A comprehensive and authoritative anthology of Rousseau’s important early political writings in faithful English translations. This volume includes the Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts and the Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men – the so-called First and Second Discourses – together with Rousseau’s extensive Replies to critics of these Discourses; the Essay on the Origin of Languages; the Letter to Voltaire on Providence; as well as several minor but illuminating writings – the Discourse on Heroic Virtue and the essay Idea of the Method in the Composition of a Book. In these as well as in his later writings, Rousseau probes the very premises of modern thought. His influence was wide-reaching from the very first, and it has continued to grow since his death. The American and the French Revolutions were profoundly affected by his thought, as were Romanticism and Idealism.

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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

Wesleyan University, Connecticut

Second Edition
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Preface to the First Edition

I am grateful to the many colleagues and friends from whom I have learned about Rousseau, or who have called my attention to infelicities or occasional mistakes in the translations and in the Editorial Notes, among them Steven Angle, Jon Barlow, Joshua Cohen, Maurice Cranston, Lydia Goehr, Wolfgang Iser, Leon Kass, Sam Kerstein, Ralph Leigh, Mark Lilla, John McCarthy, Terence Marshall, Heinrich Meier, Donald J. Moon, Robert D. Richardson Jr., Charles Sherover, Karlheinz Stierle, William Trousdale, and Robert Wokler. Professor Raymond Geuss has been unstinting in his advice regarding the content and the form of the Introductions.

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
Preface

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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I did some of the research for these volumes during a year’s fellowship at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. The Kolleg, its Director, Professor Wolf Lepenies, and his staff have created a uniquely congenial setting for productive scholarship. I welcome this opportunity to thank them publicly.

I wish also to acknowledge research assistance from Wesleyan University over a period of years.

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I must thank The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, for permission to reproduce the frontispiece and title page from its copy of the first edition of the First Discourse (PML 17482) and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University for permission to reproduce the frontispiece and the title page from its copy of the first edition of the Second Discourse.

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.

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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.

I welcome the opportunity publicly to thank David Gillespie, Lydia Goehr, Philip Hamburger, Christopher Kelly, Jonathan Marks, Steven Ossad, Joseph Raz, Amelie Rorty, J.R. Schneewind and Richard Velkley for helpful comments and suggestions, and for enlightening discussions of these texts and of many of the issues they raise.

I am indebted to Joanna North for copy-editing large sections of these revised translations, and most grateful to Georgia Cool for her scrupulous copy-editing of both volumes in their entirety.

Elizabeth Friend-Smith and Rosemary Crawley of the Cambridge University Press supervised this project from beginning to end.

Sarah Chalfant of the Wylie Agency has been a steadfast, wise guide and counselor throughout.

Thank you all.

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
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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 [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
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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 1 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

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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

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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 1 [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.

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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 1 [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 1 [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
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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” \((SD \in [5])\), 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” \((SD \Pi [4]-[10])\), 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”. \((SD \Pi [17]).\)

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 \((War [11]).\) 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” \((SD \Pi [17])\), “the specific characteristic of the human species”\((SD \ll x [5]; EOL \ll 1[14]).\) 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 1[i3]). 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 1[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.”

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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* 1[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
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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 1:0[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. xlvii 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 11[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
man” (*SDP* [12]). He divides the civil state, as he had the state of nature, into three stages separated by “revolutions” and, again as in the state of nature, he situates the peak in the second or middle stage. He assigns that peak to democracy. In the body of the *Discourse* he says so as if only in passing. He sets forth his fullest account of a legitimate political order not in the body of the *Discourse*, but at its very beginning, under cover of the Epistle Dedicatory to Geneva, with its praise of the Roman People, “that model of all free Peoples” (*ED* [6]), and of “wisely tempered democracy” (*ED* [3], cf. *SC* III 7[5], 10[3]*). The constitution of “the Fatherland I would have chosen” which he sketches in that Epistle Dedicatory corresponds in all essentials to the legitimate political order which he depicts in full detail in the *Social Contract*.

The *Discourse* concludes with a comparison between the self-sufficient life in the state of nature and the other-dependent and other-directed life in the civil state, the in-gathered sentiment of one’s own existence in the one, and the radically alienated, *amour-propre* driven sense of self in the other. The comparison appears unconditionally to favor the first, and just as unconditionally to deprecate the second. This appearance is deceptive. Rousseau stresses that we owe to *amour propre* not only what is worst but also what is best among men, conquerors as well as philosophers (*SD* II [52]). He had made the same point in the *First Discourse* and in his *Replies* to its critics. However, he does not develop it in any of these essentially diagnostic writings. He will develop it in what might by contrast be called his constructive political writings, where he will argue that *amour propre* can become the active principle and driving power of civic spiritedness and patriotism (*PE* [30]; *Poland* 4[1], [2]). Nor does he here develop the extremely terse answer he finally gives to the Academy Question in the very last paragraph of the *Discourse*: only rule in proportion to merit satisfies the requirements of natural law in any sense of that term. In the very last of the Notes he appended to the *Discourse*, he adds that political rule in proportion to wisdom and virtue – in other words, rule in strict conformity with the requirements of what the Dijon Academy means by “natural law” – has to be “authorized” by the sovereign people (also *Narcissus* [19]). It clearly follows that, as he says
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in the Epistle Dedicatory (18), [3]) and again in the Social Contract (iii 5[4], 7[5], 10[3]*), the best government is democracy wisely tempered, or elective aristocracy (SG iii 5[4]; cf. SD ed [18], [3]). He most fully illustrates how he conceives of political authority in proportion to merit in his Considerations on the Government of Poland (13).

