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VICTOR GOUREVITCH, the editor and translator, is the William Griffin Professor of Philosophy (Emeritus) at Wesleyan University, Connecticut.

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ROUSSEAU

The *Discourses* and Other Early Political Writings

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
VICTOR GOUREVITCH
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Second Edition

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Preface to the First Edition

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Annotating texts as varied and as rich in references of every kind as these is a cumulative task. No single editor is so learned as to pick up and identify every one of Rousseau's sources and allusions. All students of these rich and rewarding texts are in debt to the learned editors who have come before us, and we can only hope to repay a part of that debt by doing our share in helping those who will come after us. After a time some references become common property. I have named the sources and editions I have consulted in acknowledgment of such general debts. In the cases where I am aware of owing information to a particular editor, or an accurate or felicitous rendering to a particular translator, I have indicated that fact. In some cases I mention differences with a given edition; it should be clear that by doing so, I also indicate my esteem for that edition: it is the one worth taking seriously. I have recorded specific help in making sense of a particular

passage or in tracking down an obscure quotation in the corresponding Editorial Note.

Several of the translations and of the critical apparatus accompanying them in this volume originally appeared in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses, together with the Replies to Critics and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, Harper & Row, New York, 1986. All of them have been reviewed, and wherever necessary revised.

I am indebted to Joy Johanessen, Revan Schendler, and Mark Lilla for their care in going over some of the new translations.

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My greatest debt is to my wife, Jacqueline, who has again sustained and inspired me far beyond anything I could hope adequately to acknowledge.

I dedicate these volumes to the memory of my father.

Preface to the Second Edition

I am grateful for this opportunity to revise and to correct these translations, and to bring the Introductions and editorial material up to date.

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Victor Gourevitch
2018

Introduction

Rousseau has permanently altered how we perceive ourselves, one another, and the world about us, and in particular how we conceive of politics and what we may and what we do expect of it. The power and challenge of his thinking were recognized from the first, with the publication in 1750 of his *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, the so-called *First Discourse*. His influence grew steadily during his lifetime, and it has continued to grow ever since. The French Revolution was profoundly influenced by his teaching, as, to a lesser extent, was the American Revolution. Romanticism, in all of its forms, was set and kept in motion by his thought and example more than by anyone else's. German Idealism owes its most powerful impetus to him. Kant's debt to him is well known.

Rousseau is one of the two or three great thinkers who chose to present their thought in dramatic form, through the speeches and deeds of a large and varied cast of characters who explore the alternatives, sometimes by themselves alone, sometimes in dialogue or even in confrontation with one another. Rarely does he present wholly disembodied argument, sense dissociated from sensibility. The alternatives he has his characters explore are always also alternative ways of life. Two poles as it were define the territory they explore: the public, political life in its various guises; and the essentially private, "solitary" life in its various guises. The public, political life is most typically the citizen life, and its exemplary representative is the Younger Cato, "the greatest of men" (*SD* II [57]); the private life is most typically the philosophic life, and its most exemplary representative is

Socrates, "the wisest of men" (*PE* [30]); but it is also the life of the pre-political savage and, at the other extreme, the life of what for want of a proper term might be called the trans-political life of the solitary walker and of cosmopolitan benevolence. For the most part Rousseau presents the two ways as mutually exclusive. The many other figures to whom he assigns featured roles represent variations on these alternatives. Some are historical or quasi-historical figures: the great law-givers, Lycurgus, Moses, Romulus, Numa, and the Plutarchian heroes of Republican Rome; some are characters of his invention: Emile and his wife Sophie, the Savoyard Vicar, Julie, whom he calls the new Héloïse, her Abélard, St. Preux, and her virtuous atheist husband Wolmar. The first person singular, the most prominent, best-known member of this cast, is so many-faceted, that it is safer to begin by respecting the different identities Rousseau assigns to it in different contexts: the Citizen of Geneva who aspires to live beyond his century by identifying with the unsophisticated mass of men in the *First Discourse* ([2], [60]), but in the *Second Discourse* proclaims himself a student in Aristotle's Lyceum "with the likes of Plato and Xenocrates as my Judges, and Mankind as my Audience" (*SD* E [6]); the thinker who assumes the proud motto *vitam impendere vero*, "to dedicate life to truth"; the tutor of the none-too-bright Emile; the ostensible compiler and occasional annotator of the vast correspondence that makes up the *Nouvelle Héloïse*; and of course the subject and author of several autobiographies. Even these autobiographies are clearly not the mere outpourings of an excessively effusive exhibitionist, but case studies and illustrations of his theories. After all, a work called *Confessions* announces in its very title that it is entering the lists with Augustine.

