lose, in empty delights, the taste for true happiness and solid virtues, nor poor enough to need more help from abroad than your own industry obtains for you. And that precious liberty which great nations maintain only with exorbitant taxes costs you almost nothing to preserve.[7]

Ded. 16 May a republic so wisely and so happily constituted endure forever, for the happiness of its citizens and as an example to peoples! This is the only wish left for you to make, and the only care left for you to take. From now on it is up to you alone—not to create your happiness, for your ancestors spared you that trouble, but to make it lasting by the wisdom of using it well. Your preservation depends on your perpetual union, your obedience to the laws and your respect for their ministers. If the least seed of bitterness or distrust remains among you, hasten to destroy it, as a fatal leaven from which your misfortunes and

6 Geneva threw off the rule of the Duke of Savoy and its prince-bishop in the 1530s; the Treaty of Turin (1754) with Savoy finally settled its borders.

7 The "friendly powers" were France, Zurich and Bern, which guaranteed the Genevan settlement of 1738 after civil strife.

the ruin of the State would sooner or later result. I implore you all to look into the depths of your hearts and consult the secret voice of your conscience. Does any one of you know, anywhere in the world, a body more upright, more enlightened, more respectable than your magistracy? Do not all its members set you an example of moderation, simplicity of morals, respect for the laws and the most sincere reconciliation? Give such wise leaders, then, without reserve, that wholesome confidence which reason owes to virtue. Remember that they are of your choosing, that they justify your choice, and that the honors due to those you have raised to office necessarily redound on yourselves. None of you is so unenlightened as not to know that where the force of the laws and the authority of their defenders cease, there can be neither security nor liberty for anyone. What is at issue among you, then, but to do willingly and with justified confidence what you would always be obliged to do out of true interest, out of duty and for reason's sake? Never let a guilty and fatal indifference to the maintenance of the constitution lead you to neglect, when needed, the wise counsel of the most enlightened and most zealous among you; but let fairness, moderation and the most respectful firmness continue to govern all your conduct, and to show in you, to the whole world, the example of a people proud and modest, as jealous of its glory as of its liberty. Beware above all—and this will be my last advice—of ever listening to sinister interpretations and poisonous speeches, whose secret motives are often more dangerous than the actions they attack. A whole household wakes and stands on the alert at the first cries of a good and faithful watchdog that barks only when thieves approach; but people hate the nuisance of those noisy animals that constantly disturb the public peace, and whose continual, misplaced warnings go unheeded even at the moment they are needed.

MAGISTRATES, PASTORS AND WOMEN

Rousseau honors Geneva's magistrates, recalls his father, and praises its ministers and its women.

Ded. 17 And you, magnificent and most honored lords, you worthy and respectable magistrates of a free people, allow me to offer you in particular my homage and my respects. If there is any rank in the world fit to bring distinction to those who hold it, it is surely the one conferred by talent and virtue, the one of which you have made yourselves worthy and to which your fellow citizens have raised you. Their own merit adds still further luster to yours; and since you have been chosen by men capable of governing others, to govern them, I find you as far above other magistrates as a free people—and especially the one you have the honor of leading—is, by its enlightenment and its reason, above the populace of other States.

Ded. 18 Let me cite an example of which better traces ought to remain, and which will always be present in my heart. I never recall without the sweetest emotion the memory of the virtuous citizen to whom I owe my life, and who often spoke to me in my childhood of the respect that was due to you. I can still see him, living by the work of his hands and nourishing his soul on the most sublime truths. I see Tacitus, Plutarch and Grotius lying before him among the tools of his trade. I see at his side a beloved son, receiving with too little profit the tender instruction of the best of fathers.[8] But if the wanderings of a foolish youth made me forget such wise lessons for a time, I have the happiness of finding at last that, however inclined one may be toward vice, it is hard for an education in which the heart has had a part to be lost forever.

Ded. 19 Such, magnificent and most honored lords, are the citizens, and even the mere inhabitants, born in the State you gov-

8 Rousseau's father, Isaac Rousseau, was a Genevan watchmaker. Tacitus and Plutarch were ancient historians; Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) was a Dutch jurist, author of *The Law of War and Peace*.

ern; such are those educated and sensible men of whom, under the name of workers and common people, other nations have such low and false ideas. My father, I gladly admit, was not distinguished among his fellow citizens; he was only what they all are; and such as he was, there is no country where his company would not have been sought and cultivated, and with profit, by the most respectable people.[9] It is not my place—and, thank heaven, it is not necessary—to speak to you of the consideration that men of this stamp may expect from you: your equals by education, as well as by the rights of nature and of birth; your inferiors by their own will, by the preference they owe to your merit, which they have granted it, and for which you in turn owe them a kind of gratitude. I learn with keen satisfaction with how much gentleness and forbearance you temper, in dealing with them, the gravity proper to ministers of the laws; how fully you repay them in esteem and attention the obedience and respect they owe you—conduct full of justice and wisdom, fit to push ever further into the past the memory of unhappy events that must be forgotten so as never to be seen again; conduct all the more judicious because this fair and generous people takes pleasure in its duty, loves by nature to honor you, and because those most ardent in upholding their own rights are the most inclined to respect yours.[10]

Ded. 20 It should not be surprising that the leaders of a civil society love its glory and happiness; but it is all too surprising, for the peace of mankind, when those who regard themselves as the magistrates, or rather the masters, of a holier and more sublime homeland show some love for the earthly homeland that feeds them. How sweet it is for me to be able to make so rare an exception in our favor, and to rank among our best citizens those zealous guardians of the sacred doctrines authorized by the laws, those venerable pastors of souls, whose lively and gentle elo-

9 Geneva's population was divided into ranks: "citizens" and "burghers" held political rights, while "inhabitants" (habitants) and their locally born children (natifs) did not.

10 The "unhappy events" were the political conflicts between Geneva's ruling patricians and its citizens in the 1730s.

quence carries the maxims of the Gospel into hearts all the better because they always begin by practicing them themselves! Everyone knows with what success the great art of preaching is cultivated in Geneva. But, being too used to seeing things said one way and done another, few people know to what degree the spirit of Christianity, holiness of morals, severity toward oneself and gentleness toward others prevail in the body of our ministers. Perhaps it falls to the city of Geneva alone to show the edifying example of so perfect a union between a society of theologians and men of letters. It is in large part on their acknowledged wisdom and moderation, and on their zeal for the prosperity of the State, that I base my hope of its everlasting peace. And I note with a pleasure mixed with astonishment and respect how much they abhor the dreadful maxims of those holy and barbarous men of whom history offers more than one example, who, to uphold the so-called rights of God—that is, their own interests—were all the less sparing of human blood because they flattered themselves that their own would always be respected.

Ded. 21 Could I forget that precious half of the republic which makes the happiness of the other, and whose gentleness and wisdom maintain peace and good morals within it? Amiable and virtuous women citizens, the lot of your sex will always be to govern ours. Happy it is when your chaste power, exercised only within the marriage bond, makes itself felt only for the glory of the State and the public happiness! It was thus that women ruled in Sparta, and it is thus that you deserve to rule in Geneva. What man would be barbarous enough to resist the voice of honor and reason in the mouth of a loving wife? And who would not scorn vain luxury on seeing your simple and modest attire, which, by the radiance it takes from you, seems the most becoming to beauty? It is for you always to maintain, by your amiable and innocent sway and your winning wit, love of the laws in the State and concord among the citizens; to reunite divided families by happy marriages; and above all to correct, by the persuasive gentleness of your lessons and the modest grace of your con-

versation, the bad habits our young men pick up in other countries—from which, instead of so many useful things they might profit by, they bring back, along with a childish tone and ridiculous airs acquired among women of loose life, only admiration for I know not what so-called grandeurs, trivial compensations for servitude that will never be worth august liberty. Be always, then, what you are—the chaste guardians of morals and the gentle bonds of peace—and continue on every occasion to assert the rights of the heart and of nature in the service of duty and virtue.

Ded. 22 I flatter myself that events will not prove me wrong in founding on such guarantees my hope for the common happiness of the citizens and the glory of the republic. I admit that, with all these advantages, it will not shine with that brilliance which dazzles most eyes, and the childish and fatal taste for which is the deadliest enemy of happiness and liberty. Let a dissolute youth go elsewhere in search of easy pleasures and long repentance. Let the self-styled people of taste admire in other places the grandeur of palaces, the beauty of carriages, sumptuous furnishings, the pomp of spectacles and all the refinements of softness and luxury. In Geneva one will find only men; and yet such a spectacle has its value, and those who seek it out will be well worth the admirers of the rest.

Ded. 23 Deign, magnificent, most honored and sovereign lords, to receive, all of you with the same kindness, these respectful tokens of the interest I take in your common prosperity. If I were so unfortunate as to be guilty of some indiscreet outburst in this lively outpouring of my heart, I beg you to forgive it as the tender affection of a true patriot and the ardent and legitimate zeal of a man who sees no greater happiness for himself than that of seeing you all happy.

Ded. 24 I am, with the deepest respect,

MAGNIFICENT, MOST HONORED AND SOVEREIGN LORDS,

Your most humble and most obedient servant and fellow citizen,

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU.

Chambéry, June 12, 1754.[11]

11 Chambéry, in Savoy, was where Rousseau had lived in his youth with Madame de Warens.

Preface

Why the study of man as nature made him is the most useful and least advanced of all sciences; with Rousseau's note on his notes.

Pref. 1 The most useful and least advanced of all human knowledge seems to me to be the knowledge of man[1]; and I dare say that the inscription on the temple at Delphi alone contained a precept more important and more difficult than all the fat books of the moralists. So I regard the subject of this discourse as one of the most interesting questions philosophy can pose, and, unfortunately for us, one of the thorniest that philosophers can resolve. For how can we know the source of inequality among men

1 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. From my very first step I rely with confidence on one of those authorities respected by philosophers, because they come from a solid and sublime reason that philosophers alone know how to find and appreciate.

"However much it matters to us to know ourselves, I am not sure that we do not know better everything that is not ourselves. Provided by nature with organs designed solely for our preservation, we use them only to receive impressions from outside; we seek only to spread ourselves outward and to exist outside ourselves. Too busy multiplying the functions of our senses and enlarging the outward extent of our being, we rarely make use of that inner sense which reduces us to our true dimensions and separates from us all that is not part of us. Yet it is this sense we must use if we wish to know ourselves; it is the only one by which we can judge ourselves. But how can we give this sense its activity and its full scope? How can we free our soul, in which it resides, from all the illusions of our mind? We have lost the habit of using it; it has gone unexercised amid the tumult of our bodily sensations; it has been parched by the fire of our passions; heart, mind, senses —everything has worked against it." *Natural History*, vol. 4, p. 151, "Of the Nature of Man."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The quotation is from Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (1707–1788), the great French naturalist, author of the multivolume *Natural History* (from 1749).

without first knowing men themselves?[2] And how will man manage to see himself as nature formed him, through all the changes that the passage of time and events must have produced in his original constitution, and to separate what belongs to his own nature from what circumstances and his progress have added to, or changed in, his primitive state? Like the statue of Glaucus, which time, sea and storms had so disfigured that it looked less like a god than a wild beast, the human soul, altered in the midst of society by a thousand ever-recurring causes—by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by changes in the constitution of bodies, and by the continual clash of the passions—has, so to speak, changed its appearance to the point of being almost unrecognizable. Instead of a being always acting on sure and unchanging principles, instead of that heavenly and majestic simplicity with which its Author had stamped it, we now find in it only the misshapen contrast of passion that believes it reasons and understanding in delirium.[3]

Pref. 2 What is crueler still is that, since all the progress of the human species moves it ever further from its primitive state, the more new knowledge we accumulate, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all; so that it is, in a sense, by dint of studying man that we have made ourselves unable to know him.

Pref. 3 It is easy to see that it is in these successive changes in the human constitution that we must look for the first origin of the differences that distinguish men, who, by common agreement, are naturally as equal among themselves as were the animals of each species before various physical causes introduced into some of them the varieties we now observe. Indeed, it is inconceivable that these first changes, by whatever means

2 The Delphic inscription was "Know thyself." House policy: where Rousseau uses sauvage and other terms now considered offensive, the French column shows a neutral term in brackets—"natural man" for his hypothetical being, "Indigenous peoples," "Africans," "Khoikhoi," "Sámi" for real peoples—and the English follows it.

3 The image comes from Plato, Republic 10 (611c–d): the sea-god Glaucus, encrusted with shells and weed, is hard to recognize, as is the soul in its present state.

they came about, altered all the individuals of the species at once and in the same way. Rather, some having improved or deteriorated, and having acquired various qualities, good or bad, that were not inherent in their nature, the others remained longer in their original state. And such was the first source of inequality among men—which it is easier to demonstrate thus in general than to identify its true causes with precision.

Pref. 4 Let my readers not imagine, then, that I dare flatter myself that I have seen what seems to me so hard to see. I have begun some lines of reasoning; I have ventured some conjectures, less in the hope of resolving the question than with the intention of clarifying it and reducing it to its true form. Others will easily be able to go further along the same road, though it will not be easy for anyone to reach the end. For it is no light undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man's present nature, and to know well a state that no longer exists, that perhaps never existed, that will probably never exist, and of which it is nevertheless necessary to have accurate notions in order to judge our present state properly. It would even take more philosophy than people think for anyone who undertook to determine exactly what precautions to take in order to make solid observations on this subject; and a good solution to the following problem would not seem to me unworthy of the Aristotles and Plinys of our age: What experiments would be necessary to come to know natural man, and what are the means of carrying out these experiments within society?[4] Far from undertaking to solve this problem, I believe I have reflected enough on the subject to dare to answer in advance that the greatest philosophers will not be too good to direct these experiments, nor the most powerful sovereigns to carry them out—a combination that it is hardly reasonable to expect, especially with the perseverance, or rather the succession, of enlightenment and good will needed on both sides to succeed.

4 Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79), author of the encyclopedic Natural History, is paired with Aristotle as a model of the natural scientist.

THE CONFUSION OVER NATURAL RIGHT

Jurists and philosophers disagree about natural law because they do not know human nature.

Pref. 5 These inquiries, so difficult to carry out and so little thought of until now, are nevertheless the only means we have left of removing a host of difficulties that hide from us the knowledge of the real foundations of human society. It is this ignorance of the nature of man that casts so much uncertainty and obscurity over the true definition of natural right. For the idea of right, says M. Burlamaqui, and still more that of natural right, are manifestly ideas relative to the nature of man. It is therefore from this very nature of man, he continues, from his constitution and his state, that the principles of this science must be deduced.[5]

Pref. 6 It is not without surprise and dismay that one notices how little agreement prevails on this important matter among the various authors who have dealt with it. Among the most serious writers, one can hardly find two who share the same view on this point. Not to mention the ancient philosophers, who seem to have made it their business to contradict one another on the most fundamental principles, the Roman jurists subject man and all the other animals indiscriminately to the same natural law, because by this name they mean the law that nature imposes on itself rather than the law it prescribes; or rather, because of the particular sense in which these jurists understand the word law, which they seem to have taken on this occasion only as the expression of the general relations that nature has established among all animate beings for their common preservation.[6] The moderns, recognizing under the name of law only a rule prescribed to a moral being—that is, one that is intel-

5 Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui (1694–1748), a Genevan jurist, author of *Principles of Natural Law* (1747). Droit naturel is rendered "natural right" here and "natural law" where Rousseau writes loi naturelle.

6 Rousseau alludes to Ulpian's definition in Justinian's *Digest* (1.1.1.3): natural law is what nature has taught all animals.

ligent, free and considered in its relations with other beings—consequently restrict the scope of natural law to the only animal endowed with reason, that is, to man. But each defining this law in his own fashion, they all base it on principles so metaphysical that there are very few people, even among us, able to understand these principles, let alone discover them for themselves. So all the definitions of these learned men, otherwise in perpetual contradiction with one another, agree only in this: that it is impossible to understand the law of nature, and therefore to obey it, without being a very great reasoner and a profound metaphysician.[7] Which means precisely that, in order to establish society, men must have used insights that develop only with great difficulty, and in very few people, within society itself.

Pref. 7 Knowing so little of nature, and agreeing so poorly on the meaning of the word law, it would be very hard to agree on a good definition of natural law. And so all those found in books, besides the defect of not being uniform, have the further defect of being drawn from several kinds of knowledge that men do not naturally possess, and from advantages of which they can conceive the idea only after leaving the state of nature. One begins by looking for the rules on which, for the common good, it would be fitting for men to agree among themselves; and then one gives the name of natural law to the collection of these rules, with no other proof than the good one finds would result from their universal practice. This is certainly a very convenient way of composing definitions, and of explaining the nature of things by almost arbitrary conveniences.

Pref. 8 But as long as we do not know natural man, it is in vain that we will try to determine the law he received, or the one best suited to his constitution. All we can see very clearly about this law is that not only, for it to be law, must the will of the one it binds be able to submit to it knowingly, but also, for it to be natural, it must speak directly through the voice of nature.

7 The "moderns" are the natural-law theorists such as Grotius, Pufendorf and Burlamaqui.

TWO PRINCIPLES PRIOR TO REASON

Rousseau grounds natural right in self-preservation and a natural repugnance at seeing others suffer.

Pref. 9 Setting aside, then, all the scientific books, which teach us only to see men as they have made themselves, and meditating on the first and simplest operations of the human soul, I believe I perceive in it two principles prior to reason: one makes us ardently concerned with our well-being and our own preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance at seeing any sentient being perish or suffer, principally our fellow men.[8] It is from the concurrence and combination that our mind is able to make of these two principles, without any need to bring in that of sociability, that all the rules of natural right seem to me to flow—rules that reason is later forced to reestablish on other foundations when, by its successive developments, it has succeeded in stifling nature.[9]

Pref. 10 In this way, one is not obliged to make man a philosopher before making him a man. His duties toward others are not dictated to him solely by the belated lessons of wisdom; and so long as he does not resist the inner impulse of compassion, he will never do harm to another man, nor even to any sentient being—except in the legitimate case where, his own preservation being at stake, he is obliged to give himself preference. By this means we also put an end to the old disputes about whether animals share in natural law. For it is clear that, lacking enlightenment and freedom, they cannot recognize this law; but since they partake to some degree of our nature through the sentience with which they are endowed, it will be judged that they too must share in natural right, and that man is subject to some kind of duties toward them. It seems, in fact, that if I am obliged

8 These two principles are what Rousseau later calls self-love (amour de soi) and pity (pitié); both are discussed later in Part One.

9 Sociability, the natural inclination to live in society, was the founding principle of natural law for Grotius and Pufendorf.

to do no harm to my fellow man, it is less because he is a rational being than because he is a sentient being—a quality that, being common to beast and man, ought at least to give the one the right not to be needlessly mistreated by the other.

Pref. 11 This same study of original man, of his true needs and of the fundamental principles of his duties, is also the only good means we can use to clear away the host of difficulties that arise concerning the origin of moral inequality, the true foundations of the body politic, the reciprocal rights of its members, and a thousand other such questions, as important as they are poorly understood.