Although it was widely read and discussed, this Second Discourse did not occasion a public debate comparable to that occasioned by the First Discourse. It did not, in part, because, as Rousseau wrote many years later, “... in all of Europe [the Discourse] found only a very few readers who understood it, and of these none wished to talk about it” (Conf. viii, OC i, 389).* In part it did not occasion the kind of debate the First Discourse had occasioned because Rousseau did not directly enter the discussion of it in public. He drafted, but never mailed, replies to the critical comments by Charles Bonnet, writing under the pseudonym Philopolis, and by Charles-Georges Le Roy speaking in the name of Buffon. Both had challenged what they took to be the Discourse’s conception of the natural order and of man’s place in it. However, he did spell out his conception of the natural order and of man’s place in it rather fully in a letter he sent to Voltaire about the latter’s recently published Poem on the Lisbon Disaster. Man’s place in the natural order is again central to the reflections in the Essay on the Origin of Languages, and in an important footnote Rousseau returns to the specific issue Le Roy-Buffon had raised

* Jean de Castillon criticized the Discourse at length in a thoughtful Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes pour servir de réponse au Discours que M. Rousseau, Citoyen de Genève, a publié sur le même sujet (Amsterdam, 1756), the first work to call attention to how much Rousseau’s state of nature owed to Lucretius’s account of men’s pre-political condition. The Jesuit L. B. Castel, whom Rousseau had known when he first came to Paris, published a strongly Catholic criticism of the Discourse entitled L’Homme moral opposé à l’homme physique de M.R*** (Toulouse, 1756). Adam Smith reviewed it in the Edinburgh Review (1756). Lessing reviewed it. Lessing’s friend Moses Mendelssohn “translated” it. The two exchanged views about what Rousseau may have meant by “perfectibility” (Lessing to Mendelssohn, January 21, 1756), and their debate about tragedy was in large measure prompted by what Rousseau had said about “pity” in the Discourse: Hans-Jürgen Schings, Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch: Poetik des Mitleids von Lessing bis Büchner, Beck, München, 1980, pp. 34–45.
about carnivores (EOL 9[32]*)]. These four writings, together with the Discourse, thus form a coherent whole.

The immediate occasion for Voltaire’s Poem was the devastating earthquake that struck Lisbon on Saturday, November 1, All Saints’ Day 1755, and that was followed by tidal waves and extensive fires, causing the death of many thousands of people and destroying much of the city. The disaster made a deep impression throughout Europe. In the wake of it, Voltaire’s Poem challenges, as its subtitle announces, “the axiom ‘All is Good,’” the thesis of Leibniz’s Theodicy that this is the best of all possible worlds and of Pope’s Essay on Man that “whatever is, is right,” what at the time was called “Optimism.” “Optimism” was being much debated. The Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences had announced as the topic of its Prize competition for 1755 a thorough discussion of Pope’s thesis, and Kant had considered submitting an essay to it. Now Voltaire, writing under the impact of the earthquake, charges that optimism fails to acknowledge or to account for the ills or evils (maux) that befall man. Rousseau, by contrast, casts himself as a defender of optimism, an optimism which any reader of the Letter immediately realizes has nothing in common with the pollyannish optimism Voltaire will deride in Candide. He had, after all, just a short time before referred to his “sad system.” The aim of his Letter is to vindicate our common-sense trust in what he calls “the ordinary course of things,” and our belief or hope in the conformity between the order of things and our moral lives, by once more showing that most of the evils we suffer are of our making and that we can therefore avoid them, and that the evils which we cannot avoid count for less than the goods we enjoy.

Rousseau does not deny that the Lisbon earthquake was a great calamity, or that our lives are beset by innumerable evils. He takes issue with Voltaire about how most responsibly to characterize evils. Voltaire’s Poem depicts evils which human prudence could prevent or at least mitigate as if they could only have been prevented by an omnipotent God who chose not to prevent them. It therefore leaves us feeling forsaken. By contrast, Rousseau, siding with Leibniz and Pope, shows God combining the most good(s) with the fewest evils possible—“...if he did not do better, it is that he could not do better” ([§5])—and thus leaving
us feeling reconciled and even hopeful. Faced with the alternative between divine beneficence and divine omnipotence, Rousseau opts for the first.

The general physical evils that are, so to speak, in the nature of things – primarily death and pain – are few in number, and of comparatively little importance, especially once we recognize that they are unavoidable. Most generally, evils are unavoidable because the whole is made up of heterogeneous parts, and the good of one part – or kind or species – differs from that of another and hence from the good of the whole ([8], [21], [23]; War [42]; Philopolis [11]). We cannot avoid, undo, or overcome such evils. We can only accommodate to them more or less adequately.

Strictly speaking, the question of philosophical optimism is independent of the question of Providence. In a discussion of these very same issues in the Second Discourse, Rousseau had said that man suffers almost only evils he has brought on himself, and that therefore Nature – he makes no mention there of Providence – is justified (SD NIX [1]; cf. Narcissus [30]). Still, it is not difficult to see how a discussion of the origin of evil readily turns into a discussion of Providence. Now, in the terms which he adopts in the Letter to Voltaire, Rousseau argues that Providence makes for the best world possible, and – therefore – not for a world that is unqualifi edly good. Providence is “universal,” and – therefore – not particular ([25]).

Rousseau recognizes that even universal Providence, the proposition that the species is a part of the best-ordered whole possible, and – therefore – subject to the fewest and least constraints or evils possible, is no more than an assumption ([23]). Voltaire does not grant this assumption. For him the whole is not well ordered unless sentient beings, and in particular human beings, enjoy a privileged place in it. In his view, a whole to which his death contributes by having his mortal remains serve as food for worms is not simply well ordered. The difference between the two is that for Voltaire the whole should accommodate to man, whereas for Rousseau man must accommodate to the whole. However, the claim that we suffer more evils than we enjoy goods is disingenuous even on Voltaire’s terms. It fails to take into account “the sweet sentiment of existence” ([11]). If he took it into account, Voltaire would recognize that, in the full context of our
lives, the goods we enjoy outweigh the unavoidable general evils we suffer. What is more, the sweet sentiment of existence clearly provides a privileged place for man among the beings, and thus establishes a clear presumption in favor of even the kind of Providence Voltaire demands. Rousseau goes so far as to argue that the sentiment of one’s own existence also establishes a presumption in favor of the immortality of the individual soul (26).

The link between immortality of the individual soul and our sense of justice is readily enough apparent. We believe that justice calls for happiness in proportion to moral desert. We know that it is not always so. Yet our moral life rests on the trust that what is conforms to what should be. We may therefore be moved to hope that it might prove to be so, and hence to hope that the soul is immortal. As Voltaire remarked in the concluding note to his Poem, men entertained this hope “even before they enjoyed the assistance of revelation.” It has also always and everywhere been recognized that the hope – or the fear – that the individual soul might be immortal and subject to rewards and punishments can serve as a powerful bulwark to moral conduct. It may encourage the righteous, and deter the wicked. Rousseau takes up Glaucon’s and Adeimantos’s challenge to Socrates: in the absence of immortality and of natural sanctions, would not a person acting justly to his detriment be a fool, and only a person acting unjustly to his benefit prove rational? (26; Plato, Republic ii, 359b–362c; Franquières [22]; Geneva ms. i 2[10]; SC i 6[2]).