By presenting his thought in dramatic form, and alternatives as alternative ways of life, Rousseau effectively challenges the sharp traditional distinction between strictly theoretical and strictly practical writings. In the words of his memorable formula, he seeks both to persuade and to convince. By undercutting the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical writings, he also effectively undercuts the sharp traditional distinction between the branches of philosophy: first philosophy or metaphysics, the philosophy of nature, ethics/politics. At times it may appear that he writes about ethics/politics to the exclusion of the

other traditional domains of philosophical or human concern. Indeed, at times it may appear that he subordinates all other domains to the political, that he radically politicizes life and philosophy. Further reflection proves that he does not. He remains ever mindful of the pre-political foundations and the trans-political aspirations of political life. He does, however, write about all domains of philosophical or human concern from a political perspective. It is, for him, *the* organizing perspective. He saw that political life, life in political societies – that is to say, at a minimum, in stable associations of large numbers of people under law, sharing beliefs and practices ordered by an at least tacit conception of the good and hence also of the common good, and embodied in representative human types – is our "common sense," workaday frame of reference. That is what he means when he says that he came to see that "everything is radically dependent on politics" (*Conf.* ix, *OC* I, 404). Precisely because he regarded political life as our medium, he was ever mindful of its distinctive character and constraints. Much as he wanted to reform political conditions in his time, he was keenly alive to how precarious decent political life is. He anticipated revolutions, but he did not advocate them or hold out high hopes for them (*Observations* [62], *SD* II [56], *EOL* 20[1], *Emile* III, *OC* IV, 468, tr. 194). Even the best intentions in the world have unforeseen consequences. One of the dominant themes in his last political work, the *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, is how to reform without revolution (13 [13], [20], [24]; cf. *Judgment on the Polysynodie* [5], *OC* III, 637). All of his writings are, then, political also in the sense of being politic.

Although he was without formal education, Rousseau had early read the classical historians, but especially Plutarch, whose heroes peopled his imagination and nourished his thought throughout his life. By presenting, or at least illustrating much of his own thought through representative characters in whose deeds and thoughts the reader becomes personally involved, he is taking Plutarch's *Lives* as his model just as much as he is Plato's dialogues. He seems to have read Grotius's *Of the Right of War and Peace* when he was quite young. He studied closely most of the classical, and many more ephemeral contemporary, works of political philosophy and of history. In his early thirties, between 1745 and 1751, while

employed by Mme. Dupin, he studied and wrote abstracts of Plato, Bodin, Hobbes, and Locke, of Montesquieu's *Of the Spirit of the Laws* soon after its publication, and of the Abbé de Saint Pierre's projects for a European Federation and for Perpetual Peace. In his day, the most systematic, comprehensive compendium on political philosophy was Pufendorf's *Right of Nature and of Nations*, especially in Barbeyrac's learnedly annotated French translation, *Droit de la nature et des gens*. He seems to have kept its massive two tomes at his elbow whenever he undertook a major project in political philosophy. He had contemplated writing a work on *Political Institutions* ever since 1743–1744. The Dijon Academy Question, "Has the Restoration of the Sciences and Arts Contributed to the Purification of Morals?," announced in late 1749, prompted his first publication on the basic problems of politics, but it clearly did not prompt his first thinking about them. The scope and depth of his reflections about the Academy's Question were certainly not simply the result of what in later years he came to speak of as the inspiration of Vincennes (pp. 333f). Rather, the Academy's Question seems to have suggested to him a way of ordering his thoughts, as well as to have given direction and a strong impetus to his further reflections. The *Discourse* which he submitted as his entry in the competition, and which won him that year's Prize, aroused intense debate throughout Europe. His occasional *Replies* to one or another critic give ample evidence of the comprehensiveness and the coherence of his position. In what he called his "Last" or "Final" Reply, he said that he had not encountered a single reasonable objection which he had not considered before submitting his entry (*Last Reply* [2]*), and if one re-reads the *Discourse* in the light of the debate, one finds no reason to doubt him. Before long he came to speak of his "system," his "sad and great system" (*Narcissus* [13], *Second Letter* [6]). He seems to have meant no more by the expression than that his views were comprehensive and coherent. He did not ever deduce his "system" *more geometrico*, as, for example, Hobbes or Spinoza had sought to do. Like the most thoughtful of his characters, M. de Wolmar, the love of truth kept him from systematizing [*l'esprit des systèmes*] (*NH* IV, 7, *OC* II, 427). This is one reason why his work has given rise to so many often contradictory, and occasionally downright bizarre