Pref. 12 If we look at human society with a calm and disinterested eye, at first it seems to show nothing but the violence of the powerful and the oppression of the weak. The mind rebels against the harshness of the one; we are moved to deplore the blindness of the other. And since nothing among men is less stable than those external relations, more often the product of chance than of wisdom, that we call weakness or power, wealth or poverty, human institutions appear at first glance to be founded on heaps of shifting sand. Only by examining them closely, only after clearing away the dust and sand that surround the edifice, do we perceive the unshakable base on which it is raised and learn to respect its foundations. Now, without a serious study of man, of his natural faculties and of their successive developments, we will never manage to draw these distinctions, and to separate, in the present constitution of things, what the divine will has done from what human art has claimed to do. The political and moral inquiries prompted by the important question I am examining are therefore useful in every way, and the hypothetical history of governments is an instructive lesson for man in every respect. By considering what we would have become had we been left to ourselves, we should learn to bless Him whose beneficent hand, correcting our institutions and giving them an unshakable footing, has forestalled the disorders that would otherwise have followed from them, and has made

our happiness arise from the very means that seemed bound to heap up our misery.

Pref. 13 Learn what God has commanded you to be,
and in what place in the human world
you have been set.[10]

AVERTISSEMENT SUR LES NOTES

Avert. I have added some notes to this work, following my lazy habit of working by fits and starts. These notes sometimes stray far enough from the subject that they are not good to read along with the text. I have therefore moved them to the end of the Discourse, in which I have tried as best I could to follow the straightest path. Those who have the courage to start again may amuse themselves the second time by beating about the bushes and trying to go through the notes; there will be little harm if the others do not read them at all.

10 Persius, *Satires* 3.71–73; Persius was a Roman satirist of the first century AD.

Introduction

The Dijon Academy's question, and Rousseau's two kinds of inequality: natural and moral.

QUESTION PROPOSED BY THE ACADEMY OF DIJON

Q. What is the origin of inequality among men, and is it authorized by natural law?[1]

Intro 1 It is of man that I have to speak, and the question I am examining tells me that I am going to speak to men, for such questions are not proposed by those who are afraid to honor the truth. I will therefore defend the cause of humanity with confidence before the wise men who invite me to do so, and I will not be displeased with myself if I prove worthy of my subject and of my judges.

Intro 2 I conceive of two kinds of inequality in the human species. The one I call natural or physical, because it is established by nature, and it consists in the difference of age, health, bodily strength, and qualities of mind or soul. The other may be called moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention and is established, or at least authorized, by the consent of men. This latter consists in the various privileges that some enjoy to the detriment of others, such as being richer, more honored, or more powerful than they, or even making themselves obeyed by them.

Intro 3 We cannot ask what the source of natural inequality is, because the answer would be found stated in the mere defini-

1 The Academy of Dijon set this question for its 1754 prize competition; Rousseau had won its 1750 prize with his *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts*.

tion of the word. Still less can we ask whether there might be some essential connection between the two inequalities; for that would be to ask, in other words, whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and whether strength of body or mind, wisdom or virtue, are always found in the same individuals in proportion to their power or wealth—a question fit, perhaps, to be debated among slaves within earshot of their masters, but not suited to reasonable and free men who are seeking the truth.

Intro 4 What, then, precisely is at issue in this Discourse? To mark, in the progress of things, the moment when right took the place of violence and nature was subjected to law; to explain by what chain of marvels the strong could bring himself to serve the weak, and the people to buy an imagined tranquility at the price of real happiness.

Intro 5 The philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the need to go back as far as the state of nature, but none of them has reached it. Some have not hesitated to attribute to man in that state the notion of just and unjust, without troubling to show that he must have had this notion, or even that it would have been useful to him. Others have spoken of the natural right that each person has to preserve what belongs to him, without explaining what they meant by "belong." Still others, first giving the stronger authority over the weaker, have straightaway brought government into being, without thinking of the time that must have passed before the meaning of the words "authority" and "government" could exist among men. In short, all of them, speaking constantly of need, greed, oppression, desires and pride, have carried over into the state of nature ideas they had taken from society. They spoke of natural man, and they were depicting civil man. It has not even occurred to most of our own philosophers to doubt that the state of nature once existed, although it is evident from reading the sacred books that the first man, having received enlightenment and precepts directly from God, was not himself in that state; and that, if we give the writings of Moses the credence that

every Christian philosopher owes them, we must deny that men were ever in the pure state of nature, even before the Flood, unless they fell back into it through some extraordinary event—a paradox very awkward to defend and altogether impossible to prove.

Intro 6 Let us begin, then, by setting aside all the facts, for they do not bear on the question. The inquiries we may undertake on this subject must not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings, better suited to clarifying the nature of things than to showing their true origin, and similar to those our physicists make every day about the formation of the world. Religion commands us to believe that, since God himself took men out of the state of nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal because he willed them to be so. But it does not forbid us to form conjectures, drawn solely from the nature of man and of the beings around him, about what the human race might have become had it remained left to itself. That is what I am asked, and what I propose to examine in this Discourse. Since my subject concerns man in general, I will try to adopt a language suited to all nations; or rather, forgetting times and places so as to think only of the men to whom I am speaking, I will imagine myself in the Lyceum of Athens, repeating the lessons of my masters, with the likes of Plato and Xenocrates for judges and the human race for my audience.[2]

Intro 7 O man, whatever land you come from, whatever your opinions, listen: here is your history, as I have believed I read it—not in the books of your fellow men, who are liars, but in nature, which never lies. Everything that comes from nature will be true; nothing will be false except what I may have unwittingly mixed in of my own. The times of which I am going to speak are very remote: how much you have changed from what you were! It is, so to speak, the life of your species that I am going to describe to you, according to the qualities you received, which your education and habits have been able to deprave but

2 The Lyceum was the Athenian school founded by Aristotle; Xenocrates (c. 396–314 BC) was a pupil of Plato and later head of his Academy.

have not been able to destroy. There is, I feel, an age at which the individual man would wish to stop; you will look for the age at which you would wish your species had stopped. Dissatisfied with your present state, for reasons that foretell still greater dissatisfactions for your unhappy posterity, perhaps you would wish you could go back; and this feeling must stand as the praise of your first ancestors, the indictment of your contemporaries, and the terror of those who will have the misfortune to live after you.

Part One

Première partie
Human beings in the pure state of nature: strong, solitary, free, moved by self-love and pity.

I 1 However important it may be, in order to judge the natural state of man rightly, to consider him from his origin and to examine him, so to speak, in the first embryo of the species, I will not follow his organization through its successive developments. I will not stop to inquire in the animal kingdom what he may have been at the beginning in order to become at last what he is. I will not examine whether, as Aristotle thinks, his elongated nails were not at first hooked claws; whether he was not

hairy like a bear; and whether, if he walked on all fours,[1] his gaze, directed toward the ground and confined to a horizon of a few paces, did not mark both the character and the limits of his ideas. On this subject I could form only vague and almost imaginary conjectures. Comparative anatomy has as yet made too little progress, and the observations of naturalists are still too uncertain, for us to lay the basis of solid reasoning on such foundations. So, without resorting to the supernatural knowledge we have on this point, and without regard to the changes that must have occurred in man's conformation, both internal and external, as he applied his limbs to new uses and fed on new foods, I will suppose him to have always been formed as I see him today: walking on two feet, using his hands as we use ours, casting his gaze over the whole of nature, and measuring with his eyes the vast expanse of the sky.

THE BODY OF NATURAL MAN

Stripped of all artifice, natural man is a robust animal who easily meets his few needs.

I 2 If I strip this being, so constituted, of all the supernatural gifts he may have received and of all the artificial faculties he could have acquired only through long progress—if I consider him, in a word, as he must have come from the hands of nature—I see an animal less strong than some, less agile than others, but, all things considered, the most advantageously organized of all. I see him satisfying his hunger under an oak, quenching his thirst at the first stream, finding his bed at the foot of the same tree that supplied his meal; and there are his needs satisfied.

I 3 The earth, left to its natural fertility[2] and covered with immense forests never mutilated by the axe, offers at every step

storehouses and shelters to animals of every species. Men, scattered among them, observe and imitate their skills, and so

2 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. If among my readers there should be a physicist poor enough to raise objections to my assumption of this natural fertility of the earth, I will answer him with the following passage.

"Since plants draw much more of their nourishment from the air and water than they draw from the earth, it happens that when they rot they give back to the earth more than they took from it; moreover, a forest brings down rainwater by arresting the vapors. Thus, in a wood left untouched for a very long time, the layer of soil that serves for vegetation would increase considerably. But since animals give back less to the earth than they take from it, and men consume enormous quantities of wood and plants for fuel and other uses, it follows that the layer of topsoil in an inhabited country must always diminish, and at last become like the ground of Arabia Petraea and of so many other provinces of the East—which is in fact the region inhabited the longest—where nothing is found but salt and sand; for the fixed salt of plants and animals remains, while all the other parts evaporate. M. de Buffon, *Natural History*."

To this may be added the factual proof of the quantity of trees and plants of every kind that filled almost all the uninhabited islands discovered in recent centuries, and what history tells us of the immense forests that had to be cut down all over the earth as it became populated or civilized. On this I will make three further remarks. The first is that if there is any kind of vegetation that can make up for the loss of plant matter caused by animals, according to M. de Buffon's reasoning, it is above all trees, whose crowns and leaves gather and take in more water and vapor than other plants do. The second is that the destruction of the soil—that is, the loss of the substance suited to vegetation—must accelerate in proportion as the earth is more cultivated and its more industrious inhabitants consume its products of every kind in greater abundance. My third and most important remark is that the fruit of trees provides an animal with more abundant food than other plants can—an experiment I have made myself, comparing the yield of two plots of equal size and quality, one covered with chestnut trees and the other sown with wheat.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Arabia Petraea ("Rocky Arabia") was the Roman province covering the Sinai, southern Jordan and northwestern Arabia.

raise themselves to the level of the instinct of the beasts, with this advantage: that each species has only its own instinct, while

man, having perhaps none that belongs to him, appropriates them all, feeds equally on most of the various foods[3] that the

ing to M. de Condillac, he showed no sign of reason, walked on his feet and hands, had no language, and made sounds that in no way resembled those of a man. The little wild boy of Hanover, who was brought to the English court several years ago, had all the trouble in the world bringing himself to walk on two feet; and in 1719 two other wild men were found in the Pyrenees, running through the mountains in the manner of quadrupeds. As for the possible objection that this would deprive us of the use of the hands, from which we draw so many advantages: besides the fact that the example of monkeys shows that the hand can very well be used in both ways, this would prove only that man can give his limbs a more convenient purpose than nature's, not that nature destined man to walk otherwise than she teaches him.

other animals share among themselves, and consequently finds

But there are, it seems to me, much better reasons to give in support of the view that man is a biped. First, even if it were shown that he could at first have been formed differently from how we see him, and yet have become at last what he is, that would not be enough to conclude that this is how it happened; for after showing that these changes were possible, one would still have to show that they were at least probable before accepting them. Moreover, if man's arms seem to have been capable of serving him as legs when needed, that is the only observation in favor of this theory, against a great many others that contradict it. The chief ones are these: that the way man's head is attached to his body, instead of directing his gaze horizontally, as it is in all the other animals and in himself when he walks upright, would have kept his eyes fixed straight at the ground had he walked on all fours, a position very unfavorable to the preservation of the individual; that the tail he lacks, and which he has no use for walking on two feet, is useful to quadrupeds, and none of them is without one; that a woman's breast, very well placed for a biped holding her child in her arms, is so badly placed for a quadruped that no quadruped has it placed that way; that since the hindquarters are excessively tall in proportion to the forelegs—which is why, walking on all fours, we drag ourselves on our knees—the whole would have made an ill-proportioned animal that walked very awkwardly; that if he had set his foot down flat, like his hand, he would have had one joint fewer in his hind leg than other animals have, namely the one joining the cannon bone to the tibia; and that if he set down only the tip of his foot, as he would doubtless have been forced to do, the tarsus—to say nothing of the many bones that compose it—seems too thick to serve as a cannon bone, and its joints with the metatarsus and the tibia too close together to give the human leg, in that position, the same flexibility that the legs of quadrupeds have. The example of children, taken from an age when the natural strength has not yet developed nor the limbs grown firm, proves nothing at all; I might as well say that dogs are not meant to walk because for some weeks after birth they only crawl. Particular facts also carry little weight against the universal practice of all men, including nations that, having had no contact with others, could not have imitated anything from them. A child abandoned in a forest before he could walk, and nursed by some beast, will have followed the example of his nurse and practiced walking as she does; habit may have given him abilities he did not have from nature; and just as people without arms manage, by dint of practice, to do with their feet everything we do with our hands, he will at last have managed to use his hands as feet.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Khoikhoi are pastoral peoples of southern Africa; the Caribs (Kalinago) are Indigenous peoples of the Lesser Antilles and the nearby South American coast.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714–1780), French philosopher, discussed the Lithuanian child in his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746). The Hanover boy, known as Peter the Wild Boy, was brought to London in 1726.

his subsistence more easily than any of them can.

I 4 Accustomed from childhood to bad weather and the harshness of the seasons, inured to fatigue, and forced, naked and unarmed, to defend their lives and their prey against other wild beasts, or to escape them by running, men develop a robust and almost unalterable constitution. Children, bringing into the world the excellent constitution of their fathers and strengthening it by the same exercises that produced it, thus acquire all the vigor of which the human species is capable. Nature treats them exactly as the law of Sparta treated the children of citizens: she makes strong and robust those who are well constituted and lets all the others perish—unlike our societies, in which the State, by making children a burden to their fathers, kills them indiscriminately before they are born.

I 5 Since the body of natural man is the only instrument he knows, he uses it for various purposes of which ours, for lack of exercise, are incapable; and it is our industry that deprives us of the strength and agility that necessity obliges him to acquire. If he had had an axe, would his wrist break such strong branches? If he had had a sling, would he throw a stone by hand with such force? If he had had a ladder, would he climb a tree so nimbly? If he had had a horse, would he run so fast? Give civilized man time to gather all his machines around him, and there can be no doubt that he will easily overcome natural man. But if you want to see an even more unequal fight, set them against each other naked and unarmed, and you will soon recognize the advantage of always having all one's strength at one's disposal, of always

being ready for any event, and of always carrying oneself, so to

speak, whole and entire.[4]

16 Hobbes claims that man is naturally fearless and seeks only to attack and fight. An illustrious philosopher thinks, on the contrary—and Cumberland and Pufendorf also affirm it—that nothing is so timid as man in the state of nature, and that he is always trembling and ready to flee at the slightest noise that

strikes him, at the slightest movement he notices.[5] This may be so with respect to objects he does not know, and I do not doubt

that he is frightened by every new sight that presents itself to him, whenever he cannot tell what physical good or harm he

5 The "illustrious philosopher" is Montesquieu (*The Spirit of the Laws*, 1.2). Richard Cumberland (1631–1718) and Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694) were natural-law theorists who wrote against Hobbes.

should expect from it, or compare his strength with the dangers he must face. But such circumstances are rare in the state of

nature, where everything proceeds so uniformly and the face of the earth is not subject to those abrupt and continual changes

caused in it by the passions and fickleness of peoples living together. But natural man, living scattered among the animals

and finding himself early on in a position to measure himself against them, soon makes the comparison; and feeling that he

surpasses them in skill more than they surpass him in strength, he learns to fear them no longer. Pit a bear or a wolf against a

natural man who is robust, agile and courageous, as they all are, armed with stones and a good stick, and you will see that the

danger will be at the very least mutual, and that after several such experiences, wild beasts, which do not like to attack one

another, will be little inclined to attack man, whom they will have found every bit as fierce as themselves. As for animals that

really have more strength than he has skill, he is in the same position toward them as other, weaker species, which nonethe-

less manage to survive—with this advantage for man, that, being no less quick at running than they are and finding an almost cer-

tain refuge in trees, he is everywhere free to engage or break off when he meets them, and has the choice of flight or combat. Let

us add that it does not seem that any animal naturally makes war on man, except in self-defense or from extreme hunger, or

Travelers' accounts are full of examples of the strength and vigor of men among barbarous and Indigenous nations; they praise their dexterity and nimbleness hardly less. And since nothing but eyes is needed to observe these things, there is no reason not to believe what eyewitnesses attest on this point. I draw a few examples at random from the first books that come to hand.

shows toward him any of those violent antipathies that seem to

"The Khoikhoi," says Kolb, "understand fishing better than the Europeans at the Cape. They are equally skilled with the net, the hook and the spear, in coves as in rivers. They catch fish no less skillfully with their hands. They are incomparably skilled at swimming. Their way of swimming has something surprising about it that is entirely their own. They swim with their bodies upright and their hands stretched out of the water, so that they seem to be walking on land. When the sea is at its roughest and the waves rise like so many mountains, they dance, as it were, on the backs of the waves, rising and falling like a piece of cork."

"The Khoikhoi," the same author says further, "are surprisingly skilled at hunting, and the speed of their running is beyond imagining." He is astonished that they do not more often put their agility to bad use, which does nevertheless sometimes happen, as can be judged by the example he gives. "A Dutch sailor, on landing at the Cape," he says, "engaged a Khoikhoi man to follow him to the town with a roll of tobacco weighing about twenty pounds. When the two of them were some distance from the group, the Khoikhoi man asked the sailor whether he knew how to run. 'Run!' replied the Dutchman. 'Yes, very well.' 'Let's see,' said the African, and, fleeing with the tobacco, he vanished almost at once. The sailor, dumbfounded by this marvelous speed, did not think of pursuing him, and never saw either his tobacco or his porter again."

"Their sight is so quick and their hand so sure that Europeans come nowhere near them. At a hundred paces they will hit with a stone a mark the size of a half-sou coin; and what is most astonishing is that, instead of fixing their eyes on the target as we do, they make continual movements and contortions. It seems as if their stone were carried by an invisible hand."

Father du Tertre says of the Indigenous peoples of the Antilles much the same things we have just read about the Khoikhoi of the Cape of Good Hope. He especially praises their accuracy in shooting birds on the wing and fish in the water with their arrows, which they then retrieve by diving. The Indigenous peoples of North America are no less famous for their strength and dexterity; and here is an example that will allow the reader to judge that of the Indigenous peoples of South America.

In the year 1746, an Indigenous man from Buenos Aires, sentenced to the galleys at Cádiz, proposed to the governor that he buy back his freedom by risking his life at a public festival. He promised that he would attack the fiercest bull alone, with no weapon in hand but a rope; that he would throw it to the ground and seize it with his rope by whatever part they pointed out; that he would saddle it, bridle it and mount it, and, so mounted, fight two more of the fiercest bulls to be let out of the torillo; and that he would kill them all, one after another, the instant he was ordered to, with no one's help. This was granted him. The man kept his word and succeeded in everything he had promised. For the way he went about it and all the details of the fight, one may consult the first volume, in duodecimo, of M. Gautier's *Observations on Natural History*, page 262, from which this account is taken.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Peter Kolb (Kolben) (1675–1726), German astronomer, published an account of the Cape of Good Hope (1719; French translation 1741).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Jean-Baptiste du Tertre (1610–1687), French Dominican missionary and author of a *General History of the Antilles* (1667–71).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The torillo is the pen from which bulls are released into the ring.

announce that one species is destined by nature to be food for another.

I 7 These, no doubt, are the reasons why Africans and Indigenous peoples trouble themselves so little about the wild beasts they may meet in the woods. The Caribs of Venezuela, among others, live in this respect in the most complete security and without the slightest harm. Although they are almost naked, says François Coréal, they do not hesitate to venture boldly into the woods armed only with bow and arrow; yet no one has ever heard of any of them being devoured by beasts.

INFANCY, OLD AGE AND ILLNESS

Most human illnesses come from social life, so natural man has little need of medicine.