The question of Providence is a corollary of questions about the existence and nature of God. Rousseau had acknowledged that there are reasons for doubting the immortality of the soul (Voltaire [26]). He now acknowledges as much regarding the existence of God ([29]). The rational thing to do would, therefore, be to suspend judgment regarding God’s existence. Yet he rejects this option. More precisely, he denies that it is an option. For, he says, he cannot bear to remain in doubt about questions of vital importance. Since the unaided human reason cannot resolve the question, he falls back on sentiment. He develops this argument – if that is the proper term for this rejection of argument – in the important paragraph immediately following, in which he goes on to tell how profoundly struck he had been by Diderot’s showing

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that the order of the universe can be accounted for by matter, motion, and chance, without invoking a prime mover or a prior principle of order, in other words by a somewhat refined Epicureanism ([30]). He omitted this paragraph from the copy of the Letter which he sent to Voltaire, as well as from the version of it which he eventually allowed to be published. He did make the same point on a number of other occasions (e.g. Franquières [11]), but never publicly in his own name. It is clear why he would have hesitated to do so: as he goes on to say, he knows of no conclusive refutation of it. If he nevertheless rejects it, he does so not because he thinks it false, but because it clashes so radically with our ordinary, common-sense experience, and with our trust or hope that the world makes sense, that we could not live by it. The Second Discourse is proof that he does not simply reject it. As he puts it in a formula he also uses in a number of other important contexts, he is convinced but not persuaded by Diderot’s Epicurean account. For all practical purposes the contrast between being convinced and being persuaded corresponds to the contrast he draws a few lines later between proofs by demonstration and proofs of sentiment. In both cases, ordinary experience or inclination points one way, and demonstration or argument points another; in both cases Rousseau claims that ordinary experience or inclination prevails; and, he argues, in both cases it must be heeded. For ordinary experience makes for our stubborn trust in the stability and order of our world, and appears to point to what might be called “cosmic support for our humanity” or “Providence,” and thus to hallow necessity. Respect for this trust intensifies our common sense of what several times in this Letter Rousseau calls “the ordinary course of things”; to challenge it, as Voltaire does, in the name of alternatives that are not certain and make no useful difference therefore is, as Rousseau repeatedly says, simply cruel ([6], [30]). It is far more cruel than the various physical evils which Voltaire finds so cruel ([10]), because, by undermining our trust in the common world of common sense, it causes us to become disenchanted and detached from it. In criticizing Voltaire’s poem, Rousseau is indirectly also criticizing Diderot’s Epicurean account. He honeys the cup, and seeks to counteract the disenchantment and detachment to which their views lead by shifting
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the focus inward, away from the natural world around us toward our sentiments, and most particularly toward the sentiment of our existence. This shift significantly contributed to the shift away from cosmological arguments for the existence of God, and from religion to religiosity. It corresponds to the distinction between being convinced and being persuaded, and to the distinction between proofs by demonstration and proofs of sentiment. These shifts and distinctions succinctly mark the limits of possible enlightenment, and in particular of a politics that would be rigorously rational.

Rousseau categorically rejects the possibility of a political society of atheists, although he readily concedes that there may be individual virtuous atheists, as his very sympathetic depiction of M. de Wolmar in the *Nouvelle Héloïse* to say nothing of his circumspect accounts of his own views amply prove. Since a sound political society requires what, in the *Social Contract*, he will call a “civil religion,” he invites Voltaire to elaborate the rudiments of the religion of sentiment which he has been sketching in this Letter into a Catechism of the Citizen. Religious beliefs can be required, they cannot be enforced. It would be inhumane and unreasonable to try to enforce them. Only conduct can be enforced. Rousseau invariably draws a sharp line between enforcing belief and enforcing conduct, and in particular he consistently rejects every form of religious intolerance. For, as he says here, and as he will say again in the chapter on Civil Religion of the *Social Contract*, people who think their fellows are damned will subject them in this life to the treatment they say the Devil has in store for them in the next.

The *Letter to Voltaire* once again shows that Rousseau is preeminently a political writer not in the sense that he restricts himself to narrowly political issues or problems, but in the sense that even when he is as it were forced to speak about the most comprehensive questions, about the sum or the order of the beings, or about God, freedom, and immortality, he invariably remains mindful of common experiences, beliefs, and practices, in other words of the requirements of political life. He does not leave it at saying that the requirements of political life ought to be acknowledged, he acknowledges them in fact, in his own name, or, more precisely, in the first person. For the fact that he presents

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his discussions dramatically and in the first person does not entitle us uncritically to attribute to him the conclusions which he attributes to the first person. He may have the first person speak on behalf of sound sentiment or sound popular opinion. In the *Discourse on Heroic Virtue* he notes that “Nothing is as categorical as ignorance, and doubt is as rare among the People as assertion [l’affirmation] is among true Philosophers” [13]. Only someone who thinks it possible and desirable to suspend judgment when reason cannot decide would make such a statement. Yet in the *Letter to Voltaire* the first person claims to find it intolerable to suspend judgment regarding the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, and that this, not reason, is why it chooses the consoling alternative. In doing so it speaks on behalf of those who are not familiar with scientific claims that are at odds with common experience, or who cannot understand them ([14], [18]), just as in the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts* the first person was “an honest man who knows nothing and esteems himself none the less for it” ([4]).
 Chronology of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

1712  June 28, born in Geneva; the second son of the watch-maker Isaac Rousseau and his wife Suzanne Bernard; both parents are “citizens” of Geneva; on July 7 his mother dies.

1722–1728  Isaac Rousseau flees Geneva after a quarrel; his sons, who had received no formal education, were apprenticed. Jean-Jacques worked briefly as a notary’s clerk, and then (1725–1728) as apprentice to an engraver.

1728–1740  One night in March 1728, Rousseau finds himself locked out of Geneva, and decides to seek his fortune elsewhere; goes to Annency in the Savoy, where he meets Mme. de Warens. She sends him to Turin, where he renounces Calvinism and converts to Roman Catholicism (briefly attending a seminary for priests, then a choir school). Works intermittently as a lackey, an engraver, and a music teacher. Becomes Mme. de Warens’s lover (1733–1740) and begins to write while living with her.

1740–1741  Tutor in the house of M. de Mably, in Lyon, where he also makes the acquaintance of de Mably’s two elder brothers, Etienne Bonnot, who comes to be known as the Abbé de Condillac, and the Abbé de Mably.