interpretations. He sets out some of his reasons for proceeding as he does in the early and important programmatic *Method of Composing a Book*, and he restates them most succinctly at the end of Part I of the *Discourse on Inequality* ([53]).

The formulation of the newly formed Dijon Academy's Question for its first Prize Essay competition, "Has the Restoration of the Sciences and the Arts Contributed to the Purification of Morals?," may sound quaintly academic. Yet the problem which it raises is one which every thoughtful person of our time is forced to confront: does progress in the sciences and the arts promote – or even go hand in hand with – moral progress? The Academy's Question would seem to suggest a "yes" or "no" answer. Rousseau restates the Question, and in the process changes its focus: Has progress in the arts and sciences led to moral progress or has it led to moral decline ([4])? It is this third, new, alternative that he chooses to defend: not only does progress in the arts and sciences fail to foster moral/political progress, it actively fosters its very opposite; and it does so always and necessarily. In awarding Rousseau's *Discourse* first place, the Dijon Academy expressly stated that it did so because it had answered the Question in the negative. The only other entry also to have done so took second place.

Rousseau's argument challenges head-on the premise of enlightenment, not just the premise of *the* Enlightenment but of what all of us would dearly like to believe, that the unfettered public pursuit of the arts and sciences – of what we call "culture" – enhances men's moral and political life. In following his criticism of this view, it helps to keep in mind that he is primarily concerned with the effects of the arts and sciences on the public life, and that he consistently distinguishes between the pursuit of them in public by the public, and in private by individuals (e.g. *FD* [59]). His argument is not that all uncultured, savage, or barbarous nations are necessarily morally/politically excellent, but that assigning priority to "culture" in the public life threatens and, in the long run, destroys freedom and justice. The most representative spokesmen for enlightenment immediately recognized the challenge. In the "Preliminary Discourse" to the great *Encyclopedia* which Rousseau's friend d'Alembert wrote the very same year in which Rousseau's own *Discourse* was taking Europe

by storm, he raised the objection so many critics, then and now, have raised:

> . . . even assuming we were ready to concede the disadvantage of human knowledge, which is far from being our intention here, we are even farther from believing that anything would be gained from destroying it. We would be left the vices, and have ignorance to boot.

Rousseau fully grants the point. He never ceases repeating that there is no return. It is one of the constants of his thought that once decline has set in, it will run its full course. However, it can be delayed.

The conclusion of his argument regarding the arts, reduced to formula, is that they are bad for good societies and may be good for bad ones (*Narcissus* [37]). His argument regarding the sciences, again reduced to formula, is that the medium of public life is public opinion or fashionable prejudice, and that, as he puts it in another context, for the most part opinions and prejudices are replaced by other opinions or prejudices, not by knowledge or by a reasoned suspension of judgment (*FD* [2], [40], *Franquières* [2]). Moral/political excellence can, therefore, not be achieved – or even preserved – by the public pursuit and dissemination of knowledge, or by a so-called rational choice of enlightened self-interest, any more than it can be guaranteed to result from the working of institutions or procedures. It can only be achieved by everyone's recognizing the shared concern for the common interest or good as the organizing principle of their cares and pursuits, in short by the education – or re-education – of the passions. This is the premise underlying all of the arguments of the *First Discourse* and, indeed, of Rousseau's political teaching as a whole.