I 8 Other, more formidable enemies, against which man does not have the same means of defense, are natural infirmities: infancy, old age, and illnesses of every kind—sad signs of our weakness, of which the first two are common to all animals, while the last belongs chiefly to man living in society. I even observe, concerning infancy, that the mother, carrying her child with her everywhere, can feed it much more easily than can the females of many animals, which are forced to come and go constantly with great fatigue, on the one hand to seek their food and on the other to suckle or feed their young. It is true that if the woman happens to die, the child runs a great risk of dying with her; but this danger is common to a hundred other species whose young are not able for a long time to go and find their own food. And if infancy is longer among us, so is life, so that in

this respect everything is still roughly equal,[6] although there are other rules concerning the length of early life and the number of young,[7] which are not part of my subject. In the old, who are not very active and perspire little, the need for food diminishes along with the ability to provide it; and since the natural way of life keeps gout and rheumatism away from them, and old age is of all ills the one that human help can least relieve, they finally fade away without anyone noticing that they have ceased to be, and almost without noticing it themselves.

[19] As for illnesses, I will not repeat the empty and false tirades against medicine that most people in good health indulge in; but I will ask whether there is any solid observation from which one

6 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. "The length of a horse's life," says M. de Buffon, "is, as in all other species of animals, proportioned to the length of its period of growth. Man, who takes fourteen years to grow, can live six or seven times as long, that is, ninety or a hundred years; the horse, whose growth is completed in four years, can live six or seven times as long, that is, twenty-five or thirty years. The examples that might run counter to this rule are so rare that they should not even be regarded as an exception from which conclusions can be drawn; and as heavy horses reach their full growth in less time than fine horses, they also live less long and are old by the age of fifteen."

7 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. I think I see between carnivorous and fruit-eating animals another difference, still more general than the one I noted in Note V, since this one extends even to birds. This difference lies in the number of young, which never exceeds two per litter for species that live only on plants, and usually goes beyond that number for carnivorous animals. Nature's intention in this regard is easy to discern from the number of teats, which is only two in each female of the first kind, such as the mare, the cow, the she-goat, the doe, the ewe, etc., and which is always six or eight in the other females, such as the bitch, the she-cat, the she-wolf, the tigress, etc. The hen, the goose and the duck, which are all carnivorous birds, like the eagle, the sparrow hawk and the owl, also lay and brood a large number of eggs, which never happens with the pigeon, the turtledove, or the birds that eat nothing but grain, which scarcely ever lay and brood more than two eggs at a time. The reason that can be given for this difference is that animals living only on grass and plants, which spend almost the whole day grazing and are forced to devote much time to feeding themselves, could not manage to suckle several young; whereas carnivores, which take their meal almost in an instant, can more easily and more often return to their young and to their hunting, and make up for the loss of so great a quantity of milk. There would be many particular observations and reflections to make on all this, but this is not the place for them; it is enough for me to have shown in this part the most general system of nature—a system that provides a new reason for removing man from the class of carnivorous animals and placing him among the fruit-eating species.

could conclude that in countries where this art is most neglected, the average human lifespan is shorter than in those where it is cultivated with the greatest care. And how could that be, if we bring more ills upon ourselves than medicine can supply us with remedies! The extreme inequality in our way of life; the excess of idleness in some and the excess of labor in others; the ease with which we stimulate and satisfy our appetites and our sensuality; the over-refined foods of the rich, which feed them on heating juices and overwhelm them with indigestion; the bad food of the poor, which they most often lack altogether, so that its lack drives them to overload their stomachs greedily whenever they get the chance; late nights, excesses of every kind, the immoderate outbursts of every passion, fatigue and mental exhaustion, the countless sorrows and troubles felt in every station of life, which perpetually gnaw at people's souls: these are the grim proofs that most of our ills are our own doing, and that we would have avoided almost all of them by keeping to the simple, uniform and solitary way of life that nature prescribed for us. If nature destined us to be healthy, I almost dare assert that the state of reflection is a state contrary to nature, and that the man who meditates is a depraved animal. When we consider the sound constitution of Indigenous peoples —at least of those we have not ruined with our strong liquor— when we learn that they know almost no illnesses other than wounds and old age, we are strongly inclined to believe that one could easily write the history of human illnesses by following the history of civil societies. That at least is Plato's opinion. He judges, from certain remedies used or approved by Podalirius and Machaon at the siege of Troy, that various illnesses those remedies ought to have provoked were not yet known among men at that time; and Celsus reports that dieting, so necessary today, was invented only by Hippocrates.[8]

I 10 With so few sources of ills, then, man in the state of nature has little need of remedies, and still less of doctors. Nor is the

human species in this respect any worse off than all the others, and it is easy to learn from hunters whether they find many sick animals in the course of their chases. They find many that have received serious wounds which have healed very well, that have had bones and even limbs broken and knit again with no surgeon but time, no regimen but their ordinary life, and that are nonetheless perfectly cured, for not having been tormented with incisions, poisoned with drugs, or worn out with fasting. Finally, however useful well-administered medicine may be among us, it is still certain that if the sick natural man, left to himself, has nothing to hope for except from nature, he has, on the other hand, nothing to fear except from his illness—which often makes his situation preferable to ours.

I 11 Let us take care, then, not to confuse natural man with the men we see before our eyes. Nature treats all the animals left to her care with a partiality that seems to show how jealous she is of that right. The horse, the cat, the bull, even the donkey, are mostly taller, and all have a sturdier constitution, more vigor, strength and courage, in the forests than in our homes. They lose half these advantages on becoming domesticated, and one would think that all our care in treating and feeding these animals well serves only to make them degenerate. So it is with man himself: in becoming sociable and a slave, he becomes weak, fearful and servile, and his soft and effeminate way of life ends by sapping both his strength and his courage. Let us add that between the wild and the domesticated condition, the difference between man and man must be even greater than that between beast and beast. For since animal and man have been treated alike by nature, all the comforts that man gives himself beyond those he gives the animals he tames are so many particular causes that make him degenerate more noticeably.

I 12 It is therefore no great misfortune for these first men, and above all no great obstacle to their preservation, to go naked, to

8 Plato, *Republic* 3 (405c–408a). Podalirius and Machaon were the sons of Asclepius, healers of the Greek army in Homer; Celsus was a Roman medical writer of the first century AD, and Hippocrates the Greek physician of the fifth century BC.

have no dwelling, and to lack all those useless things we think so necessary. If they do not have hairy skins, they have no need of them in warm countries, and in cold countries they soon learn to take over the skins of the beasts they have overcome. If they have only two feet to run with, they have two arms to provide for their defense and their needs. Their children perhaps walk late and with difficulty, but the mothers carry them easily—an advantage lacking in other species, where the mother, when pursued, is forced to abandon her young or to match her pace to theirs[9]. Finally, unless we suppose those singular and chance combinations of circumstances of which I will speak later, and which might very well never have occurred, it is clear in any event that the first man who made himself clothes or a dwelling was thereby giving himself things of little necessity, since he had done without them until then; and one does not see why he could not have endured, as a grown man, a kind of life he had endured since childhood.

I 13 Solitary, idle and always near danger, natural man must like to sleep, and must sleep lightly, like the animals, which think little and sleep, so to speak, all the time they are not thinking. Since his own preservation is almost his only concern, his most exercised faculties must be those whose chief object is attack and defense, whether to overpower his prey or to keep from becoming another animal's prey. By contrast, the organs that are refined only by softness and sensuality must remain in a crude state that excludes all delicacy in him. His senses being divided on this point, he will have touch and taste of extreme coarseness, and sight, hearing and smell of the greatest keenness. Such is the animal condition in general, and such too,

9 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. There may be a few exceptions to this. One, for example, is that animal of the province of Nicaragua which looks like a fox, has feet like a man's hands, and, according to Coréal, has a pouch under its belly in which the mother puts her young when she is forced to flee. It is no doubt the same animal that is called the tlaquatzin in Mexico, and whose female Laet credits with a similar pouch for the same purpose.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The animal is the opossum. Joannes de Laet (1581–1649), a Flemish geographer, wrote a description of the Americas.

according to travelers' reports, is that of most Indigenous peoples. So we should not be surprised that the Khoikhoi of the Cape of Good Hope can spot ships on the high seas with the naked eye as far off as the Dutch can with telescopes; or that the Indigenous peoples of America could track the Spaniards by scent as well as the best dogs could have done; or that all these barbarous nations bear their nakedness without discomfort, sharpen their taste with hot peppers, and drink European liquors like water.

FREEDOM AND PERFECTIBILITY

Humans differ from animals as free agents and above all by their faculty of self-improvement.

I 14 So far I have considered only physical man; let us now try to look at him from the metaphysical and moral side.

I 15 In every animal I see nothing but an ingenious machine, to which nature has given senses to wind itself up and to protect itself, up to a point, against everything that tends to disturb it. I perceive precisely the same things in the human machine, with this difference: nature alone does everything in the operations of a beast, whereas man contributes to his own as a free agent. The one chooses or rejects by instinct, the other by an act of freedom. This is why a beast cannot deviate from the rule prescribed to it, even when it would be to its advantage to do so, and why man often deviates from it to his own harm. Thus a pigeon would starve to death beside a basin full of the finest meats, and a cat on heaps of fruit or grain, though each could very well nourish itself on the food it disdains, if it had thought of trying it. Thus dissolute men abandon themselves to excesses that bring them fever and death, because the mind depraves the senses, and the will still speaks when nature falls silent.

I 16 Every animal has ideas, since it has senses; it even combines its ideas up to a point, and in this respect man differs from a beast only in degree. Some philosophers have even suggested that there is more difference between one man and another

than between a given man and a given beast. It is therefore not so much understanding that makes the specific distinction of man among the animals as his quality of being a free agent. Nature commands every animal, and the beast obeys. Man feels the same impulse, but he knows himself free to comply or to resist; and it is above all in the awareness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul reveals itself. For physics explains, in some fashion, the mechanism of the senses and the formation of ideas; but in the power of willing, or rather of choosing, and in the feeling of this power, we find only purely spiritual acts, of which nothing is explained by the laws of mechanics.

I 17 But even if the difficulties surrounding all these questions left some room for dispute about this difference between man and animal, there is another very specific quality that distinguishes them, and about which there can be no argument: the faculty of self-improvement. This faculty, with the help of circumstances, successively develops all the others, and in us it resides in the species as well as in the individual; whereas an animal is, at the end of a few months, what it will be all its life, and its species, at the end of a thousand years, what it was in the first year of those thousand. Why is man alone liable to become senile? Is it not that he thus returns to his primitive state, and that while the beast, which has acquired nothing and so has nothing to lose, always keeps its instinct, man, losing again through old age or other accidents all that his perfectibility had enabled him to acquire, thus falls lower than the beast itself?[10] It would be sad for us to be forced to admit that this distinctive and almost unlimited faculty is the source of all man's misfortunes; that it is this faculty which, with time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days; that it is this faculty which, bringing to flower over the centuries his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues, in the long run makes him the tyrant of himself

10 Perfectibility: Rousseau's term for the faculty of self-improvement just described—the human capacity to develop and change, for better or worse.

and of nature[11]. It would be dreadful to have to praise as a benefactor the man who first suggested to the inhabitant of the banks of the Orinoco the use of those boards he binds to his children's

tish men, without enlightenment, without restraint, without education, did not all slaughter one another at every moment in fighting over their pasture or their game. Let them explain to us how these wretches even had the boldness to look in the face such clever people as we were, with such fine military discipline, such fine codes and such wise laws. And finally, why is it that since society has been perfected in the countries of the north, and so much trouble has been taken there to teach men, at their mutual sketches and the art of living together agreeably and peacefully, nothing comes out of them any longer like the multitudes of men they once produced? I am much afraid that someone will finally take it into his head to answer me that all these great things—namely the arts, the sciences and the laws—were very wisely invented by men as a salutary plague to prevent the excessive multiplication of the species, for fear that this world, which is intended for us, might end up too small for its inhabitants.

temples, and which secure for them at least part of their feeble-

What then! Must we destroy societies, abolish mine and thine, and go back to live in the forests with the bears? A conclusion in the manner of my adversaries, which I prefer to anticipate rather than leave them the shame of drawing it. O you, to whom the heavenly voice has not made itself heard, and who recognize no other destiny for your species than to finish this short life in peace; you who can leave in the midst of the cities your fatal acquisitions, your restless minds, your corrupt hearts and your unbridled desires: take back, since it depends on you, your ancient and first innocence; go into the woods and lose the sight and memory of your contemporaries' crimes, and do not fear to debase your species by renouncing its enlightenment in order to renounce its vices. As for men like me, whose passions have forever destroyed their original simplicity, who can no longer live on grass and acorns, nor do without laws and rulers; those who were honored in their first father with supernatural lessons; those who will see, in the intention of giving human actions from the start a morality they would not have acquired for a long time, the reason for a precept indifferent in itself and inexplicable in any other system; those, in a word, who are convinced that the divine voice called the whole human race to the enlightenment and happiness of the heavenly Intelligences—all these will strive, by practicing the virtues they bind themselves to practice in learning to know them, to deserve the eternal reward they must expect for them. They will respect the sacred bonds of the societies of which they are members; they will love their fellows and serve them with all their power; they will scrupulously obey the laws, and the men who are their authors and ministers; they will honor above all the good and wise princes who know how to prevent, cure or alleviate that host of abuses and evils always ready to overwhelm us; they will stir the zeal of these worthy leaders by showing them, without fear or flattery, the greatness of their task and the rigor of their duty. But they will despise no less a constitution that can be maintained only with the help of so many worthy people —who are more often wished for than obtained—and from which, despite all their care, there always arise more real calamities than apparent advantages.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Probably Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, whose *Essay on Moral Philosophy* (1749) made such a calculation.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The Great Fire of London, 1666.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Montaigne, *Essays* 1.22, "One man's profit is another's loss." Demades was an Athenian orator of the fourth century BC.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The castration of boys to make castrato singers, and of eunuchs to guard harems.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Realgar is a red arsenic sulfide, used as a pigment. The belief that the world's population had fallen since antiquity was widely debated, notably by Montesquieu and Hume.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The "first father" is Adam, and the "precept indifferent in itself" is God's command not to eat of the tree of knowledge (Genesis 2).

ness and their original happiness.[12]

THE MIND OF NATURAL MAN

Natural man only perceives and feels; his passions go no further than his physical needs.

I 18 Natural man, left by nature to instinct alone—or rather, compensated for the instinct he perhaps lacks by faculties capable first of making up for it and then of raising him far above it—will

12 Travelers reported that peoples of the Orinoco basin in South America shaped infants' heads with boards; Rousseau takes the practice as keeping them close to the dull, contented state of nature.

therefore begin with purely animal functions[13]. Perceiving and feeling will be his first state, which he will share with all animals. Willing and not willing, desiring and fearing, will be the first and almost the only operations of his soul, until new circumstances cause new developments in it.

I 19 Whatever the moralists may say, human understanding owes much to the passions, which, as everyone agrees, owe much to it as well. It is through their activity that our reason is perfected: we seek to know only because we desire to enjoy, and it is impossible to conceive why someone who had neither desires nor fears would take the trouble to reason. The passions, in their turn, take their origin from our needs, and their progress from our knowledge; for we can desire or fear things only through the ideas we can have of them, or by the simple impulse of nature. And natural man, deprived of every kind of enlightenment, feels only the passions of this second sort; his desires do

not go beyond his physical needs[14]. The only goods he knows in the universe are food, a female and rest; the only evils he fears

are pain and hunger. I say pain, and not death; for an animal will never know what it is to die, and the knowledge of death

14 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. This seems to me as evident as anything can be, and I cannot conceive where our philosophers can derive all the passions they attribute to natural man. Except for the bare physical necessities, which nature itself demands, all our other needs are needs only through habit—before which they were not needs—or through our desires; and we do not desire what we are in no position to know. It follows that since natural man desires only the things he knows, and knows only those whose possession is within his power or easy to obtain, nothing can be so tranquil as his soul, and nothing so limited as his mind.

Maupertuis. The jeweler Chardin, who traveled like Plato, has left nothing to be said about Persia; China seems to have been well observed by the Jesuits. Kaempfer gives a passable idea of the little he saw in Japan. Apart from these accounts, we do not know the peoples of the East Indies, visited only by Europeans more eager to fill their purses than their heads. The whole of Africa and its many inhabitants, as distinctive in character as in color, remain to be examined; the whole earth is covered with nations of which we know only the names—and we presume to judge and its terrors is one of the first things man acquired in moving the human race! Suppose a Montesquieu, a Buffon, a Diderot, a Duclos, a d'Alembert, a Condillac, or men of that stamp, traveling to instruct their compatriots, observing and describing, as they know how to do, Turkey, Egypt, the Barbary Coast, the empire of Morocco, Guinea, southeastern Africa, the interior of Africa and its eastern coasts, the Malabar Coast, the Mughal Empire, the banks of the Ganges, the kingdoms of Siam, Pegu and Ava, China, Tartary and above all Japan; then, in the other hemisphere, Mexico, Peru, Chile, the lands of the Strait of Magellan, not forgetting the Patagonians, true or false, Tucumán, Paraguay if possible, Brazil, and finally the Caribbean, Florida and all the distant lands—the most important journey of all, and the one that should be made with the greatest care. Suppose that these new Hercules, back from their memorable travels, then wrote at leisure the natural, moral and political history of what they had seen: we should ourselves see a new world spring from their pens, and we should thus learn to know our own. I say that when such observers declare of one animal that it is a man, and of another that it is a beast, we must believe them; but it would be very naive to rely in this matter on crude travelers, about whom one would sometimes be tempted to ask the same question they take it upon themselves to settle about other animals.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Rousseau's descriptions of human variety repeat the terms of 18th-century travel literature.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Herodotus, Greek historian of the fifth century BC; Ctesias, Greek physician and author of a fanciful account of India, around 400 BC.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The translator is the Abbé Prévost, whose *General History of Voyages* began appearing in 1746. Andrew Battell was an English sailor held captive in Angola around 1600; his "pongos" were probably gorillas or chimpanzees.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Samuel Purchas (c. 1577–1626), English clergyman who compiled travel narratives, including Battell's, in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Olfert Dapper (1636–1689), Dutch physician and compiler of a *Description of Africa* (1668). Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange, was stadtholder of the Dutch Republic from 1625 to 1647.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Girolamo Merolla, Italian Capuchin missionary whose account of his voyage to the Congo was published in 1692.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Rousseau means a breeding test: if humans and these animals could produce fertile offspring, they would be one species—but the trial would be permissible only if they were already known to be human.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The boy found among bears in Lithuania (see note III); the "philosopher" is Condillac.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Ancient tradition held that these philosophers traveled to Egypt and the East to study.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. French scientific expeditions of the 1730s: Maupertuis to Lapland and La Condamine to Peru, to measure the shape of the Earth. Jean Chardin (1643–1713) wrote on Persia; Engelbert Kaempfer (1651–1716) wrote a history of Japan.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Leading French writers of Rousseau's day. Reports of Patagonian "giants" were disputed; Pegu and Ava were kingdoms in present-day Myanmar; Tucumán is in present-day Argentina.

away from the animal condition.