1742–1749  Arrives in Paris with a scheme of musical notation, a comedy, an opera, and a collection of poems. During these years Rousseau made a precarious
living tutoring, writing, and arranging music. For a time (1743–1744) he is secretary to the Comte de Montaigu, France’s ambassador to Venice. Befriends Diderot, who commissions him to write the articles on music for the Encyclopedia; meets Thérèse Levasseur, who becomes his life-long companion.

1750

Wins the prize from the Academy of Dijon for his so-called First Discourse (Discours sur les sciences et les arts), published in January 1751, and an immediate, resounding success throughout Europe.

1752

His short opera, Le Devin du village (The Village Soothsayer), is performed at Court; a comedy, Narcisse, performed at the Théâtre Français; refuses a royal pension.

1753

Lettre sur la musique française (Letter about French Music), expressing a strong preference for Italian over French music.

1754–1755

The so-called Second Discourse (Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes) completed in May 1754. On June 1, Rousseau leaves Paris for a visit to Geneva, where he returns to Protestantism; his rights as citizen of Geneva are restored. Back in Paris in October. The Discourse is published in May 1755. In November the Political Economy appears in vol. v of Diderot and d’Alembert’s Encyclopedia.

1756


1758

Letter to M. d’Alembert (Lettre sur les spectacles) critical of d’Alembert’s article on Geneva in the Encyclopedia, and in particular of his proposal to open a theater in Geneva. The publication of the Letter made final his break with most of the philosophes.

1761

Publication of the epistolary novel Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse, which becomes a runaway best-seller.
Chronology

1762
Publication of *Du contrat social* (May 15) as well as of *Emile* (May 22). Both are condemned and ordered to be publicly burned in Geneva as well as in France; the French government orders Rousseau’s arrest; he flees to Neuchâtel, then governed by Prussia.

1763–1765
While in Neuchâtel, Rousseau renounces his Genevan citizenship. He writes a draft of a constitution for Corsica; is fiercely attacked by Voltaire in an anonymous pamphlet; and decides to write his autobiography, the *Confessions*.

1765
Spends some weeks of intense happiness on the island of Saint Pierre in the Lac de Bienne.

1765–1767
Under increasing attack wherever he seeks refuge, he accepts David Hume’s offer of help to settle in England. Suspecting (falsely) Hume of having had a hand in writing an anonymous pamphlet ridiculing him, he quarrels with him and returns to France (although the order for his arrest had not been rescinded).

1768
While living under an assumed name, Renou, he marries his long-time companion Thérèse Levasseur, by whom he had had five children, all of whom he had left at a home for foundlings.

1772
He writes the *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, and *Dialogues: Rousseau juge de Jean-Jacques*, neither of which gets published at this time.

1776
Writes the *Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*.

1778
Dies quite suddenly on July 2.

1782
Publication of the Du Peyrou-Moultou edition of the *Works* which incorporates many of Rousseau’s additions and corrections, and makes public for the first time his autobiographical writings, a number of his later political writings, as well as many shorter works, fragments, and letters.

1794
Rousseau’s ashes are transferred to the Panthéon.
A Brief Guide to Further Reading

The elegant five volumes of the Pléiade Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes* (or OC; for details, see “A Note on the Texts,” p. xliiv), make available in a convenient and compact format the most complete collection of Rousseau’s published and unpublished writings. The different texts were assigned to different editors, and accordingly the extensive critical apparatus and annotations vary in usefulness. Also, unfortunately not all the texts are entirely reliable: aside from inevitable typographical errors, some of which remain uncorrected in printing after printing, not all – not even all important – variants are recorded; capitalization is not consistently faithful to Rousseau’s original or modernized uniformly throughout the edition. Close readers will therefore also have to consult the most authoritative editions of individual works: George R. Havens’s critical edition of the *First Discourse*, Heinrich Meier’s critical edition of the *Second Discourse*, and the various classical critical editions of the *Social Contract*. For full details about these editions, see the beginning of the Editorial Notes for each work. The most complete guide to Rousseau editions, printings, and translations up to 1950 remains Jean Sénelier’s *Bibliographie générale des œuvres de J.-J. Rousseau* (PUF, Paris, 1950). As of this writing, the most complete bibliography of the writings about Rousseau is Tanguy L’Aminot’s “Bibliographie Rousseauïste” entry in R. Tousson and F. Eigeldinger, *Dictionnaire de Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Slatkine, Geneva, 2006). Ralph A. Leigh’s critical apparatus and annotations in his magisterial *Correspondance complète*
(for details, see “A Note on the Texts,” p. xliv) make his edition a doubly invaluable source.

References to standard translations of most of Rousseau’s more important works are included in the Editorial Notes. Most of Rousseau’s major political writings not included in the present volume will be found in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* and Other Later Political Writings, translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge University Press, 1997, 2018).

The *Annales de la Société Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1905–) publish articles, reviews, and notices of particular interest to Rousseau scholars; so, frequently, do *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (1955–).


The secondary literature about Rousseau’s life and works is enormous. The following list is no more than a highly selective, preliminary guide to further reading. It concentrates on – but is not limited to – works about Rousseau’s political philosophy; and it concentrates on – but is not limited to – works in English. Numerous other, often more specialized references, will be found in the Editorial Notes. The bibliographies in the works listed here and in those Notes will guide the interested reader further, as will Peter Gay’s still useful “Reading about Rousseau: A Survey of the Literature,” in his *The Party of Humanity* (Knopf, New York, 1964), pp. 211–238.

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of Chicago Press, 1991), and The Solitary Self (University of Chicago Press, 1997). Sir Gaven de Beer’s Jean-Jacques Rousseau and his World (Putnam’s, New York and Thames & Hudson, London, 1972) may be consulted for its numerous, mostly eighteenth-century images of persons, places, and memorabilia associated with Rousseau. Jean Starobinski’s J.-J. Rousseau, La transparence et l’obstacle (Plon, Paris, 1957, second, expanded edition, Gallimard, Paris, 1971), translated by Arthur Golhammer as Jean-Jacques Rousseau: Transparency and Obstruction (University of Chicago Press, 1988), is the best and the best-known attempt to understand Rousseau’s writings in the light of the kind of person he is supposed to have been, and to construct the kind of person he is supposed to have been on the basis of his writings; it focuses on the “images, obsessional desires, nostalgias, that dominate Jean Jacques’ conduct and almost permanently guide his actions”; it does not attend to his thought as such. By contrast, Christopher Kelly’s Rousseau’s Exemplary Life: The “Confessions” as Political Philosophy (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1987) reads Rousseau’s account of his life in the light of his thought.