Writing in *ancien régime* France, Rousseau hesitated to go on and openly say that in his view the common weal consists in political freedom, that is to say in political self-rule. He says so indirectly in a number of ways, most immediately by identifying himself as a Citizen of Geneva on the very title page of the *Discourse*. The Dijon Academy understood him perfectly. In awarding the *Discourse* first prize, it took note of its strongly republican tone, and expressly stated that it was awarding it the prize in spite of it. From the principle that the common weal

consists in political self-rule, it follows that anything that causes the citizens to be distracted from pursuing and preserving political freedom threatens it. That is why the pursuit of the arts and sciences to the neglect of civic virtue imperils political freedom. That is also why Rousseau rejects the argument that the unfettered pursuit of private interest redounds to the public interest, the argument Mandeville summarized as "Private Vices, Public Benefits."

At a minimum, political freedom requires subordinating the private to the public good; at its fullest, it requires finding one's private good in the public or common good. Insofar as subordinating the private to the common good requires an effort, it requires virtue: "the strength [*force*] and vigor of the soul" (*FD* [11], *Hero* [35]). While Rousseau tends, for the most part, to equate "virtue" with "civic virtue," he is fully aware of how restrictive this equation is. The competing claims of the intellectual and the civic virtues is a classical problem. He explores this problem in remarkable detail in the early *Discourse on Heroic Virtue*, and he returns to it in every one of his works. It is the theme of his repeated comparisons between Socrates and Cato, but also of the tension he describes between himself the Solitary Walker and himself the Citizen of Geneva. Unlike Kant, he never proclaimed the priority of the practical to the theoretical reason.

From the *First Discourse* onwards, Rousseau argues that the main reason why civic virtue is so difficult to achieve is that political society – especially in its modern, commercial guise – tends to force its members to seek their private good at the expense of their fellows, and hence of the common good; they need one another in order to prey on one another; they are therefore compelled to *be* one way, and to *seem* another (*Narcissus* [27]).

The question inevitably arises whether these "contradictions," as Rousseau himself sometimes calls them, are due to some flaw inherent in human nature, whether they are due to some flaw inherent in political society as such, or whether – and how – they might be avoided or mitigated. In short, how did they arise? It is therefore to the beginnings that Rousseau next turns.

In the so-called *Second Discourse* Rousseau describes himself as digging to the very roots of these problems (*SD* I [47]). He wrote the *Discourse* between November 1753 and June 1754 in answer to

another Prize Essay Question proposed by the Dijon Academy. The *First Discourse* had won the Academy's Prize, and had made him famous. The *Second Discourse* did not win the Prize, but it made him immortal. The question the Academy had proposed was: "What is the Origin of Inequality among Men, and is it Authorized by the Natural Law?" He begins by considering the key terms of that Question.

He distinguishes two kinds of inequality: "physical" inequality, by which he means not only inequality of bodily powers, but also, perhaps somewhat unexpectedly, in powers of mind, wisdom and virtue; and "moral" inequality, by which he means ruling and being ruled (*SD* [2]). With this distinction he, in effect, turns the Academy's Question about the origin of inequality into a question about the origin of rule; and since political rule is the most authoritative and comprehensive form of rule, the Academy's "What is the Origin of Inequality?" in effect becomes "What is the Origin of Civil or Political Rule?"; and hence "What is the Origin of Civil or Political Society?" It is to this question that Rousseau devotes the major portion of the *Discourse*.

The Academy had gone on to ask whether inequality is authorized by the natural law, and this leads Rousseau into what proved to be his most comprehensive thematic discussion of "natural law." Once again, he begins with a distinction: natural law may be understood either as a law of nature to which all natural and certainly all living beings are subject, or as the moral law to which only we humans, as free and rational agents, are subject. The Academy Question clearly refers to natural law understood as the moral law. Rousseau devotes his entire *Discourse* to proving that natural law so understood cannot account for the origin of political society and of "moral" inequality. As for whether natural law "authorizes" political society and rule, he initially leaves this question open: in the title he gives to his answer, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men*, he recasts the Academy's Question, just as he had recast its earlier Question about the Arts and Sciences, by substituting the non-committal "foundations" for the Academy's "authorized by the natural law." The substitution also incidentally alerts us to Rousseau's reluctance to speak about "natural law" when he speaks in his own name.