I 20 It would be easy for me, if it were necessary, to support this view with facts, and to show that among all the nations of the world the progress of the mind has been precisely proportioned to the needs that peoples had received from nature, or to which circumstances had subjected them, and consequently to the passions that led them to provide for those needs. I would show the arts in Egypt coming into being and spreading with the flooding of the Nile; I would follow their progress among the Greeks, where they were seen to sprout, grow and rise to the heavens amid the sands and rocks of Attica, yet unable to take root on the fertile banks of the Eurotas. I would point out that in general the peoples of the north are more industrious than those of the south, because they can less afford not to be—as if nature meant in this way to even things out, giving to minds the fertility it denies to the soil.[15]

I 21 But without appealing to the uncertain testimony of history, who does not see that everything seems to remove from natural man both the temptation and the means of ceasing to be so? His imagination paints him no pictures; his heart asks him for nothing. His modest needs lie so readily at hand, and he is so far from the degree of knowledge needed to want to acquire more, that he can have neither foresight nor curiosity. The spectacle of nature becomes a matter of indifference to him through sheer familiarity. It is always the same order, always the same revolutions; he has not the wit to marvel at the greatest wonders; and it is not in him that we must look for the philosophy man needs in order to be able to observe, for once, what he has seen every day. His soul, stirred by nothing, gives itself over to the sole feeling of its present existence, without any idea of the future, however near it may be; and his plans, limited like his views, scarcely extend to the end of the day. Such, even today, is the Carib's degree of foresight: in the morning he sells his cotton

15 Attica, with its poor soil, was the territory of Athens; the Eurotas is the river of Sparta, in a fertile valley.

bed, and in the evening he comes weeping to buy it back, having failed to foresee that he would need it for the coming night.[16]

THE LONG ROAD TO KNOWLEDGE

Fire, farming and reasoning would demand foresight, communication and society that natural man lacks.

I 22 The more one reflects on this subject, the more the distance from pure sensations to the simplest knowledge widens before our eyes; and it is impossible to conceive how a man could have crossed so great a gap by his own powers alone, without the help of communication and without the spur of necessity. How many centuries perhaps went by before men were in a position to see any fire other than the fire from the sky! How many different chances must they have needed to learn the commonest uses of that element! How many times must they have let it go out before acquiring the art of producing it again? And how many times, perhaps, did each of these secrets die with the one who had discovered it? What shall we say of agriculture, an art that demands so much labor and foresight; that depends on so many other arts; that quite evidently can be practiced only in a society at least begun; and that serves us not so much to draw from the earth foods it would readily supply without it, as to force it to yield what best suits our taste! But suppose that men had multiplied so greatly that the natural products of the earth were no longer enough to feed them—a supposition which, be it said in passing, would show a great advantage for the human species in that way of life. Suppose that, without forges or workshops, the tools of farming had fallen from the sky into the hands of Indigenous peoples; that these men had overcome the mortal hatred they all have for sustained labor; that they had learned to foresee their needs so far ahead; that they had guessed how the earth must be tilled, grain sown and trees planted; that they had discovered the art of grinding wheat and fermenting grapes—all things they had to have taught them by the gods, since they

16 The "cotton bed" is a hammock.

could not conceive how they would have learned them by themselves. After all this, what man would be foolish enough to toil at cultivating a field that will be stripped by the first comer, man or beast alike, who fancies the crop? And how could anyone resolve to spend his life in hard labor, when the more he needs its reward, the surer he is not to reap it? In a word, how could this situation lead men to cultivate the earth so long as it is not divided among them—that is, so long as the state of nature has not been abolished?

I 23 Even if we chose to suppose a natural man as skilled in the art of thinking as our philosophers make him; even if, following their example, we made him a philosopher himself, discovering the most sublime truths on his own, and forming for himself, through chains of highly abstract reasoning, maxims of justice and reason drawn from the love of order in general or from the known will of his Creator; in a word, even if we supposed his mind to have as much intelligence and enlightenment as it must in fact have sluggishness and stupidity—what benefit would the species draw from all this metaphysics, which could not be communicated and would perish with the individual who had invented it? What progress could the human race make, scattered in the woods among the animals? And to what degree could men perfect and enlighten one another who, having neither fixed dwelling nor any need of one another, would meet perhaps scarcely twice in their lives, without knowing each other and without speaking?

I 24 Consider how many ideas we owe to the use of speech; how much grammar exercises and eases the operations of the mind; and think of the inconceivable difficulties and endless time the first invention of languages must have cost. Add these reflections to the preceding ones, and you will judge how many thousands of centuries it must have taken to develop, one after another, the operations of which the human mind was capable.

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

Rousseau shows how hard it is to explain the invention of language among solitary humans.

I 25 Let me consider for a moment the difficulties surrounding the origin of languages. I could be content to cite or repeat here the inquiries that the Abbé de Condillac has made on this subject, all of which fully confirm my view, and which perhaps first gave me the idea of it. But since the way this philosopher resolves the difficulties he raises for himself about the origin of instituted signs shows that he assumed what I am calling into question—namely, a kind of society already established among the inventors of language—I think that, while referring the reader to his reflections, I ought to add my own, in order to present the same difficulties in the light suited to my subject.[17] The first that arises is to imagine how languages could have become necessary; for since men had no dealings with one another, nor any need of them, we can conceive neither the necessity of this invention nor its possibility, if it was not indispensable. I might well say, like many others, that languages were born in the domestic intercourse of fathers, mothers and children. But besides the fact that this would not answer the objections, it would be to commit the error of those who, reasoning about the state of nature, carry into it ideas taken from society. They always see the family gathered in one dwelling, its members maintaining among themselves a union as close and as lasting as among us, where so many common interests bind them together. In that primitive state, on the contrary, having neither houses, nor huts, nor property of any kind, each lodged where chance took him, and often for a single night; males and females came together by chance, as encounter, opportunity and desire dictated, without speech being a very necessary interpreter of what they had to say to each other; and they par-

17 In his *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge* (1746), Condillac traces language to the cries and gestures of two children living together.

ted with the same ease[18]. The mother at first nursed her children for her own need; then, habit having made them dear to her, she went on feeding them for theirs. As soon as they had the strength to seek their own food, they did not wait long to leave even the mother; and since there was almost no other way of finding one another again than not to lose sight of one another, they soon reached the point of not even recognizing one another. Notice further that since the child has all its needs to express, and consequently more to say to the mother than the mother to the child, it is the child that must bear the greater share of the cost of invention, and the language it uses must be largely its own work. This multiplies languages as many times over as there are individuals to speak them—a multiplication furthered by the wandering, vagabond life, which gives no idiom time to take on any consistency. For to say that the mother dictates to the child the words it must use to ask her for this or that thing shows well enough how languages already formed are taught, but teaches us nothing about how they are formed.

HOW LANGUAGE COULD HAVE BEGUN

Rousseau traces speech from the cry of nature to gestures and names, and doubts it could arise by human means alone.

I 26 Let us suppose this first difficulty overcome. Let us leap for a moment across the immense space that must have lain between the pure state of nature and the need for languages; and, sup-

posing them to be necessary,[19] let us look for how they could have begun to be established. A new difficulty, worse still than

the last: for if men needed speech in order to learn to think, they needed still more to know how to think in order to discover the

19 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. I shall take good care not to launch into the philosophical reflections that might be made on the advantages and drawbacks of this institution of languages: I am not one who is permitted to attack common errors, and the lettered public respects its prejudices too much to bear my supposed paradoxes patiently. Let us therefore allow others to speak—people who have not been accused of a crime for daring now and then to take the side of reason against the opinion of the multitude. "Nor would anything be lost to the happiness of the human race if, the plague and confusion of so many languages being driven out, mortals were masters of a single art, and were permitted to explain anything whatever by signs, movements and gestures. As things now stand, the condition of the animals commonly believed to be brutes seems far better than ours in this respect, since they convey their feelings and thoughts without an interpreter more readily, and perhaps more happily, than any mortals can, especially if they are using a foreign tongue." Isaac Vossius, *On the Singing of Poems and the Power of Rhythm*, p. 66.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The quotation is in Latin in the original; its source is given at the end of the note.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Isaac Vossius (1618–1689), Dutch scholar; his *De poematum cantu et viribus rhythmi* appeared in 1673.

art of speech. And even if we understood how the sounds of the voice came to be taken as the conventional interpreters of our

ideas, it would still remain to be known what could have served as interpreters of this convention itself for ideas that, having no

sensible object, could be indicated neither by gesture nor by voice. So we can scarcely form tolerable conjectures about the

birth of this art of communicating one's thoughts and establishing intercourse between minds: a sublime art that is already so

far from its origin, yet which the philosopher still sees at so prodigious a distance from its perfection that no one is bold

enough to assert it would ever reach it—even if the revolutions that time necessarily brings were suspended in its favor, even if

previous one can provide for its own needs, we would need experiments that Locke certainly had not made and that no one is in a position to make. The continual cohabitation of husband and wife is so immediate an occasion of exposure to a new pregnancy that it is very hard to believe that chance encounters, or the mere impulse of temperament, would produce such frequent effects in the pure prejudice were to leave the academies or fall silent before them, children sturdier, and might moreover be offset by the capacity to conceive lasting to a greater age in women who had made less excessive use of it in their youth. As for children, there are many reasons to believe that their strength and their organs develop later among us than they did in the primitive state I am speaking of. The original weakness they inherit from their parents' constitution, the pains taken to swaddle and constrict all their limbs, the softness in which they are brought up, perhaps the use of milk other than their mother's—everything thwarts and delays in them the first progress of nature. The application they are made to give to a thousand things on which their attention is constantly fixed, while no exercise is given to their bodily strength, may also considerably divert their growth; so that if, instead of first overloading and wearying their minds in a thousand ways, we let their bodies exercise in the constant movement that nature seems to demand of them, we may well believe that they would be able much sooner to walk, to act and to provide for their own needs.

4. Finally, Mr. Locke proves at most that a man might well have a motive for staying attached to a woman once she has a child; but he in no way proves that he must have become attached to her before the birth, during the nine months of pregnancy. If a given woman is a matter of indifference to the man during those nine months, if she even becomes a stranger to him, why will he help her after the birth? Why will he help her raise a child he does not even know to be his, and whose birth he neither intended nor foresaw? Mr. Locke plainly assumes what is in question: for the issue is not why the man will stay attached to the woman after the birth, but why he will attach himself to her after conception. Once appetite is satisfied, the man no longer needs that woman, nor the woman that man. He has not the slightest concern, nor perhaps the slightest idea, of the consequences of his act. One goes off one way, the other another, and there is no likelihood that at the end of nine months they will remember having known each other: for the kind of memory by which one individual gives preference to another for the act of generation requires, as I prove in the text, more progress or corruption in human understanding than can be supposed of it in the animal state in question here. Another woman can therefore satisfy the man's new desires just as conveniently as the one he has already known, and another man can likewise satisfy the woman—supposing she feels the same appetite during pregnancy, which may reasonably be doubted. And if in the state of nature the woman no longer feels the passion of love after conceiving the child, the obstacle to her associating with the man becomes greater still, since she then needs neither the man who made her pregnant nor any other. There is therefore no reason in the man to seek out the same woman, nor any reason in the woman to seek out the same man. Locke's reasoning thus falls to pieces, and all this philosopher's dialectic has not kept him from the mistake that Hobbes and others have made. They had to explain a fact of the state of nature—that is, of a state in which men lived in isolation, in which a given man had no motive for staying beside a given man, nor perhaps men for staying beside one another, which is far worse; and it did not occur to them to carry themselves back beyond the centuries of society—that is, beyond those times when men always have a reason for staying near one another, and when a given man often has a reason for staying beside a given man or a given woman.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (1690), §§79–80, quoted from the French translation Rousseau used (*Du gouvernement civil*).

and even if they could devote themselves to this thorny subject for whole centuries without interruption.

I 27 Man's first language, the most universal, the most forceful, and the only one he needed before it became necessary to persuade assembled men, is the cry of nature. Since this cry was wrung from him only by a kind of instinct in urgent situations—to beg for help in great dangers or for relief in violent pain—it was of little use in the ordinary course of life, where more moderate feelings prevail. When men's ideas began to broaden and multiply, and closer communication was established among them, they sought more numerous signs and a more extensive language; they multiplied the inflections of the voice and added gestures to them, which are by nature more expressive, and whose meaning depends less on prior agreement. So they expressed visible and moving objects by gestures, and those that strike the ear by imitative sounds. But gesture indicates little beyond objects that are present or easy to describe, and visible actions; it is not of universal use, since darkness or an intervening body renders it useless; and it requires attention rather than arousing it. So men at last hit on replacing it with the articulations of the voice, which, without bearing the same relation to particular ideas, are better suited to represent them all as instituted signs. This substitution could be made only by common consent, and in a way rather difficult to put into practice for men whose coarse vocal organs had as yet had no exercise—and more difficult still to conceive in itself, since this unanimous agreement must have had its reasons, and speech seems to have been very necessary for establishing the use of speech.

I 28 We must judge that the first words men used had a much broader meaning in their minds than do those used in languages already formed, and that, knowing nothing of the division of discourse into its constituent parts, they at first gave each word the sense of a whole proposition. When they began to distinguish subject from predicate, and verb from noun—no mean feat of genius—nouns at first were only so many proper names; the

present infinitive was the only tense of verbs; and as for adjectives, the notion of them must have developed only with great difficulty, because every adjective is an abstract word, and abstractions are laborious and unnatural operations. Each object at first received a particular name, without regard to genera and species, which these first founders were in no position to distinguish; and all individuals presented themselves to their minds in isolation, as they are in the picture of nature. If one oak was called A, another oak was called B: for the first idea we draw from two things is that they are not the same, and it often takes a long time to notice what they have in common. So the more limited their knowledge, the larger the dictionary became. The encumbrance of all this nomenclature could not easily be removed: for in order to arrange beings under common and generic names, one had to know their properties and their differences; one needed observations and definitions—that is, natural history and metaphysics—far more than men of that time could have had.

I 29 Besides, general ideas can enter the mind only with the help of words, and the understanding grasps them only through propositions. This is one of the reasons why animals cannot form such ideas, nor ever acquire the perfectibility that depends on them. When a monkey goes without hesitation from one nut to another, does anyone think it has the general idea of that kind of fruit, and compares its archetype with these two individuals? Surely not; but the sight of one of these nuts calls back to its memory the sensations it received from the other, and its eyes, affected in a certain way, announce to its taste the way it is about to be affected. Every general idea is purely intellectual; let imagination have the least part in it, and the idea at once becomes particular. Try to picture to yourself a tree in general: you will never manage it. In spite of yourself you will have to see it small or large, sparse or dense, light or dark; and if it were up to you to see in it only what is found in every tree, the image would no longer look like a tree. Purely abstract beings are seen

in the same way, or are conceived only through discourse.[20] The definition of a triangle alone gives you the true idea of it: as soon as you picture one in your mind, it is this triangle and not another, and you cannot help making its lines visible or its surface colored. So one must state propositions—one must speak—in order to have general ideas: for as soon as imagination stops, the mind can proceed only with the help of discourse. If, then, the first inventors could give names only to the ideas they already had, it follows that the first nouns can never have been anything but proper names.

I 30 But when, by means I do not understand, our new grammarians began to broaden their ideas and generalize their words, the ignorance of the inventors must have confined this method within very narrow limits. And just as they had at first multiplied the names of individuals too much, for lack of knowing genera and species, so they afterward made too few species and genera, for lack of having considered beings in all their differences. To carry the divisions far enough would have required more experience and insight than they could have had, and more research and labor than they were willing to spend on it. Now if, even today, new species are discovered every day that had until now escaped all our observations, think how many must have escaped men who judged things only by first appearances! As for the primary classes and the most general notions, it is needless to add that these too must have escaped them. How, for example, could they have imagined or understood the words matter, mind, substance, mode, figure, motion, when our philosophers, who have been using them for so long, have great difficulty understanding them themselves, and when, the ideas attached to these words being purely metaphysical, they found no model for them in nature?

I 31 I stop at these first steps, and I beg my judges to suspend their reading here and consider—taking just the invention of physical nouns, that is, the easiest part of language to discover—

20 "Are seen in the same way": that is, they too can be pictured only as particulars, or else grasped only through language.

how far language still has to go to express all men's thoughts, to take on a stable form, to be capable of being spoken in public, and to influence society. I beg them to reflect on how much time and knowledge it took to discover numbers,[21] abstract words, aorists and all the tenses of verbs, particles, syntax; to link propositions and arguments; and to form the whole logic of discourse.[22] As for me, alarmed by the difficulties that keep multiplying, and convinced of the almost demonstrated impossibility that languages could have arisen and become established by purely human means, I leave to whoever wishes to undertake it the discussion of this difficult problem: which was more necessary—society already formed for the institution of languages, or languages already invented for the establishment of society?

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21 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Plato, showing how necessary ideas of discrete quantity and its relations are in even the humblest arts, rightly mocks the authors of his time who claimed that Palamedes invented numbers at the siege of Troy—as if, says the philosopher, Agamemnon could have been ignorant until then of how many legs he had. Indeed, one sees that society and the arts could not have reached the point they had already reached at the time of the siege of Troy unless men had had the use of numbers and calculation. But the necessity of knowing numbers before acquiring other knowledge does not make their invention any easier to imagine. Once the names of numbers are known, it is easy to explain their meaning and to call up the ideas these names represent; but to invent them, before conceiving those very ideas, one had to have grown familiar, so to speak, with philosophical meditation, to have practiced considering beings in their essence alone and independently of every other perception—a very laborious abstraction, very metaphysical, very unnatural, and yet one without which these ideas could never have been carried over from one species or genus to another, nor numbers have become universal. A natural man could consider his right leg and his left leg separately, or look at them together under the indivisible idea of a pair, without ever thinking that he had two of them; for the representative idea that depicts an object to us is one thing, and the numerical idea that determines it is another. Still less could he count up to five; and although, by laying his hands one on the other, he might have noticed that the fingers corresponded exactly, he was far from thinking of their numerical equality. He no more knew the number of his fingers than of his hairs; and if, after making him understand what numbers are, someone had told him that he had as many toes as fingers, he might perhaps have been very surprised, on comparing them, to find that it was true.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Plato, *Republic* VII, 522d. Palamedes, a Greek hero at Troy, was credited in legend with inventing numbers, letters and games.

22 "My judges": the Academy of Dijon, whose prize question of 1753 the Discourse answers. The aorist is a past tense of Greek grammar.

NEITHER WRETCHED NOR WICKED

Natural man, free and healthy, is not miserable, and Hobbes wrongly concludes that he is naturally wicked.

I 32 Whatever the truth about these origins, we can at least see—from how little care nature has taken to bring men together through mutual needs and to make the use of speech easy for them—how little it prepared them for sociability, and how little it contributed of its own to all they have done to establish social bonds. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine why, in that primitive state, one man would need another any more than a monkey or a wolf needs its fellow; nor, granting this need, what motive could induce the other to meet it; nor even, in that case, how they could agree between themselves on the terms. I know we are endlessly told that nothing would have been so wretched as man in that state; and if it is true, as I believe I have proved, that only after many centuries could he have had the desire and the opportunity to leave it, that would be a charge to bring against nature, not against the one it had so constituted. But if I understand this term wretched correctly, it is a word that either has no meaning or signifies only a painful privation and suffering of body or soul. Now I should very much like someone to explain to me what kind of wretchedness there can be for a free being whose heart is at peace and whose body is in health. I ask which of the two, civil life or natural life, is more liable to become unbearable to those who live it? Around us we see almost nothing but people who complain of their existence—several, even, who deprive themselves of it as far as they can, and the combined force of divine and human law is barely enough to check this disorder. I ask whether anyone has ever heard of a natural man living in freedom so much as thinking of complaining about life and taking his own life? Let us judge, then, with less pride, on which side true wretchedness lies. On the contrary, nothing would have been so wretched as natural man dazzled by enlightenment, tormented by passions, and reasoning about

a state different from his own. It was by a very wise providence that the faculties he possessed in potential were to develop only along with the occasions to exercise them, so that they would be neither superfluous and burdensome before their time, nor late and useless when needed. In instinct alone he had all he needed to live in the state of nature; in cultivated reason he has only what he needs to live in society.