Brief Guide to Further Reading

l’existence de J.-J. Rousseau (PUF, Paris, 1952); as does at least one major study in German: Martin Rang, Rousseaus Lehre vom Menschen (Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1959), which surveys the entire oeuvre from the perspective of the Emile.


Kant acknowledged how indebted his moral thought was to Rousseau. This has unfortunately misled some academics to portray him as a lisping Kant. In an influential article, Eric Weil even went so far as to claim that “it took Kant to think Rousseau’s thoughts” (“J.-J. Rousseau et sa politique,” Critique [January 1952], 56: 3–28, reprinted in Éssais et Conferences [Plon, Paris, 1971], vol. ii, pp. 115–148). The best-known summaries of the influence of Rousseau on Kant’s moral thought are Ernst Cassirer’s balanced The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (originally published in 1932; translated by Peter Gay, Indiana University Press,
Bloomington, 1963) and “Kant and Rousseau,” in *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* (Princeton University Press, 1945). It remained for Richard L. Velkley’s original, learned, and absorbing *Freedom and the End of Reason* (Chicago University Press, 1989) and his *Being after Rousseau* (Chicago University Press, 2002) to show Rousseau’s profound and pervasive influence on Kant’s critical philosophy as a whole. Andrew Levine’s *The Politics of Autonomy: A Kantian Reading of Rousseau’s Social Contract* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1976) is mindful of the differences between Rousseau and Kant; however, his Kant is, as he announces from the first, Marxicized by way of Althusser; see also his later *The General Will: Rousseau, Marx, Communism* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); Louis Althusser’s analytic-Marxist reading, “Sur le Contrat Social (Les décalages),” *Cahiers pour l’analyse* (1970), 8: 5–42, translated by B. Brewster, is included in his *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Marx: Politics and History* (Verso, London, 1982); Michel Launay, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau écrivain politique* (CEL/ACER, Grenoble, 1972) views Rousseau’s political writings from what might, by contrast, be called an historical-Marxist perspective, in the light of a very detailed account of the political circumstances in which they were composed.

David Lay Williams’s *Rousseau’s Social Contract: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) is thorough, thoughtful, and refreshingly non-partisan. Joshua Cohen’s *Rousseau: A Free Community of Equals* (Oxford University Press, 2010) stands out among the recent studies of Rousseau’s political thought that tend to stress the continuity between it and modern liberalism. N. J. H. Dent’s discussion in his *Rousseau* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1988) of what Rousseau called *amour propre* renewed attention to an issue that can be traced in an almost unbroken line from at least as far back as Hobbes on vanity through Hegel on recognition (*Anerkennung*) to the latest ideas of the self. The most recent and so far most exhaustive contribution to this discussion is Frederick Neuhouser’s somewhat startlingly titled *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love* (Oxford University Press, 2008). Jonathan Marks discusses some of the problems which this approach raises in *Perfection and Disharmony in the Thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).
The debate about whether Rousseau’s legitimate, well-constituted State is what is now sometimes called totalitarian goes at least as far back as the debates about the relation between his thought and the French Revolution and especially the Terror. The most conspicuous attacks on him on this score are Edmund Burke’s, particularly in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), in which Burke did, however, also recognize that Rousseau himself “would be shocked at the practical frenzy of his scholars”; and by Benjamin Constant, especially in his *Principles of Politics* (1815) and his *Liberty of the Ancients as compared with that of the Moderns* (1819), both translated by B. Fontana in *Constant: Political Writings* (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge University Press, 1988); for a review of the debate, see J. W. Chapman, *Rousseau: Totalitarian or Liberal?* (AMS Press, New York, 1968); a widely influential argument for the view that Rousseau laid the foundation for “totalitarian democracy” is made by J. L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (Secker & Warburg, London, 1952; paperback reprint, Praeger, New York, 1960). The most tenacious contemporary critic of Rousseau’s presumably totalitarian teaching and personality is Lester G. Crocker, for example in his *Rousseau’s Social Contract: An Interpretive Essay* (Case Western Reserve Press, Cleveland, 1968); Richard Fralin, *Rousseau and Representation* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1978) examines one of the central problems in this all-too-often highly polemical debate with scrupulous care.


A Note on the Texts

The present collection brings together most of Rousseau’s most important “political” writings, as well as some briefer polemical writings, and a few fragments and letters which shed light on the more formal, finished texts. For the most part they appear here and in the companion volume, ‘The Social Contract’ and Other Later Political Writings, in the order in which they were written or published.

Some of the material included in these collections was not originally published by Rousseau himself, and it is not in all cases clear that he intended it to appear in print. Its inclusion therefore calls for at least a brief comment. We simply can no longer read and try to understand Rousseau exactly as he himself chose to present his thought and his person, and as his contemporaries came to know them. Many important drafts and fragments which he discarded or suppressed have been discovered in the course of the past two centuries. In addition, some fifty massive volumes of his correspondence have been published. Purists may regret the incorporation into his oeuvre of this material. Yet no conscientious student of Rousseau can simply ignore it, if only because much of it develops or illumines what he did publish or intend for publication. At the same time, conscientious scholars will take into account whether – and why – he may or may not have intended a given passage or text to be made public. Many of his better-known letters are short essays about important aspects of his thought. That is why they are well known. He fully expected that they would be made public, either by their addressees – a number of whom did, in fact, circulate and publish
letters they had received from the by now famous Rousseau—or by himself. He certainly did not write the few letters included in this collection in order to unburden himself or to confide his inmost thoughts. He wrote them, as he repeatedly points out, in order to fulfill a moral obligation, to help or to benefit his addressees. They are as carefully crafted as his explicitly public writings. They, too, are politic.

The present standard edition of Rousseau’s works is the five-volume Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, edited by B. Gagnebin and M. Raymond (Pléiade, Paris, 1959–1995). In order to make it easier for readers to check the translation against the original, I introduced the practice of providing volume and page references to this edition: for example, \( OC \) III, 202–204, refers to pages 202–204 of volume III in the Pléiade Oeuvres complètes; [202] in the body of a translation indicates that what follows corresponds to page 202 of that volume of the Pléiade edition. A number of other translators have since chosen to adopt this practice. In order further to facilitate cross-references, I have numbered Rousseau’s paragraphs: \( SC \) III 2[1] refers to Social Contract, Book III, chapter 2, paragraph 1.