He very correctly observes that everyone who has inquired into the bases of political society has been led to inquire into man's pre-political condition. He refers to this pre-political condition as the "state of nature," an expression introduced, for all intents and purposes, by Hobbes, who defines it as "the state of men without civil society," or without an acknowledged common superior on earth (*De cive*, Preface). While he adopts Hobbes's expression, his account of this state is sharply at odds with Hobbes's account of it.

Hobbes "very clearly saw the defect of all modern definitions of Natural right," namely that they assumed that man is by nature rational and political. Yet Hobbes goes on to commit essentially the very same fallacy: he erroneously attributes to man in the state of nature passions and needs which he could only have acquired after the rise of reason and political society (*SD* I [35]). Because of this fallacy, Hobbes erroneously concludes that the state of nature is a state of war of all against all. If it indeed were, then, Rousseau argues, mankind would have been forced to abandon it from the very first or to face extinction. Hobbes's fallacy prevents him from accounting for mankind's long, stable pre-civil existence. He spoke of savage man, but depicted civil man (*SD* I [38]; *War* [8]).

Rousseau sets out to correct Hobbes's account by adhering to his premises more consistently than Hobbes himself had done. To this end, he conjectures what human nature must have been in "the embryo of the species," by, so to speak, "bracketing" all the changes it must have undergone as reason and sociability develop. This reductive analysis leaves him with two principles prior to reason and independent of sociability, self-preservation and pity, which, in his view, suffice to allow men to act in conformity with natural right. Rousseau is not denying that men are rational or sociable; he denies that prior to the development of reason and sociability humans cannot act in conformity with natural right. By speaking about self-preservation and pity as "principles," Rousseau is calling attention to the fact that they manifest themselves in different forms at different stages of the development of individuals and of the species: thus "the principle of pity" assumes different forms in the *Discourse on Inequality*, in the *Essay on the Origin of Languages* (*EOL* 9[2]), and in the *Emile*. In the *Discourse*

pity manifests itself primarily as a revulsion at inflicting or even witnessing hurt (*SD* P [9], I [35]; cf. *Geneva ms.* II 4[15]), and Rousseau goes so far as strongly to suggest a natural propensity to vegetarianism. However he also calls the reader's attention to the fact that the claims of self-preservation "legitimately" take precedence over the claims of pity (*SD* P [10], I [38]), that the state of nature is a state of violence, and that the law of nature is the rule of the stronger (*SD* E [4], II [56], *Poland* 13[3]). Yet this law of the stronger does not lead to serious conflict, let alone to Hobbes's war of all against all: "[e]verywhere the state of war prevailed, yet the whole earth was at peace" (*EOL* 9[6]; *War*). For so long as men's passions are sluggish, their needs limited in number, and they can easily satisfy them on their own, being stronger makes little difference. Rousseau's radical reductive analysis is, as he will go on to show, therefore entirely consistent with the fact that for the greater part of recorded time, the greater part of mankind has lived "without civil society," and that this life "without civil society" has been remarkably stable, that, in other words, the pre-political state is indeed a state, a stable, enduring, and distinct condition of mankind.