I 33 It seems at first that men in that state, having no kind of moral relation to one another and no known duties, could be neither good nor wicked, and had neither vices nor virtues—unless, taking these words in a physical sense, we call vices in an individual the qualities that can harm his own preservation, and virtues those that can contribute to it; in which case we would have to call the most virtuous the one who resisted least the simple impulses of nature. But without departing from the ordinary sense, it is well to suspend any judgment we might pass on such a situation, and to be wary of our prejudices, until we have examined, scales in hand, whether there are more virtues than vices among civilized men; or whether their virtues are more beneficial than their vices are harmful; or whether the progress of their knowledge is sufficient compensation for the harm they do one another as they learn of the good they ought to do one another; or whether, all things considered, they would not be in a happier situation having neither harm to fear nor good to hope for from anyone, than having submitted to universal dependence and bound themselves to receive everything from those who bind themselves to give them nothing.

I 34 Above all, let us not conclude with Hobbes that because man has no idea of goodness he is naturally wicked; that he is vicious because he does not know virtue; that he always refuses his fellows services he does not believe he owes them; or that, by virtue of the right he rightly claims to the things he needs, he foolishly imagines himself the sole owner of the whole universe. Hobbes saw very clearly the defect in all modern definitions of natural right; but the consequences he draws from his own show that he takes it in a sense that is no less false. Reasoning

on the principles he lays down, this author ought to have said that since the state of nature is the one in which care for our own preservation is least harmful to that of others, that state was consequently the most conducive to peace and the best suited to the human race. He says precisely the opposite, because he wrongly brought into natural man's care for his preservation the need to satisfy a multitude of passions that are the work of society and have made laws necessary. The wicked man, he says, is a sturdy child. It remains to be seen whether natural man is a sturdy child. Even if we granted him this, what would he conclude from it?[23] That if this man, when sturdy, were as dependent on others as when he is weak, there is no excess he would not commit: he would beat his mother when she was too slow to give him the breast; he would strangle one of his younger brothers when he found him a nuisance; he would bite the other's leg when bumped or bothered by him. But to be sturdy and to be dependent are two contradictory suppositions in the state of nature. Man is weak when he is dependent, and he is emancipated before he is sturdy. Hobbes did not see that the same cause that prevents natural men from using their reason, as our jurists claim, prevents them at the same time from abusing their faculties, as he himself claims. So one could say that natural men are not wicked precisely because they do not know what it is to be good; for it is neither the development of enlightenment nor the restraint of law, but the calm of the passions and ignorance of vice that keep them from doing harm: "So much more does ignorance of vice profit the one than knowledge of virtue profits the other."[24] There is, moreover, another principle that Hobbes did not perceive, and which, having been given to man to soften, in certain circumstances, the ferocity of his amour-propre, or the desire for self-preservation before this

23 Hobbes, preface to *De Cive* (1647 edition): the wicked man is "a sturdy child."
24 Latin in the original, from the Roman historian Justin (*Epitome* II.2), comparing the Scythians with the Greeks.

love arises,[25] tempers the ardor he has for his own well-being by an innate repugnance to seeing a fellow creature suffer. I do not think I have any contradiction to fear in granting man the one natural virtue that the most extreme detractor of human virtues was forced to recognize.[26] I mean pity, a disposition fitting for beings as weak and subject to as many ills as we are; a virtue all the more universal and all the more useful to man because it precedes in him the use of any reflection, and so natural that even animals sometimes show perceptible signs of it. Not to speak of the tenderness of mothers for their young and the dangers they brave to protect them, one sees every day the reluctance of horses to trample a living body underfoot.[27] An animal does not pass the dead body of one of its own species without disquiet; there are even some that give them a kind of

25 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Amour-propre must not be confused with love of oneself; they are two passions very different in their nature and in their effects. Love of oneself is a natural feeling that leads every animal to watch over its own preservation, and which, guided in man by reason and modified by pity, produces humanity and virtue. Amour-propre is only a relative, artificial feeling, born in society, which leads each individual to set more store by himself than by anyone else, which inspires in men all the harm they do one another, and which is the true source of honor.

With this well understood, I say that in our primitive state, in the true state of nature, amour-propre does not exist. For each man in particular regards himself as the only spectator who observes him, as the only being in the universe who takes an interest in him, as the sole judge of his own merit; so it is not possible that a feeling that has its source in comparisons he is in no position to make could take root in his soul. For the same reason, this man could have neither hatred nor desire for revenge—passions that can arise only from the belief that one has received some offense. And since it is contempt or the intention to harm, and not the harm itself, that constitutes an offense, men who know neither how to value nor how to compare themselves can do each other a great deal of violence when there is some advantage in it for them, without ever offending one another. In a word, each man, seeing his fellows scarcely otherwise than he would see animals of another species, can snatch the prey from the weaker or give up his own to the stronger, regarding these seizures only as natural events, without the slightest stir of insolence or resentment, and with no other passion than the pain or joy of success or failure.

26 Amour-propre, kept in French: the comparative, socially born love of self—vanity—which Rousseau distinguishes from natural self-love (amour de soi) in note XV. The "detractor" is Bernard Mandeville, named below.

27 Pity (pitié): Rousseau's term for the natural, pre-reflective feeling for another's suffering; according to sense it is also rendered "compassion."

burial; and the mournful lowing of cattle entering a slaughterhouse announces the impression made on them by the horrible sight that strikes them. It is a pleasure to see the author of *The Fable of the Bees*, forced to acknowledge man as a compassionate and feeling being, abandon his cold and subtle style in the example he gives, to offer us the moving image of a man shut in, who sees outside a wild beast tearing a child from its mother's breast, crushing its frail limbs in its murderous teeth, and ripping with its claws the child's quivering entrails.[28] What dreadful agitation this witness feels at an event in which he has no personal interest! What anguish he suffers at the sight, unable to bring any help to the fainting mother or the dying child!

I 35 Such is the pure movement of nature, prior to all reflection; such is the force of natural pity, which even the most depraved morals still have difficulty destroying—for every day at our theaters we see people moved and weeping at the misfortunes of some unhappy wretch who, were they in the tyrant's place, would make their enemy's torments worse still. They are like the bloodthirsty Sulla, so sensitive to evils he had not caused, or like that Alexander of Pherae who dared not attend the performance of any tragedy for fear he would be seen groaning with Andromache and Priam, while he listened without emotion to the cries of so many citizens whose throats were cut every day on his orders.[29]

I 36 Nature, when she gave us tears,
Confesses that she gave the human race
The tenderest of hearts.[30][31]

I 37 Mandeville clearly sensed that for all their morality men would never have been anything but monsters had nature not

28 Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733), Dutch-born English writer, whose *Fable of the Bees* (1714) argued that private vices produce public benefits; the example is from his "Essay on Charity and Charity-Schools."

29 Sulla (138–78 BC), Roman dictator notorious for his proscriptions. Alexander, tyrant of Pherae in Thessaly (fourth century BC); the anecdote is from Plutarch's Life of Pelopidas. Andromache and Priam are figures of Trojan tragedy.

30 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Juvenal, Satires XV, line 131.

31 Latin in the original.

given them pity to support reason; but he did not see that from this single quality flow all the social virtues he wishes to deny men. Indeed, what are generosity, clemency, humanity, if not pity applied to the weak, to the guilty, or to the human species in general? Benevolence and even friendship are, rightly understood, the products of a constant pity fixed on a particular object: for to wish that someone not suffer—what is that but to wish that he be happy? Even if it were true that commiseration is only a feeling that puts us in the place of the one who suffers—a feeling that is obscure but lively in natural man, developed but weak in civil man—what would this idea matter to the truth of what I am saying, except to give it more force? Indeed, commiseration will be all the more forceful the more intimately the animal looking on identifies itself with the animal suffering; and it is evident that this identification must have been infinitely closer in the state of nature than in the state of reasoning. It is reason that engenders amour-propre, and reflection that strengthens it; it is reason that turns man back upon himself; it is reason that separates him from all that troubles and distresses him. It is philosophy that isolates him; it is through philosophy that he says in secret, at the sight of a suffering man: Perish, if you like; I am safe. Only dangers to society as a whole still disturb the philosopher's tranquil sleep and drag him from his bed. His fellow creature can have his throat cut beneath his window with impunity; the philosopher has only to put his hands over his ears and argue with himself a little to stop the nature that rebels within him from identifying him with the man being murdered. Natural man has none of this admirable talent; and for want of wisdom and reason, we always see him give himself up heedlessly to the first feeling of humanity. In riots and street brawls the populace gathers, while the prudent man keeps his distance; it is the rabble, the market women, who separate the combatants and prevent respectable people from cutting one another's throats.

I 38 It is certain, then, that pity is a natural feeling which, by moderating in each individual the activity of love of oneself,

contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species. It is pity that carries us without reflection to the aid of those we see suffering; it is pity that, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, morals and virtue, with this advantage, that no one is tempted to disobey its gentle voice; it is pity that will deter any sturdy natural man from taking from a weak child or an infirm old man the sustenance he has gained with difficulty, if he himself hopes to find his own elsewhere; it is pity that, instead of that sublime maxim of reasoned justice, Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, inspires in all men this other maxim of natural goodness, far less perfect but perhaps more useful than the first: Do good to yourself with the least possible harm to others. It is in this natural feeling, in a word, rather than in subtle arguments, that we must look for the cause of the repugnance every man would feel at doing wrong, even independently of the maxims of education. Though it may be given to Socrates and minds of his stamp to acquire virtue through reason, the human race would long ago have ceased to exist if its preservation had depended only on the reasonings of those who compose it.

I 39 With passions so little active and so salutary a restraint, men—more wild than wicked, and more intent on protecting themselves from harm they might receive than tempted to do harm to others—were not subject to very dangerous quarrels. Since they had no kind of dealings with one another; since they consequently knew neither vanity, nor regard, nor esteem, nor contempt; since they had not the least notion of yours and mine, nor any true idea of justice; since they regarded any violence they might suffer as a harm easily repaired and not as an injury to be punished; and since they did not even think of revenge, except perhaps mechanically and on the spot, like the dog that bites the stone thrown at it—their disputes would rarely have had bloody consequences, if they had had no more touchy subject than food. But I see a more dangerous one, of which it remains for me to speak.

LOVE IN THE STATE OF NATURE

The physical desire of the sexes causes few quarrels until society adds preference, comparison and jealousy.

I 40 Among the passions that stir the heart of man, there is one, ardent and impetuous, that makes one sex necessary to the other: a terrible passion that braves all dangers, overturns all obstacles, and in its frenzies seems fit to destroy the human race it is meant to preserve. What will become of men prey to this unbridled and brutal rage, without modesty, without restraint, fighting every day over their loves at the price of their blood?

I 41 We must first agree that the more violent the passions, the more necessary laws are to contain them. But besides the fact that the disorders and crimes these passions cause among us every day show clearly enough the inadequacy of laws in this respect, it would also be well to examine whether these disorders did not arise with the laws themselves; for in that case, even if the laws were capable of repressing them, the least one could demand of them would be to stop an evil that would not exist without them.

I 42 Let us begin by distinguishing the moral from the physical in the feeling of love. The physical is that general desire which leads one sex to unite with the other. The moral is what gives this desire its particular object and fixes it exclusively on one person, or at least gives it a greater degree of energy for the preferred one. Now it is easy to see that the moral side of love is an artificial feeling, born of social custom and extolled by women with great skill and care to establish their dominion and make dominant the sex that ought to obey. Since this feeling is founded on certain notions of merit or beauty that a natural man is in no position to have, and on comparisons he is in no position to make, it must be almost nonexistent for him. For just as his mind has been unable to form abstract ideas of regularity and proportion, so his heart is not susceptible to the feelings of admiration and love that, even without our noticing, arise from

applying these ideas. He heeds only the temperament he has received from nature, and not the taste he has been unable to acquire; and any woman is good for him.

[I 43] Confined to the physical side of love alone, and fortunate enough to know nothing of those preferences that inflame the feeling and increase its difficulties, men must feel the ardors of temperament less often and less keenly, and consequently have fewer and less cruel disputes among themselves. Imagination, which wreaks such havoc among us, does not speak to natural hearts; each waits peacefully for the impulse of nature, yields to it without choosing, with more pleasure than frenzy; and once the need is satisfied, desire is wholly extinguished.

[I 44] It is therefore beyond dispute that love itself, like all the other passions, has acquired only in society that impetuous ardor which so often makes it fatal to men. And it is all the more ridiculous to depict natural men as endlessly cutting one another's throats to sate their brutishness, since this opinion runs directly counter to experience: the Caribs—of all existing peoples the one that has so far departed least from the state of nature—are precisely the most peaceable in their loves and the least prone to jealousy, even though they live in a scorching climate that always seems to make these passions more active.

[I 45] As for the inferences that might be drawn, in several species of animals, from the fights between males that bloody our farmyards all year round, or that make our forests ring with their cries in spring as they fight over the female, we must begin by excluding all species in which nature has plainly established relations between the relative strength of the sexes different from those among us: thus cockfights do not afford an inference for the human species. In species where the proportion is better observed, these fights can have no causes but the scarcity of females relative to the number of males, or the periods of exclusion during which the female steadily refuses the male's approach—which comes down to the first cause; for if each female accepts the male for only two months of the year, it is in this respect as if the number of females were reduced by five-

sixths. Now neither of these cases applies to the human species, in which the number of females generally exceeds that of males, and in which it has never been observed, even among Indigenous peoples, that females have, like those of other species, times of heat and of exclusion. Furthermore, among several of these animals, the whole species comes into heat at once, and there comes a terrible moment of common ardor, tumult, disorder and combat—a moment that does not occur in the human species, whose love is never periodic. We cannot, then, conclude from the fights of certain animals for possession of females that the same thing would happen to man in the state of nature. And even if we could draw this conclusion, since these conflicts do not destroy the other species, we must at least suppose they would be no more fatal to ours; and it is very likely that they would cause even less havoc there than they do in society—especially in countries where, morals still counting for something, the jealousy of lovers and the vengeance of husbands cause duels, murders and worse every day; where the duty of eternal fidelity serves only to produce adulterers; and where the very laws of continence and honor necessarily spread debauchery and multiply abortions.

THE END OF THE PURE STATE OF NATURE

Natural man lives alone without speech or ties, natural inequality barely matters, and no one can enslave another.

I 46 Let us conclude, then, that wandering in the forests, without industry, without speech, without a dwelling, without war and without ties, with no need of his fellows and no desire to harm them, perhaps without ever recognizing any one of them individually, natural man, subject to few passions and sufficient unto himself, had only the feelings and the knowledge suited to that state; that he felt only his true needs, looked only at what he believed it was in his interest to see, and that his intelligence made no more progress than his vanity. If by chance he made some discovery, he was all the less able to pass it on, since he

did not even recognize his own children. Every art perished with its inventor. There was neither education nor progress; generations multiplied to no purpose; and since each one always started from the same point, centuries went by in all the crudeness of the first ages. The species was already old, and man remained forever a child.

I 47 If I have dwelt so long on the supposition of this primitive condition, it is because, having ancient errors and inveterate prejudices to destroy, I thought I must dig down to the root, and show, in the picture of the true state of nature, how far inequality, even natural inequality, is from having as much reality and influence in that state as our writers claim.

I 48 Indeed, it is easy to see that, among the differences that distinguish men, several pass for natural which are solely the work of habit and of the various kinds of life that men adopt in society. Thus a robust or delicate constitution, and the strength or weakness that depend on it, often come more from the hard or effeminate way in which one was raised than from the original make-up of the body. The same is true of the powers of the mind. Education not only creates a difference between minds that are cultivated and those that are not; it also increases the difference among the cultivated in proportion to their cultivation. For if a giant and a dwarf walk along the same road, every step either of them takes will give the giant a fresh advantage. Now if we compare the prodigious diversity of upbringings and ways of life that prevails among the different orders of the civil state with the simplicity and uniformity of animal and natural life, where all feed on the same food, live in the same way, and do exactly the same things, we will understand how much smaller the difference between one man and another must be in the state of nature than in the state of society, and how much natural inequality must be increased in the human species by inequality of institution.

I 49 But even if nature showed as much favoritism in the distribution of her gifts as is claimed, what advantage would the most favored draw from them at the expense of others, in a state of

things that allowed almost no kind of relationship among them? Where there is no love, what use will beauty be? What good is wit to people who do not speak, or cunning to those who have no dealings with one another? I keep hearing it repeated that the strongest will oppress the weak. But let someone explain to me what is meant by this word oppression. Some will dominate by violence; the others will groan, enslaved to their every whim! That is precisely what I observe among us; but I do not see how it could be said of natural men, whom it would be hard even to make understand what servitude and domination are. One man may well seize the fruit another has gathered, the game he has killed, the cave that served as his shelter; but how will he ever succeed in making the other obey him? And what chains of dependence can there be among men who possess nothing? If I am driven from one tree, I need only go to another; if I am tormented in one place, who will stop me from moving elsewhere? Is there a man so much stronger than I, and moreover so depraved, so lazy and so fierce, as to force me to provide for his subsistence while he stays idle? He must resolve not to lose sight of me for a single instant, and to keep me tied up with great care while he sleeps, for fear that I escape or kill him. That is, he is obliged to expose himself willingly to far more trouble than the trouble he wants to avoid, and than the trouble he gives me. After all that, does his vigilance slacken for a moment? Does some unexpected noise make him turn his head? I take twenty steps into the forest, my chains are broken, and he never sees me again as long as he lives.

I 50 Without needlessly drawing out these details, everyone must see that, since the bonds of servitude are formed only by men's mutual dependence and the reciprocal needs that unite them, it is impossible to enslave a man without first putting him in a position where he cannot do without another. And since that situation does not exist in the state of nature, it leaves everyone there free of the yoke and renders the law of the strongest void.

I 51 Having proved that inequality is barely perceptible in the state of nature, and that its influence there is almost nil, it remains for me to show its origin and its progress in the successive developments of the human mind. Having shown that perfectibility, the social virtues and the other faculties that natural man had received in potential could never develop by themselves, that for this they needed the chance convergence of several outside causes which might never have arisen, and without which he would have remained forever in his primitive condition, it remains for me to consider and bring together the various accidents that may have perfected human reason while making the species worse, made a being wicked by making him sociable, and, from so distant a starting point, brought man and the world at last to the point where we now see them.

I 52 I admit that, since the events I have to describe could have happened in several ways, I can decide among them only by conjecture. But besides the fact that such conjectures become reasons when they are the most probable that can be drawn from the nature of things, and the only means we can have of discovering the truth, the consequences I mean to deduce from mine will not on that account be conjectural, since, on the principles I have just established, no other system could be formed that would not give me the same results, and from which I could not draw the same conclusions.