The present standard edition of Rousseau’s correspondence is Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Correspondance complète, collected, edited, and annotated by R. A. Leigh (Institut et Musée Voltaire, Geneva and The Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institution, Oxford, 1965–1989); all references to this remarkable work are abbreviated \( CC \), followed by the Roman numeral indicating the volume, and the Arabic numeral(s) indicating the page(s).
A Note on the Translations

Rousseau is a writer of uncommon range and power. Kant, the sober Kant, said that his writing so swept him away that he could not attend to his argument upon a first reading. No translation can hope to do justice to his original. My aim has therefore been no more than to render what he said and how he said it as faithfully and as unobtrusively as possible.

His writings continue to speak to us with great immediacy. My aim, throughout, has been to preserve that immediacy. At the same time, I have tried to make these translations sufficiently accurate to permit close, even minute study of Rousseau’s text. I have therefore adhered as closely as I could both to what he said and to how he said it. I did not attempt to dissolve difficulties which he allowed to let stand, I did not paraphrase or transpose his vocabulary into ours, and as far as possible I even followed his punctuation and use of capitals. This should prove no more disturbing to the reader of the translation than it does to the reader of the original, or than it does to us when we read Locke, or Fielding or Gibbon. Close readers may find it helpful. An honest translation first and foremost respects the surface of the text and attempts to reproduce it, much as an honest performance does a score or a script. If successful it may also reveal something of what lies beneath this surface. But nothing is revealed by distorting the surface.

Rousseau was aware that understanding his writings may require effort. He repeatedly calls for attentive readers (e.g. SD 1[53]; SC 111 1[1]), and on at least one occasion he expressly invites us to re-read him with care (Poland 14[3]; see also SD Notice xlvi
Note on the Translations

about the Notes. In a letter to Mme. d’Epinay he tells her that she will have to “learn my dictionary” because “my terms rarely have their usual meaning” (March 1756, CC 111, 296). All of his readers have to learn his dictionary. The following brief remarks are no more than preliminary notes for it.

Art, “art”: see First Discourse [5], Editorial Note.

Bon (adj.), bonté (n.), bien (n., adv.), “good,” “goodness,” “good(s)” and “well,” together with their antonyms, are key terms for Rousseau. For a brief comment about translating them, see the Editorial Note to Letter to Voltaire [3].

Droit (n.), Right (Latin: jus) as e.g. in “political right”; Rousseau frequently contrasts appeals to Right with appeals to fact; droit(s) (n.), right as e.g. in “the rights of man and citizen”; droit (adj.), upright, as e.g. in “the general will is invariably droit” SC ii 3[1].

For the most part, I have translated liberté as “freedom,” and affranchir as “to free” (serfs); but affranchissement, “freeing,” sometimes has to be “manumission.”

Morale (n.) means ethics; moralité (n.), “morality”; and, much of the time, moral (adj.), “moral,” simply means what we mean by that term, namely whatever pertains to what is morally right or wrong. However, often Rousseau also uses “moral” in contrast to “physical.” We do so as well when we say that we have a moral certainty to indicate that we believe something to be the case although we have no “physical” evidence to support this belief (cf. Voltaire [38]). More generally, Rousseau follows Pufendorf in speaking of “moral persons,” associations, institutions, corporations, civil societies that have no physical existence properly so called, but owe their existence to agreements, covenants, contracts, or to shared beliefs, opinions, attitudes, to moeurs, “morals” or ways of life; such “moral persons” may perfectly intelligibly be said to pursue corporate ends or goods, and to possess a corporate will. His most conspicuous use of “moral” in this sense of it is his one but all-important mention of “moral freedom” in contrast to “natural freedom” (SC i 8[3]). Moral and moeurs are closely related: Pufendorf derives moeurs from moral; Burlamaqui derives moral from moeurs. Moeurs is notoriously difficult to translate. No single English word consistently means “shared public morality.” “Manners” might seem plausible, but the burden of
Rousseau’s numerous discussions of *moeurs* is the discrepancy between manners and morals. From the *First Discourse* onwards, his constant concern is with this moral core of *moeurs*: he understands the Dijon Academy’s Question about the impact of the arts and sciences on *moeurs* as a question about their impact on the moral tastes, dispositions, judgments, conduct, characteristic of a community’s way of life. That is one reason why I have almost always translated *moeurs* as “morals.” Admittedly, *moeurs* can also mean “customs” or “ways,” as does its Latin root, *mores*. However, Rousseau distinguishes between *moeurs* and customs (e.g. in *Narcissus* [15]; SC ii 12[5]). In a few rare cases – as when he speaks of the *moeurs* of animals (*Reveries* vii, *OC* i, 1668), or Le Roy speaks of the mating *moeurs* of partridges, deer, and wolves (in the last line of his remarks about the *Second Discourse*), and when Rousseau speaks of the savages’ ferocious *moeurs* (*EOL* 9[5]) – I have translated *moeurs* as “ways.” Although on one occasion Rousseau speaks of *moeurs* as one kind of law (*SC* ii 12[5]), he consistently adheres to the traditional distinction between *moeurs* and laws. Pre-political – barbarous and savage – peoples live by *moeurs* alone, whereas *civil-ized* peoples live also according to law strictly and properly so called (*SD* ii [15], [20]; *EoL* 5[5]). Indeed, law more than anything else defines civil society, and hence being *civilized*. At the same time, Rousseau would fully agree with Montesquieu that “... a people invariably knows, loves, and defends its morals more than its laws” (*Spirit of the Laws* x 11).

Patrie is now most commonly translated by “country,” as in “my country.” Yet “country” will not do, because Rousseau contrasts *patrie* and *pays*, “fatherland” and “country,” and those who have a country (*pays*) even if they cannot be said to have a fatherland (*patrie*) (*Emile* v, *OC* iv, 858; cf. *NH* vi, 5, *OC* ii, 657). I have therefore consistently rendered *patrie* as “fatherland.” “Fatherland” also preserves the traditional suggestion that citizenship bears a certain similarity to a filial relationship – filial, not necessarily paternal: in spite of its etymology, it is feminine (*la patrie*); and Rousseau does not hesitate to speak of the *mère patrie*, the mother fatherland (*PE* [34]; *Poland* 3[8]). Unfortunately “fatherland” does not capture

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the echo of *patrie* which Rousseau also wants his reader to hear in “patriotism.” No English word does.