There is ample evidence about the state of nature in the sense of mankind's pre-political state, and Rousseau avails himself of the ancient sources as well as of contemporary travelers' reports. Nevertheless he speaks of his account as "conjectural." In one respect his calling it that is a transparent rhetorical feint. A public inquiry into the origins inevitably has to come to terms with the biblical account. Rousseau disposes of this challenge by inviting us *therefore* to set aside all the facts (*SD* E [6]). Still, setting aside the biblical account of the beginnings does not dispose of all difficulties. The historians' and the travelers' reports are hard to interpret because the pre-political life they describe is, clearly, not life at its most primitive. The Caribs may well be the one of all known peoples that has remained closest to the state of nature (*SD* I [44]), but there is every reason to believe that they are not the most primitive humans simply. Rousseau therefore divides the pre-political state of nature into three stages separated by "revolutions" (cf. *EOL* 9[19]), and he assigns "most of the savage peoples known to us" (*SD* II [17], cf. [18]) to the second of these stages. Since less evidence is available about the preceding stage, his

account of it is, as he says, necessarily conjectural. So is his account of what he sometimes calls "the pure state of nature" (*SD* E [5]), the state of man without – and conceivably prior to – "moral" relations of any kind, and hence without – and conceivably prior to – artifice or convention of any kind. Reflections about man's beginnings inexorably lead to conjectures about a presumed human prime matter, and any account of how solitary hominoids devoid of affect, reason, language, might have developed or devised them, just as inexorably lead to the conclusion that only beings possessed of the faculties for reason, for language, for social life could have done so. Hence Rousseau has men at the most likely earliest stage of the *historical* state of nature display incipient reason, engage in such communal activities as hunts, and possess language, "crude, imperfect, and more or less such as various Savage Nations have now" (SD II [4]-[10]), in short "perfectible", endowed with a faculty that triggers and "with the aid of circumstances successively develops" all the other faculties "natural man had received in potentiality". (SD I [17]).

The basic premise of Rousseau's pre-political state of nature is that everyone in this state enjoys a balance between needs and the resources and powers to satisfy them; and that everyone possesses the power to restore this balance when it has been upset. Rousseau's pre-political state of nature is characterized by everyone's being self-sufficient. So long as each one's needs and powers are in balance, no one is drawn or driven by his nature to alter his state. So long as each one's needs and powers are in balance, even Hobbes's natural right of everyone to everything he might need or desire would not make for a Hobbesian state of war, and would therefore not force men to abandon the state of nature (*War* [11]f.). The balance between needs, inclinations, and the powers to satisfy them is in very large measure maintained or restored by what, in the *Second Discourse*, Rousseau calls "perfectibility" (*SD* I [17]), "the specific characteristic of the human species"(*SD* N X [5]; *EOL* I[14]). Perfectibility is the mechanism which brings into play the faculties that will enable individuals and the species to establish a new balance between needs and powers when the previous balance between them has been irreversibly upset by a change in circumstances such as floods, droughts, or earthquakes.

The development of language plays a particularly important role in the working of perfectibility, if only because language is so intimately involved in the development of what Rousseau calls "moral" and we would now call "social" relations (*SD* I [30] and Editorial Note; N X [5]; *EOL* I[13]).The term "perfectibility" invites misunderstanding. In spite of its name, and in contrast to teleological principles of explanation, perfectibility is not set and kept in motion by some inner dynamic or impulsion. Rather, it is triggered by changes in external circumstances, by what Rousseau therefore refers to as "accidents" (*concours singuliers et fortuits de circonstances, concours singuliers de plusieurs causes étrangères qui pouvaient ne jamais naître, SD* I [12], [51]). They are "accidents" because they do not work in concert for the sake of one another or for whatever proves to be the outcome of their converging. Nevertheless, there is nothing haphazard about the course perfectibility follows. Rousseau consistently has human faculties – language, reason, the passions – and human associations – families, troops, tribes, societies – develop always and everywhere in the same, familiar, order, "successively," and not at random or in a different order in different circumstances. Now, bringing faculties into play is one thing, perfecting the individual – let alone the species – whose faculties they are is quite another. In spite of its name, perfectibility does not perfect or even guide the use of the faculties it brings into play. Faculties are like tools and, like tools, they can be used for good or ill. It is at least as likely that we will misuse them as that we will use them well (*Voltaire* [8], [11]; *EOL* I[13]; *Conf.* viii, *OC* I, 388).