I 53 This will spare me from enlarging on several points: on the way the passage of time makes up for the slight likelihood of events; on the surprising power of very slight causes when they act without respite; on the impossibility, on the one hand, of destroying certain hypotheses, even when, on the other, one is unable to give them the degree of certainty of facts; on the principle that, when two facts given as real are to be linked by a series of intermediate facts that are unknown or regarded as such, it is for history, where we have it, to supply the facts that link them, and, failing history, for philosophy to determine similar facts that could link them; and finally on the fact that, where events are concerned, similarity reduces the facts to a much

smaller number of different classes than one imagines. It is enough for me to offer these matters for the consideration of my judges; it is enough for me to have arranged things so that ordinary readers need not consider them.

Part Two

Seconde partie
From the first fence to property, society, government and despotism: how inequality grew.

II 1 The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, took it into his head to say *this is mine*, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. What crimes, wars and murders, what miseries and horrors, might the human race have been spared by the one who pulled up the stakes or filled in the ditch and cried out to his fellows: "Beware of listening to this impostor; you are lost if you forget that the fruits belong to all, and the earth to no one!" But in all likelihood things had by then already reached the point where they could no longer go on as they were. For this idea of property, depending as it does on many prior ideas that could only have arisen one after another, was not formed all at once in the human mind. Much progress had to be made, much industry and knowledge acquired, handed down and increased from age to age, before this last stage of the state of nature was reached. Let us therefore go further back, and try to gather into a single view this slow succession of events and discoveries, in their most natural order.

FIRST STEPS OUT OF THE STATE OF NATURE

Hardship teaches tools, fire, cooperation in the hunt, and the first dim sense of human superiority.

II 2 Man's first feeling was that of his existence; his first care, that of his preservation. The products of the earth furnished him with everything he needed, and instinct led him to make use of them. As hunger and other appetites made him experience various modes of existence in turn, there was one that invited him to perpetuate his species; and this blind urge, devoid of any feeling of the heart, produced only a purely animal act. The need satisfied, the two sexes no longer recognized each other, and even the child was nothing more to its mother as soon as it could do without her.

II 3 Such was the condition of nascent man; such was the life of an animal limited at first to pure sensations, barely profiting from the gifts nature offered him, far from thinking of wresting anything from her. But difficulties soon arose, and he had to learn to overcome them. The height of trees, which kept him from reaching their fruit; the competition of animals that sought to feed on it; the ferocity of those that threatened his own life: all this forced him to apply himself to bodily exercise. He had to make himself agile, swift in running, vigorous in fighting. Natural weapons, which are branches of trees and stones, were soon at hand. He learned to overcome the obstacles of nature, to fight other animals when necessary, to contend with men themselves for his subsistence, or to make up for what he had to yield to the stronger.

II 4 As the human race spread, its troubles multiplied along with its numbers. Differences of soil, climate and season may have forced men to make differences in their ways of life. Barren years, long hard winters, scorching summers that consume everything, demanded new industry of them. Along the sea and the rivers they invented the line and the hook, and became fishermen and fish-eaters. In the forests they made bows and

arrows, and became hunters and warriors. In cold countries they covered themselves with the skins of the beasts they had killed. Lightning, a volcano, or some lucky accident acquainted them with fire, a new resource against the harshness of winter. They learned to keep this element alive, then to reproduce it, and finally to cook with it the meat that they had previously devoured raw.

II 5 This repeated application of various beings to himself, and of one to another, must naturally have given rise in man's mind to the perception of certain relations. These relations, which we express by the words great, small, strong, weak, fast, slow, fearful, bold, and other such ideas, compared as needed and almost without thinking about it, finally produced in him some sort of reflection—or rather a mechanical prudence that pointed out to him the precautions most necessary for his safety.

II 6 The new knowledge that resulted from this development increased his superiority over the other animals by making him aware of it. He practiced setting traps for them and fooled them in a thousand ways; and although several surpassed him in strength in a fight or in speed in a race, of those that could serve him or harm him he became in time the master of the former and the scourge of the latter. Thus it was that the first look he turned on himself produced in him the first stirring of pride; thus it was that, while still scarcely able to distinguish ranks, and regarding himself as first by virtue of his species, he was preparing himself from afar to claim first rank as an individual.

II 7 Although his fellows were not for him what they are for us, and he had hardly more dealings with them than with the other animals, they were not forgotten in his observations. The resemblances that time could make him perceive between them, his female and himself led him to infer those he did not perceive; and seeing that they all behaved as he would have done in similar circumstances, he concluded that their way of thinking and feeling was entirely like his own. This important truth, once firmly established in his mind, made him follow—by a presentiment as sure as dialectic and quicker—the best rules of

conduct that it suited him to observe toward them for his own advantage and safety.

II 8 Taught by experience that love of well-being is the sole motive of human actions, he found himself able to distinguish the rare occasions when common interest should make him count on the help of his fellows, and the still rarer ones when competition should make him wary of them. In the first case he joined with them in a herd, or at most in some sort of free association that bound no one and lasted only as long as the passing need that had formed it. In the second, each sought to get the advantage, either by open force if he thought he could, or by skill and cunning if he felt himself the weaker.

II 9 That is how men could imperceptibly acquire some crude idea of mutual commitments and of the advantage of keeping them, but only so far as present and tangible interest could require; for foresight meant nothing to them, and far from concerning themselves with a distant future, they did not even think of the next day. Was it a matter of catching a deer? Each clearly felt that for this he must faithfully keep to his post. But if a hare happened to pass within reach of one of them, there can be no doubt that he would chase it without scruple, and that, having caught his prey, he would care very little about having made his companions miss theirs.[1]

II 10 It is easy to understand that such dealings did not require a language much more refined than that of crows or monkeys, which flock together in much the same way. Inarticulate cries, many gestures and some imitative noises must for a long time have made up the universal language. By adding to this in each region a few articulate and conventional sounds—whose institution, as I have already said, is not very easy to explain—particular languages arose, but crude and imperfect ones, much like those that various Indigenous nations still have today.

II 11 I pass like an arrow over multitudes of centuries, driven by the passing of time, by the abundance of things I have to say,

1 The "stag hunt," later a standard model in game theory of the tension between cooperation and individual gain.

and by the almost imperceptible progress of the beginnings; for the slower events were to follow one another, the quicker they are to describe. These first advances at last put man in a position to make more rapid ones. The more the mind was enlightened, the more industry improved. Soon, no longer falling asleep under the first tree or withdrawing into caves, men found various sorts of hatchets of hard, sharp stone, which served to cut wood, dig the earth, and build huts of branches, which they later thought to coat with clay and mud. This was the epoch of a first revolution, which brought about the establishment and differentiation of families and introduced a kind of property—from which perhaps many quarrels and fights already arose. However, since the strongest were probably the first to make themselves dwellings they felt able to defend, it is likely that the weak found it quicker and safer to imitate them than to try to dislodge them. As for those who already had huts, each would have had little reason to try to take over his neighbor's—less because it did not belong to him than because it was of no use to him, and because he could not seize it without exposing himself to a fierce fight with the family that occupied it.

II 12 The first developments of the heart were the effect of a new situation, which brought husbands and wives, fathers and children together in a common dwelling. The habit of living together gave rise to the sweetest feelings known to men: conjugal love and paternal love. Each family became a little society, all the more closely united because mutual attachment and freedom were its only bonds. And it was then that the first difference was established in the way of life of the two sexes, who until then had had only one. Women became more sedentary and grew accustomed to looking after the hut and the children, while the man went in search of their common subsistence. Through a somewhat softer life, the two sexes also began to lose something of their ferocity and vigor. But if each individually became less fit to fight wild beasts, it was, on the other hand, easier to gather together to resist them in common.

II 13 In this new state, with a simple and solitary life, very limited needs, and the tools they had invented to meet them, men enjoyed a great deal of leisure, and used it to procure several kinds of conveniences unknown to their fathers. This was the first yoke they imposed on themselves without realizing it, and the first source of the evils they prepared for their descendants. For besides continuing in this way to soften body and mind, these conveniences, having through habit lost almost all their charm, and having at the same time degenerated into true needs, became far more cruel to be deprived of than they were sweet to possess; and men were unhappy to lose them without being happy to have them.

II 14 Here we can see a little better how the use of speech became established, or was imperceptibly perfected, within each family; and we can further conjecture how various particular causes could have extended language and accelerated its progress by making it more necessary. Great floods or earthquakes surrounded inhabited districts with water or precipices; upheavals of the globe detached portions of the continent and broke them up into islands. One can see that among men thus brought close together and forced to live with one another, a common idiom was bound to form sooner than among those who roamed freely in the forests of the mainland. Thus it is quite possible that, after their first attempts at navigation, islanders brought the use of speech to us; and it is at least very likely that society and languages were born on islands and perfected there before they were known on the continent.

HUTS, FAMILIES AND THE BIRTH OF ESTEEM

Settled neighbors compare themselves, public esteem gains a value, and this youth of the world is its happiest age.

II 15 Everything begins to change its aspect. Men who until now wandered in the woods, having settled more firmly, slowly come together, unite in various bands, and finally form in each region a particular nation, united in customs and character not by reg-

ulations and laws but by the same way of life and food, and by the common influence of climate. Permanent neighborliness cannot fail in the end to create some bond between different families. Young people of different sexes live in neighboring huts; the passing intercourse that nature demands soon leads to another, no less sweet and more lasting through mutual acquaintance. People grow used to looking at different objects and making comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and beauty, which produce feelings of preference. By dint of seeing one another, they can no longer do without seeing one another again. A tender and sweet feeling steals into the soul, and at the slightest opposition becomes an impetuous fury. Jealousy awakens with love; discord triumphs, and the gentlest of the passions receives sacrifices of human blood.

II 16 As ideas and feelings follow one another, as mind and heart are exercised, the human race continues to be tamed; connections spread and bonds grow tighter. People grew accustomed to gathering in front of the huts or around a large tree. Song and dance, true children of love and leisure, became the amusement, or rather the occupation, of idle men and women gathered together. Each began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem acquired a value. The one who sang or danced best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most skillful or the most eloquent became the most highly regarded; and this was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. From these first preferences arose vanity and contempt on the one hand, shame and envy on the other; and the fermentation caused by these new leavens at last produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.

II 17 As soon as men had begun to appreciate one another, and the idea of consideration had formed in their minds, each claimed a right to it, and it was no longer possible to deny it to anyone with impunity. From this came the first duties of civility, even among Indigenous peoples; and from this every deliberate wrong became an outrage, because along with the harm that resulted from the injury, the offended party saw in it contempt

for his person, which was often more unbearable than the harm itself. Thus, as each punished the contempt shown him in proportion to the value he placed on himself, acts of vengeance became terrible, and men bloodthirsty and cruel. This is precisely the stage reached by most of the Indigenous peoples known to us. And it is for want of having sufficiently distinguished ideas, and noticed how far these peoples already were from the first state of nature, that many have hastened to conclude that man is naturally cruel and needs civil order to make him gentle. Yet nothing is so gentle as man in his primitive state, when, placed by nature at equal distances from the stupidity of brutes and the fatal enlightenment of civil man, and limited equally by instinct and by reason to protecting himself from the harm that threatens him, he is restrained by natural pity from doing harm to anyone himself, with nothing to impel him to it, even after harm has been done to him. For, according to the axiom of the wise Locke, "where there is no property, there is no injury."[2]

II 18 But it must be noted that society, once begun, and relations already established among men, required of them qualities different from those they owed to their primitive constitution; that as morality began to enter into human actions, and as each, before there were laws, was sole judge and avenger of the offenses he had received, the goodness suited to the pure state of nature was no longer the goodness that suited nascent society; that punishments had to become more severe as the occasions for offense became more frequent; and that it was up to the terror of vengeance to take the place of the restraint of laws. Thus, although men had become less forbearing, and natural pity had already undergone some alteration, this period in the development of human faculties, holding a happy mean between the indolence of the primitive state and the petulant activity of our amour-propre, must have been the happiest and most lasting epoch. The more one reflects on it, the more one

2 John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), IV.3.18, cited there as an example of a proposition as certain as geometry.

finds that this state was the least subject to upheavals and the

best for man[3], and that he can have left it only through some fatal accident which, for the common good, ought never to have happened. The example of Indigenous peoples, almost all of whom have been found at this point, seems to confirm that the human race was made to remain in it always, that this state is the true youth of the world, and that all subsequent progress has been so many steps, in appearance, toward the perfection of the individual, and in fact toward the decrepitude of the species.

IRON AND WHEAT

Metallurgy and agriculture bring labor, the division of land, property based on work, and growing inequality.

II 19 As long as men were content with their rustic huts, as long as they confined themselves to sewing their clothes of skins with thorns or fish bones, adorning themselves with feathers and shells, painting their bodies in various colors, perfecting or embellishing their bows and arrows, and carving with sharp stones a few fishing canoes or some crude musical instruments —in a word, as long as they applied themselves only to tasks that one person could do alone, and to arts that did not require the cooperation of several hands—they lived free, healthy, good and happy, as far as they could be by their nature, and continued to enjoy among themselves the pleasures of independent dealings. But from the moment one man needed the help of another, from the moment it was seen to be useful for one person to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property was introduced, labor became necessary, and the vast forests were transformed into smiling fields that had to be watered with the sweat of men, and in which slavery and misery were soon seen to sprout and grow along with the crops.

II 20 Metallurgy and agriculture were the two arts whose invention produced this great revolution. For the poet it is gold and silver, but for the philosopher it is iron and wheat that civilized men and ruined the human race. Accordingly, both were

unknown to the Indigenous peoples of America, who have for that reason always remained as they were; other peoples even

seem to have remained barbarous as long as they practiced one of these arts without the other. And perhaps one of the best reas-

ons why Europe has been, if not earlier, at least more continuously and better civilized than the other parts of the world is

objects: the conveniences of life for oneself, and consideration among others. But how are we to imagine the kind of pleasure an Indigenous man takes in spending his life alone in the midst of the woods, or fishing, or blowing into a poor flute without ever managing to draw a single note from it, and without caring to learn how?

Indigenous people have several times been brought to Paris, London and other cities; there has been great eagerness to display before them our luxury, our riches, and all our most useful and curious arts. None of it ever aroused in them anything but mute amazement, without the slightest stirring of desire. I remember, among others, the story of a chief of some North American people who was taken to the English court some thirty years ago. A thousand things were paraded before his eyes in an effort to find some present that might please him, but nothing could be found that he seemed to care about. Our weapons seemed heavy and awkward to him, our shoes hurt his feet, our clothes cramped him; he rejected everything. At last it was noticed that, having picked up a woolen blanket, he seemed to enjoy wrapping it around his shoulders. "You will at least admit," he was immediately told, "how useful this article is?" "Yes," he replied, "it seems to me almost as good as an animal skin." And he would not have said even that if he had worn both in the rain.

that it is at once the richest in iron and the most fertile in

Perhaps I shall be told that it is habit, attaching each person to his own way of life, that prevents Indigenous peoples from sensing what is good in ours. On that footing, it must at least seem very extraordinary that habit should have more power to keep Indigenous peoples attached to their misery than Europeans to the enjoyment of their felicity. But to give this last objection an answer to which not a word can be replied—without citing all the young Indigenous people whom we have vainly striven to civilize; without speaking of the Greenlanders and the inhabitants of Iceland whom attempts were made to raise and feed in Denmark, and whom sorrow and despair all caused to perish, either from wasting away or in the sea, where they had tried to swim back to their country—I shall content myself with citing a single, well-attested example, which I submit for examination to the admirers of European civilization.

"All the efforts of the Dutch missionaries at the Cape of Good Hope have never been able to convert a single Khoikhoi. Van der Stel, governor of the Cape, having taken one in infancy, had him brought up in the principles of the Christian religion and in the practice of European customs. He was richly dressed; he was taught several languages, and his progress fully answered the care taken over his education. The governor, expecting much of his intelligence, sent him to the Indies with a commissioner-general, who employed him usefully in the affairs of the Company. He returned to the Cape after the commissioner's death. A few days after his return, on a visit to some Khoikhoi relatives, he decided to strip off his European finery and dress himself in a sheepskin. He went back to the fort in this new attire, carrying a bundle that held his old clothes, and presenting them to the governor, he addressed him as follows:

'Be so good, sir, as to note that I renounce this apparel forever. I also renounce the Christian religion for the rest of my life; my resolve is to live and die in the religion, manners and customs of my ancestors. The only favor I ask of you is to let me keep the collar and the cutlass I am wearing. I shall keep them for love of you.' At once, without waiting for Van der Stel's reply, he took flight, and was never seen at the Cape again." *Histoire des voyages*, volume 5, p. 175.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Simon van der Stel was governor of the Dutch East India Company's colony at the Cape from 1679 to 1699; "the Company" is the Dutch East India Company.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The *Histoire générale des voyages*, a French compilation of travel narratives edited by the Abbé Prévost from 1746.

wheat.[4]

II 21 It is very difficult to conjecture how men came to know and use iron; for it is not credible that they thought up by themselves the idea of extracting the ore from the mine and giving it the preparations needed to smelt it before knowing what would come of it. On the other hand, this discovery can all the less be attributed to some accidental fire, since mines form only in arid places, bare of trees and plants; so that one would say nature had taken precautions to hide this fatal secret from us. There remains, then, only the extraordinary circumstance of some volcano which, spewing out molten metallic matter, gave those who watched it the idea of imitating this operation of nature. Even then we must suppose them to have had a great deal of courage and foresight to undertake such arduous work and to foresee so far ahead the advantages they could draw from it—which hardly suits any but minds already more practiced than theirs can have been.

II 22 As for agriculture, its principle was known long before its practice was established. It is hardly possible that men, constantly occupied in drawing their subsistence from trees and plants, should not fairly soon have grasped the means nature uses to propagate vegetation. But their industry probably turned in that direction only very late: either because trees, which together with hunting and fishing supplied their food, did not need their care; or for want of knowing the use of wheat; or for want of tools to cultivate it; or for want of foresight about future needs; or, finally, for want of means to prevent others from appropriating the fruit of their labor. Once they had become more industrious, we may suppose that with sharp stones and pointed sticks they began by growing a few vegetables or roots around their huts, long before they knew how to prepare wheat and had the tools needed for farming on a large scale. Not to mention that, to take up this occupation and sow the land, one must be willing to lose something at first in order to gain a great

4 The poet's version is the myth of the ages of gold and silver, as in Hesiod and Ovid.

deal later—a precaution very far from the cast of mind of natural man, who, as I have said, finds it hard enough to think in the morning of his needs for the evening.

II 23 The invention of the other arts was therefore needed to force the human race to apply itself to that of agriculture. As soon as men were needed to smelt and forge iron, other men were needed to feed them. The more the number of workers grew, the fewer hands were employed in providing for the common subsistence, without there being any fewer mouths to consume it; and since the one group needed foodstuffs in exchange for their iron, the other at last discovered the secret of using iron to multiply foodstuffs. From this arose, on the one hand, plowing and agriculture, and on the other, the art of working metals and multiplying their uses.