*Science: see First Discourse [5], Editorial Note.*

In a number of cases I have tried to preserve some of the associations of the original: *force* (n.) means “strength” as well as “force.” I have tried to render it as consistently as possible by “force.” In part I have done so simply to keep before the reader’s eyes how very frequently Rousseau uses “force” and cognates; in part I have done so in order to convey as faithfully as possible Rousseau’s repeated inquiries into possible parallels and contrasts between physical and moral or psychological “force” – as when he characterizes the contract as a pooling of forces, or when, in a famous and ambiguous phrase, he speaks of men’s “forced to be free” (SC i 7[8]), or when he derives “virtue” from “force” (*Emile* v, *OC* iv, 817; *Franquières* [21]; cf. *SC* iv 4[1]*) and defines it as “the strength *force* and vigor of the soul” (*FD* [11]; *Herof* [33] and Editorial Note). These inquiries are best seen as so many case studies of his constant, comprehensive examination of the relations between the law(s) of nature and the natural law(s).

Unfortunately it is not always possible to convey this point as clearly in the translation as Rousseau makes it in the original: when, in the brief paragraph introducing the *Social Contract*, he says he had overestimated his *forces*, it seems forced to avoid “strength”; and “The most inviolable law of nature is the law *du plus fort*” has to be “of the stronger” (*Poland* 13[3]). *Fort* (adj.) “strong,” clearly has the same root as *force* and *forcer*, and its occurrence therefore reinforces the associations with these words, whereas “strong” of course does not immediately evoke an association with “force.” That association grows still weaker when it comes to *à force de* (see, in particular, *SC* ii 9[1]), which means “by dint of,” and will evoke “force” only to the etymologically schooled reader; it cannot be rendered at all for *force de* (as in *Poland* 3[2]), meaning “many,” and suggesting that there is force in numbers. (See also the Introduction, p. xxv above, and the Introduction to *SC* tr.)

In some cases I have tried to preserve associations which Rousseau clearly tried to preserve with writings he read with great care. To take but one example: *inconveniènt* (n., adj.) is commonly rendered “drawback” or “disadvantage.” I have tried
Note on the Translations

consistently to render it as “inconvenience” and “inconvenient,” because that is the term Machiavelli uses quite routinely, as when he remarks that against the *inconvenienti* facing a newly established free State there is “no remedy more powerful, more valid, more secure, or more necessary than the killing of the sons of Brutus . . .” (*Discourses* i 16, with which cf. Rousseau’s *Last Reply* [54]–[56]); it is the term Grotius uses in a crucial passage in which he also notes that “. . . you can frame no Form of Government in your Mind, which will be without Inconveniences [*incommodis*] and Dangers . . .” (*Right of War and Peace* 1, 3, § viii); it is the term Hobbes uses: e.g. “The condition of man in this life shall never be without Inconveniences . . .” (*Leviathan* xx [18]; cf. “. . . the estate of Man can never be without some incommmodity or other”; *Leviathan*, ch. xviii, and *De cive*, ch. x, *passim*), which Sorbière, in whose translation Rousseau read Hobbes, sometimes renders *inconvenients* and sometimes *incommodite*; it is also the term Locke uses: “. . . *Civil Government* is the proper Remedy for the Inconveniences of the State of Nature, which must certainly be Great, where Men may be Judges in their own Case . . .” (*Second Treatise*, ch. ii, § xiii; cf. ibid., ch. vii, §§ 90, 91; ch. viii, § 101; ch. xi, §§ 127, 136), which the contemporary French translations render *inconvenients*; cf. *SC* iii15[10]. What in some contexts Rousseau calls “inconvenience(s),” in other contexts he calls “evil(s).”

In a few cases I took advantage of the fact that some French words and expressions have become part of English by leaving them untranslated: “entre nous,” “corvée,” “amour propre.” “Amour propre,” one of the key terms of Rousseau’s moral psychology, is a traditional stumbling-block for translators. Hume had already complained about the difficulties of finding a suitable English equivalent for it:

It seems, indeed, certain that the *sentiment* of conscious worth, the self-satisfaction proceeding from a review of a man’s own conduct and character – it seems certain, I say, that this sentiment which, though the most common of all sentiments, has no proper name in our language . . . The term pride is commonly taken in a bad sense; but this sentiment seems indifferent . . . The French express this sentiment by the term *amour-propre*; but
Note on the Translations

as they also express self-love as well as vanity by the same term, there arises a great confusion ... (An Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals, Appendix iv: “Of Some Verbal Disputes,” § 3 and note)

The obvious candidates for Rousseau’s amour propre are “vanity,” “vainglory” and “pride,” especially since he introduces amour propre as a technical term in the context of his criticism of Hobbes’s understanding of “vanity” or “vainglory.” Yet none of these three English terms will do, if only because Rousseau uses vanité, orgueil, and fierté, and carefully draws contrasts between them: Project for a Constitution for Corsica, OC iii, 937f.; Emile iv, OC iv, 494. Fortunately, “amour propre” has found its way into Webster’s Dictionary as well as into the OED. I therefore felt free to let it stand as is.

Sauvage (n., adj.) is consistently rendered “savage”; it is helpful to keep in mind that in French the word also means “wild” in contrast to “cultivated” and “domesticated,” as in “wild flowers” or “wildlife”; for example, SD i [11]. Sense (v., n.), in French as in English and in so many other languages, refers to physical as well as to moral and intellectual apprehension. Hence the distinction between being “sentient” or “sensitive” (sensible) and being “sensible” (sensitif). One prominent form the mid-eighteenth-century debate about materialism took was a debate about whether matter is or could be sentient or sensitive (see Editorial Note to Letter to Voltaire [8]). Rousseau explores the relations between “physical” sense and “moral” sense in all of his major writings, but perhaps most searchingly in the Essay on the Origin of Languages (especially in chapters 13–17), and at one time he considered writing a morale sensitive, an ethics based on sentience or sensibility, which he also thought of as le matérialisme du Sage, “the wise man’s materialism” (Conf. ix, OC i, 409). His most sustained discussions of the virtues related to the senses, temperance, moderation, sobriety, are found at the end of Book iv of the Emile and in the second Dialogue, OC i, 804ff. William Empson has devoted four classical studies to the changing fortunes of this family of terms, in The Structure of Complex Words; Jane Austen explored it beautifully in Sense and Sensibility; and