Indeed, the faculties man develops and brings into play in order to deal with a given situation, the tools he fashions, the skills he acquires, the new ways he adopts, place at his disposal far more power than that situation required. The first time he used a stone it may have been to crack a nut; but stones do not for him become nutcrackers, they become hammers or missiles. The new faculties, skills, and implements release powers and open up possibilities which far exceed the needs that occasioned them. Their use will not be confined to satisfying the original need. Instead, men will explore and use their new surplus powers and, in the process, create new,

derivative needs, needs that soon override the primary needs in their urgency. This is Rousseau's point whenever he invites his reader to consider whether men might not be better off without the power – the faculties or the tools – to do ill as well as good than they are when they possess this power and use it for ill.

The single most distinctive feature of Rousseau's original, natural man, and of men in the pre-political state of nature, is that they are "good." Rousseau always stressed that the doctrine of man's natural goodness was his central doctrine. It stands in clear opposition to the doctrine of original sin (*SD* E [5], N IX [14]). Men in the pre-political state are naturally good in the sense that so long as each person's needs, inclinations, and the powers to satisfy them are in balance, each can yield to his spontaneous inclination to self-preservation and to pity by attending to his own good without desiring and, for the most part, needing to harm anyone (*SD* I [38]). Talleyrand captured something of Rousseau's meaning if, as tradition has it, his only advice to a class of graduating Foreign Service officers was: "Beware of your first inclination. It is apt to be good." Still, Rousseau's talk of natural, spontaneous goodness, and especially his stress on "pity" as constitutive of natural goodness, is apt to mislead readers into overlooking the flinty features of his pre-political state of nature, the fact that men's natural goodness is perfectly compatible with fierceness, even with ferociousness, cruelty, and a considerable level of violence (*SD* I [6], II [17], *EOL* 9[1]). They may be fierce, ferocious, and cruel, but they are no more wicked or vindictive than is a dog biting the stone that hit him (*SD* I [39]). They are not wicked or vindictive for the same reason that they are not properly speaking just or magnanimous: their sense of self is not dependent on how others perceive them and, unlike men in Hobbes's state of nature, they are therefore not bent on besting anyone, let alone everyone. Natural goodness is, then, emphatically not beneficence, the inclination or the steady will to do another's good. Nor is it virtue, "the strength [*force*] and vigor of the soul" (*FD* [11]), let alone the justice that consists in doing unto others as you would have them do unto you (*SD* I [38]). Nothing in Rousseau's account of men in the pre-political state of nature justifies calling them "noble savages."

They are good because and insofar as they are self-sufficient. Rousseau criticizes Hobbes for presumably teaching that men are naturally wicked or evil, by assuming that their appetites are from the first and by nature unbounded, and in particular that they are from the first and by nature driven by what Hobbes calls "vanity" or "vainglory" and he himself calls *amour propre*, the passion to have others acknowledge us at the stock we set by ourselves. He argues that, on the contrary, *amour propre* and all other passions fueled by comparing ourselves to others are derivative, late acquisitions, which are fully developed and become imperious only in political society.

In the pre-political state of nature men are self-sufficient because and insofar as they are free and equal. They are free because they are not irreversibly dependent on another for the satisfaction of their material, psychological, or social – Rousseau's "moral" – needs; and they are equal because their "physical" inequalities remain without "moral" import: they are equal because they are free. This pre-political non-dependence or "natural freedom" is associated with the deep-seated sentiment of freedom which for Rousseau comes close to defining being human (*SD* II [41]). Hobbes has men driven to escape or to avoid the state of nature because it permanently threatens what he calls the greatest evil, violent death. Accordingly, on his view, the primary aim of civil society is peace. Rousseau, by contrast, has men drawn to remain in the pre-political state of nature in order to avoid what he calls the worst that can happen in the relations between man and man, to find oneself at the discretion of another's arbitrary will (*SD* II [37]). Accordingly, on his view, the primary aim of civil society is freedom. He fully recognizes, indeed he stresses, that the requirements for civil peace may be at odds with the requirements for civil freedom (*SD* II [38], [39]; *SC* III 4[7]; *Poland* I[3]).