II 24 From the cultivation of land there necessarily followed its division; and from property, once recognized, the first rules of justice. For in order to render to each his own, each must be able to have something. Moreover, as men began to look to the future and all saw that they had some goods to lose, there was none who did not have to fear for himself reprisals for the wrongs he might do to others. This origin is all the more natural in that it is impossible to conceive of the idea of nascent property as coming from anything but manual labor; for it is hard to see what, in order to appropriate things he has not made, man can put into them beyond his labor. It is labor alone that, by giving the cultivator a right to the produce of the land he has tilled, consequently gives him a right to the soil itself, at least until the harvest, and so from year to year; and this, making for continuous possession, is easily transformed into property. When the ancients, says Grotius, gave Ceres the epithet of lawgiver, and gave a festival celebrated in her honor the name of Thesmophoria, they signified by this that the division of lands had pro-

duced a new kind of right: that is, the right of property, distinct from the right that follows from natural law.[5]

II 25 Things in this state might have remained equal if talents had been equal, and if, for example, the use of iron and the consumption of foodstuffs had always balanced exactly. But the proportion, which nothing maintained, was soon broken: the strongest did more work; the most skillful made better use of his; the most ingenious found ways to shorten labor; the farmer needed more iron, or the smith needed more wheat; and, working equally hard, the one earned a great deal while the other could barely live. Thus natural inequality imperceptibly unfolds along with the inequality of combination, and the differences between men, developed by differences of circumstance, become more noticeable, more permanent in their effects, and begin to influence the lot of individuals in the same proportion.

II 26 Things having reached this point, it is easy to imagine the rest. I will not stop to describe the successive invention of the other arts, the progress of languages, the testing and use of talents, the inequality of fortunes, the use or abuse of wealth, or all the details that follow from these and that anyone can easily supply. I will limit myself to casting a glance at the human race placed in this new order of things.

II 27 Here, then, are all our faculties developed, memory and imagination at play, amour-propre engaged, reason made active, and the mind arrived almost at the limit of the perfection of which it is capable. Here are all the natural qualities put into action, and each man's rank and lot established, not only on the quantity of his goods and his power to serve or to harm, but on wit, beauty, strength or skill, on merit or talents; and since these qualities were the only ones that could win regard, one soon had to have them or pretend to them. For one's own advantage, one had to show oneself as other than one really was. To be and to seem became two entirely different things, and from this dis-

5 Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Dutch jurist, *On the Law of War and Peace* II.2.2. Ceres (Greek Demeter), goddess of grain, was honored at the Thesmophoria, a festival whose name suggests "law-bringing."

tinction came imposing ostentation, deceitful cunning, and all the vices that follow in their train. On the other hand, man, who had formerly been free and independent, is now, through a multitude of new needs, subjected, so to speak, to all of nature, and above all to his fellow men, whose slave he becomes in a sense even in becoming their master: rich, he needs their services; poor, he needs their help; and a middling condition does not enable him to do without them. He must therefore constantly seek to interest them in his lot, and to make them find, in reality or in appearance, their own profit in working for his. This makes him deceitful and artful with some, imperious and harsh with others, and puts him under the necessity of deceiving all those he needs, when he cannot make them fear him and does not find it in his interest to serve them usefully. Finally, consuming ambition—the eagerness to raise one's relative fortune, less out of real need than to put oneself above others—inspires in all men a dark inclination to harm one another, a secret jealousy all the more dangerous because, to strike its blow more safely, it often wears the mask of goodwill. In a word: competition and rivalry on one side, conflicting interests on the other, and always the hidden desire to profit at the expense of others. All these evils are the first effect of property and the inseparable train of nascent inequality.

II 28 Before the signs that represent wealth had been invented, wealth could consist of scarcely anything but land and livestock, the only real goods men can possess. Now, when inheritances had grown in number and extent to the point of covering the whole soil and all bordering on one another, some could enlarge themselves only at the expense of others; and the supernumeraries, whom weakness or indolence had kept from acquiring any in their turn, having become poor without having lost anything—because while everything changed around them, they alone had not changed—were obliged to receive or to seize their subsistence from the hands of the rich. And from this there began to arise, according to the differing characters of each, domination and servitude, or violence and plunder. The rich,

for their part, had scarcely known the pleasure of dominating before they disdained all other pleasures; and, using their old slaves to subdue new ones, they thought only of subjugating and enslaving their neighbors—like those ravenous wolves that, having once tasted human flesh, refuse all other food and want nothing but to devour men.

II 29 Thus, as the most powerful or the most wretched made of their strength or their needs a sort of right to the goods of others—equivalent, in their view, to the right of property—the breakdown of equality was followed by the most frightful disorder. Thus the usurpations of the rich, the robberies of the poor, and the unbridled passions of all, stifling natural pity and the still feeble voice of justice, made men avaricious, ambitious and wicked. Between the right of the strongest and the right of the first occupant there arose a perpetual conflict, which ended only in fights and murders[6]. Nascent society gave way to the most horrible state of war: the human race, degraded and desolate, no longer able to retrace its steps or to renounce the unhappy acquisitions it had made, and laboring only toward its own shame through the abuse of the faculties that honor it, brought itself to the brink of ruin.

II 30 Stunned by this strange new evil, both rich and wretched, / he longs to flee his wealth, and hates what he had just prayed for.[7]

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6 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. It might be objected that in such a disorder men, instead of stubbornly slaughtering one another, would have dispersed, if there had been no limits to their dispersal. But, first, these limits would at least have been those of the world; and if one thinks of the excessive population that results from the state of nature, one will judge that the earth in that state would soon have been covered with men thus forced to stay together. Besides, they would have dispersed if the evil had come quickly and the change had happened overnight; but they were born under the yoke; they were already in the habit of bearing it when they felt its weight, and they were content to wait for a chance to shake it off. Finally, being already accustomed to a thousand conveniences that forced them to stay together, they no longer found dispersal as easy as in the first ages, when, since no one needed anyone but himself, each made up his own mind without waiting for another's consent.

7 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* XI.127–128, on King Midas, whose golden touch turned even his food to gold.

THE RICH MAN'S PROPOSAL

The rich persuade the poor to unite under laws that turn usurpation into right and bind everyone in chains.

II 31 It is impossible that men should not at last have reflected on so wretched a situation and on the calamities that overwhelmed them. The rich above all must soon have felt how disadvantageous to them was a perpetual war of which they alone bore the whole cost, and in which the risk to life was shared by all, while the risk to property was theirs alone. Besides, whatever color they might give to their usurpations, they were well aware that these rested only on a precarious and abusive right, and that, having been acquired by force alone, they could be taken away by force without their having any reason to complain. Even those whom industry alone had enriched could hardly base their property on better titles. In vain might they say: "I built this wall; I earned this land by my labor." "Who marked out its lines for you?" one could answer them. "And by what right do you claim to be paid at our expense for labor we never imposed on you? Do you not know that a multitude of your brothers perish or suffer for want of what you have in excess, and that you needed the express and unanimous consent of the human race to appropriate, out of the common subsistence, anything beyond your own?" Lacking valid reasons to justify himself and sufficient strength to defend himself; easily crushing a single individual but himself crushed by bands of brigands; alone against all, and unable, because of mutual jealousies, to unite with his equals against enemies united by the common hope of plunder —the rich man, pressed by necessity, at last conceived the most deliberate project that ever entered the human mind. It was to use in his favor the very forces of those who attacked him, to make his adversaries his defenders, to inspire them with other maxims, and to give them other institutions that would be as favorable to him as natural right was contrary to him.

II 32 With this in view, after laying before his neighbors the horror of a situation that armed them all against one another, that made their possessions as burdensome as their needs, and in which no one found safety either in poverty or in wealth, he easily invented specious reasons to lead them to his goal. "Let us unite," he told them, "to protect the weak from oppression, restrain the ambitious, and secure for each the possession of what belongs to him. Let us institute rules of justice and peace to which all are obliged to conform, which show favor to no one, and which in some measure make up for the caprices of fortune by subjecting the powerful and the weak alike to mutual duties. In a word, instead of turning our forces against ourselves, let us gather them into one supreme power that governs us according to wise laws, protects and defends all the members of the association, repels our common enemies, and keeps us in everlasting concord."

II 33 Far less than the equivalent of this speech was needed to win over crude, easily seduced men, who besides had too many disputes to settle among themselves to do without arbiters, and too much avarice and ambition to do without masters for long. All ran headlong to meet their chains, believing they were securing their liberty; for although they had reason enough to sense the advantages of a political establishment, they had not experience enough to foresee its dangers. Those most capable of anticipating the abuses were precisely those who expected to profit from them; and even the wise saw that they had to resolve to sacrifice one part of their liberty to preserve the other, as a wounded man has his arm cut off to save the rest of his body. Such was, or must have been, the origin of society and of laws,

which gave new fetters to the weak and new forces to the rich[8], destroyed natural liberty beyond recall, fixed forever the law of property and inequality, turned a clever usurpation into an irrevocable right, and, for the profit of a few ambitious men, subjected the whole human race from then on to labor, servitude and misery. It is easy to see how the establishment of a single society made that of all the others indispensable, and how, to stand up to united forces, others had to unite in their turn. Societies, multiplying or spreading rapidly, soon covered the whole surface of the earth, and it was no longer possible to find a single corner of the universe where one could free oneself from the yoke and withdraw one's head from the sword, often ill-wielded, that every man saw perpetually hanging over his own. Civil law having thus become the common rule of citizens, the law of nature no longer held except between different societies, where, under the name of the law of nations, it was tempered by certain tacit conventions to make dealings possible and to take the place of natural compassion. That compassion, losing from society to society almost all the force it had from man to man, now dwells only in a few great cosmopolitan souls, who cross the imaginary barriers that separate peoples and who, following the example of the sovereign Being who created them, embrace the whole human race in their benevolence.[9]

II 34 Bodies politic, thus remaining in the state of nature with respect to one another, soon felt the inconveniences that had forced individuals to leave it; and this state became even more deadly between these great bodies than it had formerly been

8 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Marshal de V used to tell how, in one of his campaigns, the excessive swindling of a provisions contractor had made the army suffer and grumble, and he gave the man a sharp dressing-down and threatened to have him hanged. "That threat doesn't concern me," the swindler boldly replied, "and I'm glad to tell you that nobody hangs a man who has a hundred thousand écus at his disposal." "I don't know how it happened," the marshal would add naively, "but in fact he was not hanged, though he had deserved it a hundred times over."

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Usually taken to be Marshal Villars (1653–1734), a leading French commander under Louis XIV. The écu was a silver coin.

9 The law of nations (droit des gens): the older name for the body of rules governing relations between states, roughly international law.

between the individuals who composed them. From it came national wars, battles, murders and reprisals that make nature shudder and offend reason, and all those horrible prejudices that rank the honor of shedding human blood among the virtues. The most decent people learned to count among their duties that of slaughtering their fellow men; at last men were seen massacring one another by the thousands without knowing why; and more murders were committed in a single day of battle, and more horrors in the taking of a single town, than had been committed in the state of nature over whole centuries across the entire face of the earth. Such are the first effects one glimpses of the division of the human race into different societies. Let us return to their institution.

WHY GOVERNMENT DID NOT BEGIN WITH SLAVERY

Conquest, paternal authority and voluntary servitude cannot found legitimate rule, since no one may give up liberty.

II 35 I know that many have given political societies other origins, such as the conquests of the most powerful or the union of the weak; and the choice among these causes makes no difference to what I wish to establish. Yet the one I have just set out seems to me the most natural, for the following reasons. 1. That in the first case, the right of conquest, not being a right, could not found any other, since the conqueror and the conquered peoples always remain in a state of war with each other, unless the nation, restored to full liberty, should voluntarily choose its victor as its chief. Until then, whatever capitulations may have been made, since they were founded only on violence and are therefore void by that very fact, there can be in this hypothesis neither true society, nor body politic, nor any law but that of the strongest. 2. That the words "strong" and "weak" are ambiguous in the second case; that in the interval between the establishment of the right of property, or of first occupancy, and that of political governments, the meaning of these terms is better conveyed by "poor" and "rich," because before laws a man in fact

had no other means of subjecting his equals than by attacking their goods or by giving them some share of his own. 3. That since the poor had nothing to lose but their liberty, it would have been great folly for them voluntarily to give up the only good they had left while gaining nothing in exchange; that on the contrary the rich, being vulnerable, so to speak, in every part of their possessions, were much easier to harm, and so had more precautions to take to protect themselves; and finally that it is reasonable to believe a thing was invented by those it benefits rather than by those it harms.

II 36 Nascent government had no constant and regular form. Lack of philosophy and experience allowed only present inconveniences to be seen, and people thought of remedying the others only as they arose. Despite all the labors of the wisest lawgivers, the political state always remained imperfect, because it was almost the work of chance, and because, having been badly begun, it could never have the vices of its constitution repaired by time, even as time revealed its defects and suggested remedies. People kept patching, when they should have begun by clearing the ground and removing all the old materials, as Lycurgus did at Sparta, in order afterward to raise a sound building.[10] At first society consisted only of a few general conventions that all individuals pledged to observe, and for which the community made itself guarantor to each of them. Experience had to show how weak such a constitution was, and how easy it was for offenders to escape conviction or punishment for faults of which the public alone was to be witness and judge; the law had to be evaded in a thousand ways; inconveniences and disorders had to multiply continually, before people at last thought of entrusting to private individuals the dangerous charge of public authority, and committed to magistrates the task of enforcing the people's decisions. For to say that the chiefs were chosen before the confederation was formed, and

10 Lycurgus: the legendary lawgiver of Sparta, credited with remaking its constitution and way of life from the ground up.

that the ministers of the laws existed before the laws themselves, is a supposition that cannot seriously be argued against.

II 37 It would be no more reasonable to believe that peoples first threw themselves into the arms of an absolute master, unconditionally and irrevocably, and that the first means of providing for the common security that proud and untamed men could devise was to rush headlong into slavery. Indeed, why did they give themselves superiors, if not to defend them against oppression and to protect their goods, their liberties and their lives, which are, so to speak, the constituent elements of their being? Now, since in relations between man and man the worst that can happen to one is to find himself at the other's mercy, would it not have been contrary to good sense to begin by surrendering into a chief's hands the very things for whose preservation they needed his help? What equivalent could he have offered them for the grant of so fine a right? And had he dared demand it on the pretext of defending them, would he not at once have received the answer of the fable: "What more will the enemy do to us?"[11] It is therefore incontestable, and it is the fundamental maxim of all political right, that peoples gave themselves chiefs to defend their liberty and not to enslave them. "If we have a prince," Pliny said to Trajan, "it is so that he may keep us from having a master."[12]

II 38 Our political writers commit the same sophisms about the love of liberty that our philosophers have committed about the state of nature. From the things they see they judge very different things they have not seen, and they attribute to men a natural inclination to servitude on the strength of the patience with which those before their eyes endure theirs—without considering that liberty is like innocence and virtue: one feels their worth only so long as one enjoys them oneself, and the taste for them is lost as soon as they are lost. "I know the delights of your

11 Phaedrus, *Fables* I.15: urged by his master to flee the approaching enemy, a donkey asks whether the victor will make him carry two loads.

12 Pliny the Younger, *Panegyric of Trajan* (AD 100), his speech of thanks to the emperor.

country," said Brasidas to a satrap who was comparing life in Sparta with life in Persepolis, "but you cannot know the pleasures of mine."[13]

II 39 As an unbroken steed bristles its mane, paws the ground and struggles violently at the mere approach of the bit, while a trained horse patiently bears whip and spur, so barbarous man will not bow his head to the yoke that civilized man wears without a murmur, and he prefers the stormiest liberty to tranquil subjection. It is not, then, by the degradation of enslaved peoples that we must judge man's natural disposition for or against servitude, but by the prodigies that all free peoples have performed to protect themselves from oppression. I know that the former do nothing but boast endlessly of the peace and quiet they enjoy in their chains, and that "they call the most wretched servitude peace." But when I see the others sacrifice pleasures, quiet, wealth, power and life itself to preserve this one good, so disdained by those who have lost it; when I see animals born free, and loathing captivity, dash their heads against the bars of their prison; when I see multitudes of Indigenous people, quite naked, scorn European pleasures and brave hunger, fire, the sword and death merely to preserve their independence, I feel that it is not for slaves to reason about liberty.[14]

II 40 As for paternal authority, from which several writers have derived absolute government and all society, there is no need to resort to the contrary proofs of Locke and Sidney; it is enough to note that nothing in the world is further from the fierce spirit of despotism than the gentleness of that authority, which looks more to the advantage of the one who obeys than to the benefit of the one who commands; that by the law of nature the father is the child's master only as long as his help is necessary to it; that beyond that point they become equals; and that then the son, perfectly independent of the father, owes him only respect and not obedience—for gratitude is indeed a duty that must be paid,

13 Brasidas: Spartan general (died 422 BC). A satrap was a provincial governor of the Persian Empire; Persepolis was one of its royal capitals.
14 Rousseau quotes in Latin from Tacitus, *Histories* IV.17.

but not a right that can be demanded.[15] Instead of saying that civil society derives from paternal power, one should have said, on the contrary, that it is from civil society that this power draws its principal strength. An individual was recognized as the father of several only when they remained gathered around him. The father's goods, of which he is truly the master, are the ties that keep his children dependent on him, and he may give them a share of his estate only in proportion as they have deserved well of him by continual deference to his wishes. Now, far from subjects having any similar favor to expect from their despot—since they belong to him as his own property, they and all they possess, or at least he claims so—they are reduced to receiving as a favor whatever of their own goods he leaves them. He does justice when he strips them; he grants a pardon when he lets them live.

II 41 If we continued thus to examine the facts in the light of right, we would find no more solidity than truth in the voluntary establishment of tyranny; and it would be hard to show the validity of a contract that bound only one of the parties, in which everything was put on one side and nothing on the other, and which turned only to the detriment of the party who committed himself. This odious system is far from being, even today, that of wise and good monarchs, and especially of the kings of France, as can be seen in various places in their edicts, and in particular in the following passage from a celebrated work published in 1667 in the name and by order of Louis XIV. Let it not be said, then, that the sovereign is not subject to the laws of his State, since the contrary proposition is a truth of the law of nations, which flattery has sometimes attacked but which good princes have always defended as a tutelary divinity of their States. How much more legitimate it is to say, with the wise Plato, that the perfect happiness of a kingdom is for a prince to be obeyed by his subjects, for the prince to obey the law, and for

15 John Locke and Algernon Sidney (1623–1683) both refuted Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, which grounded royal absolutism in the authority of fathers.

the law to be right and always directed to the public good.[16] I will not stop to inquire whether, liberty being the noblest of man's faculties, it is not degrading one's nature, putting oneself on the level of beasts enslaved to instinct, and even offending the Author of one's being, to renounce without reserve the most precious of all his gifts, and to submit to committing every crime he forbids us in order to please a fierce or deranged master; nor whether that sublime Craftsman must be more angered to see his finest work destroyed than dishonored. I will set aside, if you like, the authority of Barbeyrac, who declares plainly, following Locke, that no one can sell his liberty so far as to submit to an arbitrary power that treats him as it pleases: "For," he adds, "that would be selling one's own life, of which one is not the master." I will ask only by what right those who were not afraid to debase themselves to that point could subject their posterity to the same ignominy, and renounce on its behalf goods that it does not owe to their liberality, and without which life itself is a burden to all who are worthy of it.[17]

II 42 Pufendorf says that just as one transfers one's property to another by agreements and contracts, one can also divest oneself of one's liberty in someone's favor. That, it seems to me, is very bad reasoning. For, first, the property I alienate becomes something entirely foreign to me, whose abuse is a matter of indifference to me; but it matters to me that my liberty not be abused, and I cannot, without making myself guilty of the evil I will be forced to do, expose myself to becoming the instrument of crime;[18] moreover, since the right of property is only a matter of convention and human institution, every man may dispose of what he possesses as he pleases. But the same does not hold for the essential gifts of nature, such as life and liberty, which

16 From the *Treatise on the Rights of the Most Christian Queen* (1667), which set out the claims of Louis XIV's Spanish-born queen to territories in the Spanish Netherlands.

17 Jean Barbeyrac (1674–1744): French jurist, translator and annotator of Grotius and Pufendorf.

18 Samuel von Pufendorf (1632–1694): German jurist, author of *On the Law of Nature and of Nations*.

everyone is permitted to enjoy and of which it is at least doubtful that one has the right to divest oneself. By giving up the one, one degrades one's being; by giving up the other, one annihilates it, as far as lies in one's power; and since no temporal good can compensate for either, it would offend both nature and reason to renounce them at any price whatever. But even if one could alienate one's liberty as one does one's goods, the difference would be very great for the children, who enjoy the father's goods only through the transmission of his right; whereas liberty, being a gift they hold from nature in their capacity as men, their parents had no right to strip them of it. So just as violence had to be done to nature to establish slavery, nature had to be changed to perpetuate this right; and the jurists who have gravely pronounced that the child of a slave woman shall be born a slave have decided, in other words, that a man shall not be born a man.

II 43 It seems certain to me, then, not only that governments did not begin with arbitrary power, which is only their corruption and extreme limit, and which brings them back at last to the sole law of the strongest, for which they were at first the remedy; but also that even if they had begun that way, this power, being by its nature illegitimate, could not have served as the foundation for the rights of society, nor, consequently, for instituted inequality.

GOVERNMENT AS A CONTRACT

Political society is treated as a contract between the people and chosen magistrates, which gives rise to different forms of government.

II 44 Without entering today into the inquiries still to be made into the nature of the fundamental pact of all government, I limit myself, following common opinion, to considering the establishment of the body politic here as a true contract between the people and the chiefs it chooses for itself—a contract by which both parties bind themselves to observe the laws stipulated in it, which form the bonds of their union. The people having, with

regard to social relations, united all their wills into a single one, all the articles on which this will declares itself become so many fundamental laws binding all members of the State without exception, one of which governs the choice and the power of the magistrates charged with overseeing the execution of the others. This power extends to everything that can maintain the constitution, without going so far as to change it. To it are joined honors that make the laws and their ministers respected, and, for the ministers personally, prerogatives that compensate them for the arduous labors that good administration costs. The magistrate, for his part, binds himself to use the power entrusted to him only according to the intention of those who entrusted it, to maintain each person in the peaceful enjoyment of what belongs to him, and on every occasion to prefer the public benefit to his own interest.

II 45 Before experience had shown, or knowledge of the human heart had led people to foresee, the inevitable abuses of such a constitution, it must have seemed all the better because those charged with watching over its preservation had themselves the greatest interest in it. For since the magistracy and its rights were founded only on the fundamental laws, as soon as these were destroyed the magistrates would cease to be legitimate and the people would no longer be bound to obey them; and since it would have been not the magistrate but the law that constituted the essence of the State, each person would by right return to his natural liberty.

II 46 On careful reflection, this would be confirmed by further reasons, and from the nature of the contract one would see that it cannot be irrevocable. For if there were no higher power that could guarantee the good faith of the contracting parties or force them to fulfill their mutual commitments, the parties would remain sole judges in their own cause, and each of them would always have the right to renounce the contract as soon as it found that the other was violating its terms, or that the terms no longer suited it. It is on this principle, it seems, that the right to abdicate may be founded. Now, considering only human

institution, as we are doing, if the magistrate, who holds all the power in his hands and appropriates all the advantages of the contract, nonetheless had the right to renounce authority, then all the more should the people, who pay for all the faults of their chiefs, have the right to renounce their dependence. But the frightful dissensions and endless disorders that this dangerous power would necessarily bring show, more than anything else, how much human governments needed a firmer base than reason alone, and how necessary it was for public peace that the divine will should intervene to give sovereign authority a sacred and inviolable character, which would take from subjects the fatal right to dispose of it. Had religion done men only this good, it would be enough for them all to cherish and adopt it, even with its abuses, since it spares still more blood than fanaticism sheds. But let us follow the thread of our hypothesis.

II 47 The various forms of government take their origin from the greater or lesser differences that existed between individuals at the moment of institution. Was one man eminent in power, virtue, wealth or influence? He alone was elected magistrate, and the State became monarchical. If several, roughly equal among themselves, stood above all the rest, they were elected jointly, and there was an aristocracy. Those whose fortunes or talents were less disproportionate, and who had strayed least from the state of nature, kept the supreme administration in common and formed a democracy. Time showed which of these forms was most advantageous to men. Some remained subject only to the laws; others soon obeyed masters. Citizens wanted to keep their liberty; subjects thought only of taking it from their neighbors, unable to bear that others should enjoy a good they themselves no longer enjoyed. In a word, on one side were riches and conquests, and on the other happiness and virtue.

II 48 In these various governments all magistracies were at first elective; and when wealth did not prevail, preference was given to merit, which confers a natural ascendancy, and to age, which confers experience in affairs and composure in deliberation.

The elders of the Hebrews, the Gerontes of Sparta, the Senate of Rome, and even the etymology of our word Seigneur show how much old age was once respected.[19] The more the elections fell on men advanced in age, the more frequent they became, and the more their difficulties made themselves felt: intrigues crept in, factions formed, parties grew bitter, civil wars flared up; at last the blood of citizens was sacrificed to the supposed happiness of the State, and people were on the brink of falling back into the anarchy of earlier times. The ambition of the leading men took advantage of these circumstances to perpetuate their offices in their families. The people, already accustomed to dependence, to quiet and to the comforts of life, and already unable to break their chains, consented to let their servitude increase in order to secure their tranquility. And thus the chiefs, having become hereditary, grew used to regarding their magistracy as a family possession, to regarding themselves as the owners of the State, of which they had at first been only the officers, to calling their fellow citizens their slaves, to counting them, like cattle, among the things that belonged to them, and to calling themselves equals of the gods and Kings of Kings.

THREE STAGES OF INEQUALITY

Inequality grows from rich and poor, to powerful and weak, to master and slave, as distinctions spread through society.

II 49 If we follow the progress of inequality through these different revolutions, we shall find that the establishment of law and of the right of property was its first stage, the institution of the magistracy the second, and the third and last the change of legitimate power into arbitrary power. So the condition of rich and poor was authorized by the first epoch, that of powerful and weak by the second, and by the third that of master and slave, which is the last degree of inequality and the point at which all

19 The Gerontes were the members of Sparta's council of elders, the Gerousia. French seigneur ("lord") comes from Latin senior, "older," as Senate comes from senex, "old man."

the others finally end, until new revolutions dissolve the government altogether or bring it closer to legitimate institution.

II 50 To understand the necessity of this progress, we must consider less the motives for establishing the body politic than the form it takes in practice and the drawbacks it brings in its train. For the vices that make social institutions necessary are the same ones that make their abuse inevitable. And since—with the sole exception of Sparta, where the law attended chiefly to the education of children, and where Lycurgus established morals that almost spared him the need to add laws—laws in general, being weaker than the passions, restrain men without changing them, it would be easy to prove that any government which, without being corrupted or altered, always proceeded exactly according to the purpose of its institution would have been instituted without necessity, and that a country where no one evaded the laws or abused the magistracy would need neither magistrates nor laws.

II 51 Political distinctions necessarily bring civil distinctions with them. As inequality grows between the people and its chiefs, it soon makes itself felt among private individuals, where it takes a thousand forms according to passions, talents and circumstances. The magistrate cannot usurp illegitimate power without making himself creatures, to whom he is forced to cede some part of it. Besides, citizens let themselves be oppressed only insofar as, carried away by blind ambition and looking below rather than above themselves, they come to hold domination dearer than independence, and consent to wear chains so that they may put chains on others in their turn. It is very difficult to reduce to obedience someone who does not seek to command, and the most skillful politician would never manage to subjugate men who wished only to be free; but inequality spreads easily among ambitious and cowardly souls, always ready to run the risks of fortune, and to dominate or to serve almost indifferently as fortune turns for or against them. Thus there must have come a time when the people's eyes were so bewitched that their leaders had only to say to the least of men,

"Be great, you and all your line," and at once he appeared great to everyone, as well as in his own eyes, and his descendants rose still higher the further they were removed from him. The more remote and uncertain the cause, the more the effect increased; the more idlers a family could count, the more illustrious it became.

II 52 If this were the place to go into details, I could easily explain how, even without any intervention by the government, inequality of standing and authority becomes inevitable among private individuals[20] as soon as, united in one society, they are forced to compare themselves with one another and to take account of the differences they find in the continual use they must make of each other. These differences are of several kinds.

20 ROUSSEAU'S NOTE. Distributive justice would itself be opposed to the rigorous equality of the state of nature, even if that equality were practicable in civil society; and since all the members of the State owe it services in proportion to their talents and their strength, the citizens in their turn ought to be distinguished and favored in proportion to their services. It is in this sense that we must understand a passage of Isocrates in which he praises the early Athenians for having known how to tell which was the more advantageous of the two kinds of equality: one of which consists in giving the same advantages to all citizens without distinction, and the other in distributing them according to each one's merit. These skillful statesmen, the orator adds, banishing that unjust equality which makes no difference between the wicked and the good, attached themselves inviolably to the kind that rewards and punishes each according to his merit. But in the first place, there has never existed a society, whatever degree of corruption it may have reached, in which no difference was made between the wicked and the good. And in matters of morals, where the law cannot fix a measure exact enough to serve the magistrate as a rule, it very wisely forbids him to judge persons, leaving him only the judgment of actions, so as not to leave the lot or the rank of citizens to his discretion. Only morals as pure as those of the ancient Romans could bear censors; among us, such tribunals would soon have turned everything upside down. It is for public esteem to make the difference between the wicked and the good. The magistrate is judge only of strict right; but the people are the true judge of morals—a judge of integrity, and even enlightened on this point, who is sometimes deceived but never corrupted. The ranks of citizens must therefore be regulated not by their personal merit, which would leave the magistrate the means of applying the law almost arbitrarily, but by the real services they render to the State, which lend themselves to a more exact estimate.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Isocrates (436–338 BC), Athenian orator; the passage is from his *Areopagiticus* (§§21–22).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. Censors: Roman magistrates who, among other duties, oversaw public morals and could strike citizens from the rolls of their rank.

But since, in general, wealth, nobility or rank, power, and personal merit are the chief distinctions by which people measure themselves in society, I would prove that the harmony or conflict of these various forces is the surest indication of a well- or badly constituted State. I would show that, of these four kinds of inequality, personal qualities being the origin of all the others, wealth is the last to which they are all reduced in the end, because, being the most immediately useful to well-being and the easiest to pass on, it is readily used to buy all the rest. This observation allows us to judge fairly precisely how far each people has strayed from its original institution, and how far it has traveled toward the final extreme of corruption. I would note how much this universal desire for reputation, honors, and preferment, which devours us all, exercises and compares talents and strengths; how much it excites and multiplies the passions; and how, by making all men competitors, rivals, or rather enemies, it causes every day reverses, successes, and catastrophes of every kind, by making so many contenders run the same course. I would show that it is to this eagerness to be talked about, to this frenzy to distinguish ourselves, which almost always keeps us outside ourselves, that we owe what is best and worst among men: our virtues and our vices, our sciences and our errors, our conquerors and our philosophers—that is to say, a multitude of bad things against a small number of good ones. Finally, I would prove that if we see a handful of the powerful and the rich at the pinnacle of greatness and fortune while the crowd crawls in obscurity and wretchedness, it is because the former value the things they enjoy only insofar as others are deprived of them, and because, without any change in their own condition, they would cease to be happy if the people ceased to be wretched.

DESPOTISM CLOSES THE CIRCLE

Oppression grows until despotism makes all equal in nothing, a new state of nature ruled by force.

II 53 But these details alone would be the matter of a considerable work, in which one would weigh the advantages and drawbacks of every government in relation to the rights of the state of nature, and would unveil all the different faces under which inequality has appeared up to our own day and may appear in centuries to come, according to the nature of these governments and the revolutions that time will necessarily bring about in them. We would see the multitude oppressed from within as a consequence of the very precautions it had taken against what threatened it from without. We would see oppression grow continually, without the oppressed ever being able to know where it would end, or what legitimate means would remain to them for stopping it. We would see the rights of citizens and the liberties of nations die out little by little, and the protests of the weak treated as seditious grumbling; we would see statecraft restrict to a mercenary portion of the people the honor of defending the common cause; we would see the necessity of taxes arise from this, and the discouraged farmer leave his field even in time of peace, and abandon the plow to gird on the sword; we would see the deadly and bizarre rules of the point of honor come into being; we would see the defenders of the fatherland sooner or later become its enemies, holding the dagger forever raised over their fellow citizens; and a time would come when they would be heard saying to the oppressor of their country:[21]

21 The point of honor: the code of the duel.

II 54 Should you order me to plunge my sword into my brother's breast,
Into my father's throat, and into the womb of my pregnant wife,
I would do it all, though my right hand were unwilling.[22]

II 55 From extreme inequality of ranks and fortunes, from the diversity of passions and talents, from useless arts, pernicious arts, and frivolous sciences, would come swarms of prejudices, equally contrary to reason, to happiness, and to virtue. We would see the leaders foment everything that can weaken men gathered together by disuniting them; everything that can give society an air of apparent concord while sowing in it a seed of real division; everything that can inspire the different orders with mutual distrust and hatred through the opposition of their rights and interests, and so strengthen the power that holds them all in check.[23]

II 56 It is from the midst of this disorder and these revolutions that despotism, raising its hideous head by degrees and devouring everything good and sound it had seen in every part of the State, would at last succeed in trampling underfoot the laws and the people, and in establishing itself on the ruins of the republic. The times preceding this final change would be times of troubles and calamities; but in the end everything would be swallowed up by the monster, and the peoples would no longer have leaders or laws, but only tyrants. From that moment, too, there would no longer be any question of morals and virtue; for wherever despotism reigns, "which has nothing to hope for from honorable means," it tolerates no other master. As soon as it speaks, there is neither honesty nor duty to consult, and the blindest obedience is the only virtue left to slaves.[24]

II 57 This is the last stage of inequality, the extreme point that closes the circle and meets the point from which we set out.

22 Latin in the original: Lucan, *Pharsalia* I.376–378, words spoken to Julius Caesar by one of his centurions.
23 Orders: the legally distinct estates of society, such as clergy, nobility, and commoners.

Here all private individuals become equal again, because they are nothing; and since the subjects have no law but the will of the master, and the master no rule but his passions, the notions of good and the principles of justice vanish once more. Here everything is brought back to the sole law of the strongest, and consequently to a new state of nature, different from the one with which we began in that the first was the state of nature in its purity, and this last is the fruit of an excess of corruption. Besides, there is so little difference between these two states, and the contract of government is so thoroughly dissolved by despotism, that the despot is master only so long as he is the strongest; and as soon as he can be driven out, he has no grounds to protest against violence. The uprising that ends by strangling or dethroning a sultan is as lawful an act as those by which, the day before, he disposed of the lives and goods of his subjects. Force alone maintained him; force alone overthrows him. All things thus take place according to the natural order; and whatever the outcome of these brief and frequent revolutions, no one can complain of the injustice of others, but only of his own imprudence or his misfortune.

NATURAL MAN AND CIVILIZED MAN

Natural man lives within himself, social man only in the opinion of others; Rousseau states his conclusion.

II 58 In thus discovering and following the forgotten and lost paths that must have led man from the natural state to the civil state; in restoring, along with the intermediate positions I have just marked, those that the pressure of time has made me leave out, or that imagination has not suggested to me—every attentive reader cannot fail to be struck by the immense distance that separates these two states. It is in this slow succession of things that he will see the solution to an infinity of problems of morals and politics that the philosophers cannot resolve. He will sense that, the human race of one age not being the human race of

24 Latin in the original.

another, the reason Diogenes found no man was that he was looking among his contemporaries for the man of a time that was no more. Cato, he will say, perished with Rome and liberty because he was out of place in his century; and the greatest of men merely astonished the world he would have governed five hundred years earlier.[25] In a word, he will explain how the soul and the human passions, altering imperceptibly, change their nature, so to speak; why our needs and our pleasures change their objects in the long run; why, as original man gradually vanishes, society no longer offers to the eyes of the wise anything but an assemblage of artificial men and factitious passions, which are the work of all these new relations and have no true foundation in nature. What reflection teaches us on this point, observation confirms perfectly: natural man and civilized man differ so much in the depths of their hearts and inclinations that what constitutes the supreme happiness of the one would reduce the other to despair. The first breathes only repose and freedom; he wants only to live and stay idle, and even the ataraxia of the Stoic does not approach his profound indifference to every other object. The citizen, on the contrary, always active, sweats, bustles, and torments himself endlessly in search of still more laborious occupations. He works until death, even runs toward it in order to put himself in a position to live, or renounces life to acquire immortality.[26] He pays court to the great, whom he hates, and to the rich, whom he despises; he spares nothing to obtain the honor of serving them; he boasts proudly of his own baseness and of their protection, and, proud of his slavery, he speaks with disdain of those who do not have the honor of sharing it. What a spectacle for a Carib are the arduous and envied labors of a European minister! How many cruel deaths would this indolent Indigenous man not prefer to the horror of such a life, which often is not even sweetened by

25 Diogenes the Cynic reportedly went about with a lamp in daylight, "looking for a man." Cato the Younger (95–46 BC) killed himself rather than submit to Julius Caesar.

26 Ataraxia: Greek for "untroubledness," the calm freedom from disturbance sought by ancient philosophers.

the pleasure of doing good. But to see the purpose of so many cares, these words, *power* and *reputation*, would have to have some meaning in his mind; he would have to learn that there is a kind of men who set some store by the gaze of the rest of the universe, who know how to be happy and satisfied with themselves on the testimony of others rather than on their own. Such, in fact, is the true cause of all these differences: natural man lives within himself; social man, always outside himself, knows how to live only in the opinion of others, and it is, so to speak, from their judgment alone that he draws the sense of his own existence. It is not part of my subject to show how from such a disposition arises so much indifference to good and evil, together with such fine discourses on morality; how, everything being reduced to appearances, everything becomes factitious and play-acted—honor, friendship, virtue, and often even the vices themselves, in which people at last find the secret of glorying; how, in a word, always asking others what we are, and never daring to question ourselves on the matter, in the midst of so much philosophy, humanity, politeness, and sublime maxims, we have only a deceptive and frivolous exterior: honor without virtue, reason without wisdom, and pleasure without happiness. It is enough for me to have proved that this is not the original state of man, and that it is the spirit of society alone, and the inequality it engenders, that thus change and alter all our natural inclinations.

II 59 I have tried to set out the origin and progress of inequality, and the establishment and abuse of political societies, insofar as these things can be deduced from the nature of man by the light of reason alone, and independently of the sacred dogmas that give sovereign authority the sanction of divine right. It follows from this account that inequality, being almost nonexistent in the state of nature, draws its strength and growth from the development of our faculties and the progress of the human mind, and at last becomes stable and legitimate through the establishment of property and laws. It follows further that moral inequality, authorized by positive right alone, is contrary

to natural right whenever it does not coincide in the same proportion with physical inequality—a distinction that sufficiently determines what we ought to think in this respect of the sort of inequality that reigns among all civilized peoples, since it is manifestly against the law of nature, however it may be defined, that a child should command an old man, that a fool should lead a wise man, and that a handful of people should be glutted with superfluities while the starving multitude lacks necessities.[27]

27 Positive right: law made by human enactment, as opposed to natural right.