Once men become irreversibly dependent on one another, Rousseau's pre-political state of nature breaks down. In the *Second Discourse* he conjectures that this breakdown was due to the "accidental" introduction of large-scale agriculture, with the attendant division of labor and enclosure, and he praises Moses for indicating his apparent disapproval of agriculture "by attributing its invention to a wicked man," Cain, the tiller of the

soil who was also the founder of cities (*EOL* 9[18]; Genesis 4:2–7). Control of any other primary natural resource on which all depend, would, of course, have led to the same result. In the *Social Contract* he therefore reduces the causes for the breakdown of the pre-political state of nature to the formula: no one can any longer attend to his preservation by himself alone (*SC* I 6[1]). The loss of self-sufficiency thus leads to the division of labor which, in turn, leads to the irreversible loss of equality, because now the natural, "physical" inequalities in talents and strength which had always existed assume "moral," that is to say social, import. As a result, the cleverer or the stronger now enjoy advantages at the expense of the duller or weaker who are therefore now compelled to simulate qualities which they do not in fact possess. Before long inequalities in brain or brawn become inequalities between rich and poor, masters and slaves, rulers and ruled. The point of Rousseau's genealogy is clear: existing moral inequalities are fundamentally unjust. They are the result of unearned inequalities – being talented, or clever, or strong – used to one's own advantage at the expense of others. What is more, existing moral inequalities corrupt the advantaged and the disadvantaged alike. Conflict inevitably arose, which before long turned into a war of all against all.

Rousseau agrees with the earlier modern state-of-nature doctrines that civil society is instituted to remedy what they call "the inconveniences" (see "A Note on the Translations," p. xlvi below) of the state of nature. He disagrees with them by denying that these inconveniences manifest themselves from the first, or are due to an inherent flaw in human nature.

In the *Discourse on Inequality* Rousseau conjectures that the war of all against all must have been brought to an end by a contract proposed by the rich to the poor: all would pool their forces to constitute a supreme power that would rule them according to law, and protect each and every member in the possession of what he has. Rousseau had society arise naturally – he speaks of "beginning" and "nascent society" (*SD* II [18]; cf. *EOL* 9[34–36]) – and break down with the introduction of irreversible material and "moral" dependence. Civil or political society is an artificial alternative to "natural" society torn apart by the intestine war which dependence inevitably causes. As "beginning" or "nascent"

society gives way to the state of war, tradition and morals (*moeurs*) give way to the worst that can happen to one, dependence on another's arbitrary will. The contract substitutes the rule of law for the rule of morals and of arbitrary individual will. By conjecturing that political society must have begun by contract, Rousseau suggests that it must at all times have been at least tacitly recognized that only mutual consent could provide a basis for a just or at least a legitimate civil order (cf. *SD* II [31] with *SC* I 6[5]). While this conjectured historical contract might have been just by being a contract, it was flawed – a "usurpation" – by freezing the inherently unjust inequalities between rich and poor that had given rise to the war of all against all, and hence to the need to institute political society in the first place (see also *PE* [63]). In the process, the contract establishes and sanctions a state of affairs which places individuals in contradiction with one another and themselves, and forces them to override their natural goodness, their natural inclination to do their own good with the least harm possible to others, by placing them in the position of having to do their good at others' expense. This is how men can be wicked while man is good (*SD* N IX [2]; letter to Cramer, Oct. 13, 1764). They are so not because of some inherent flaw or Fall or failing on their part, but because political society is flawed in its very inception. In answer to the Academy's Question, Rousseau argues that the origin of inequality is the rule of the stronger in the form of the rule of the richer; and that, as such, it clearly is not "authorized" by the natural law, regardless of how that term may be understood (*SD* II [31], [35], [58]).

The *Discourse on Inequality* does not explore how this state of affairs might be remedied, any more than it explores whether or on what terms civil or political society might be "authorized" or "legitimate." It has therefore left some readers under the impression that Rousseau thinks that the self-sufficient savage marks the peak of humanity (*SD* II [18]), from which the civil state is an unqualified decline. This is certainly the immediate impression he wishes to create (*SD* E [7]). By comparison to his discussion of the state of nature, the discussion of the civil state that follows lacks drama. It is also significantly shorter. Yet it would be a mistake to neglect what he calls his "hypothetical history of governments," for it is, as he says, "... in all respects an instructive lesson for