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John Austin explored it ingeniously in *Sense and Sensibilia*. The secondary literature on “sensibility” is enormous. To my knowledge, the best history of the medical background remains Owsei Temkin’s classical “Studien zum ‘Sinn’-Begriff in der Medizin,” *Kyklos* (1929), 2: 21–105. I am not aware of a comparable study of the French background, but rich materials for one can be found in Jacques Roger’s classical *Les Sciences de la vie dans la pensée du xviiie siècle* (Armand Colin, Paris, 1963). Anyone interested in studying Rousseau’s usage in detail will want to consult *Le Vocabulaire du sentiment dans l’œuvre de J.-J. Rousseau*, compiled under the direction of Michel Gilot and Jean Sgard at the Centre d’Étude des Sensibilités de l’Université de Grenoble (Slatkine, Geneva and Paris, 1970), and J. J. Spink, “Rousseau et la morale du sentiment (lexicologie, idéologie),” in *Rousseau after 200 Years*, edited by R. A. Leigh (Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 239–250. Questions surrounding “sense” are further complicated by questions about *sentiment* or “sentiment.” Rousseau reserves the term for the inmost stratum of our being and experience, what he came to call “the sentiment of one’s own existence” (references in the Editorial Notes to *SD* i [21]). More generally, both “sense” and “sentiment” come to be seen as less rigorous but deeper, more rooted than reason or “mere ratiocination,” and both French and English come increasingly to use “sentiment” in place of opinion, or judgment, or even thought – as Hume does in the passage about *amour propre* quoted above. Rousseau himself remains ever mindful of the difference between sentiment and thought, and he draws a sharp distinction between “proof by sentiment” and rational proof, a distinction which very strictly corresponds to the important distinction he frequently draws between persuasion and conviction (e.g. Voltaire [30]; *Franquières* [11], To Mirabeau [14]). For these reasons among others, it is preferable, whenever possible, to render *sentir* with “to sense” or “to be sensible to,” rather than with the more usual “to feel.” *Sentimental* (“sentimental”) enters the language in the mid-eighteenth century, but plays no role in Rousseau’s vocabulary; how much it, too, becomes saturated with the ambiguities of its root term is nicely conveyed by Flaubert’s title *Education sentimentale*, “Sentimental Education.”
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Whenever Rousseau qualifies something as *véritable*, “genuine,” he is explicitly or implicitly contrasting it with what he regards as a spurious alternative; *vrai*, “true” does not imply such a contrast.

Although he is remarkably consistent in the use of his technical vocabulary, Rousseau expressly calls attention to the fact that he finds it impossible to be invariably so (*Emile* ii, *OC* iv, 345*, tr. 108); and that it sometimes suits his purposes not to be so (*SC* i 6[10] near the end), in other words that it sometimes suits his purposes to be deliberately ambiguous in the use of his political language. Thus, for example, he will occasionally use the language of natural law, although he rejects the idea or concept of natural law. At times it suits him to use “government” to refer to what most of us would most of the time call either “government” or “the state” – as he does in the title of his work on *Poland* – although for precise, technical purposes, he restricts “government” to strictly subordinate administrative and executive functions (he reviews the various senses of “government” in *LM* v, *OC* iii, 770f. and ibid. vi, *OC* iii, 808f.; also see *Emile* v, *OC* iv, 844–848, tr. 463–466). “Government,” as he defines it, is not sovereign (*SC* iii 1[3]–[5]). The people is. In Rousseau’s technical vocabulary, *peuple* or “people” corresponds to what we would now refer to either as “a people” or a “nation”: as, for example, in “the French people or nation” (*SC* i 6[10]); “... the act by which a people is a people ... is the true foundation of society” (*SC* i 5[2]). “People,” like “nation,” can be used both in the singular – e.g. “the people is sovereign”, “it can be misled” – and in the plural – e.g. “there are no more peoples being formed” (*SC* iv 4[1]). “People” may also refer to the many, those who labor and are poor – e.g. “It is the people that makes up mankind; what is not people is so slight a thing as not to be worth taking into account” (*Emile* iv, *OC* iv, 509, tr. 225) – and whenever he uses “people” in his more technical sense, he wants his reader to have the association with *peuple* in this more common sense of the term. Rousseau’s use of *peuple(s)* significantly influenced later uses – and conceptions – of “folk,” especially in the German sense of *Volk*.

*Police* most of the time means “administration” (*SC* iii 15[12], iv 1[3]; *Poland* 7[24]). *Policé* literally means “ politicized” in
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contrast to being in the state preceding political society; the Latinized version of the word, “civilized,” fails to do justice to the French word because it no longer has a primarily political connotation; also, Rousseau sometimes uses “civilize,” and when he does, he uses it as we would use it now. Where possible I have therefore translated it “politically organized.” I am not aware of a single occurrence of civilization in Rousseau; its first recorded use in French (in 1757) is by Rousseau’s correspondent, Mirabeau (“Civilization: Contribution à l’histoire du mot,” E. Benveniste, Problèmes de linguistique générale [Gallimard, Paris, 1966], pp. 336–345). Politesse is “politeness” in the sense of “urbanity,” and in contrast to “rusticity” or even “boorishness” (see especially FD [10], [14]); whereas civility consists in acting in conformity with natural right toward fellow-citizens, in contrast to “humanity,” which consists in acting in conformity with it toward strangers. The contrast literally corresponds to the contrast citizen/man and to the corresponding contrast political right/natural right: for example, Introduction, pp. xvif above. Politique(s) (n.) is now commonly translated “political theorist(s),” which suggests departments of political science and has little to do with Rousseau’s meaning. The true politique, he tells the Archbishop of Paris, seeks to render peoples happy and good by striving for the harmony between the private and the public good (To Beaumont, OC iv, 937). Bacon sometimes simply kept the French term – “... it is as hard and severe a thing to be a true politique, as to be truly moral” (Advancement of Learning ii) – and sometimes he used “ politic men.” I have somewhat reluctantly translated it as “politician(s).” The politiques were also the party of those who, like Bodin, sought political solutions to religious conflicts, and the term long had the same associations in its English use.

Such examples could be multiplied almost at will. An adequate discussion of any one of the more important terms in Rousseau’s vocabulary would require a full essay. Every now and then I have flagged some of these terms in the Editorial Notes.

While Rousseau is not perfectly consistent in his use of capitalization, certain words clearly mean one thing when he capitalizes them, and another when he does not. A few examples will, again, have to suffice. For the most part he uses Cité, “City,” as a technical term roughly equivalent to the Latin civitas; it is, of
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course, the root of “Citizen,” a term to which he did so much to restore its distinctive resonance. By contrast, ville, “city,” means just what we mean when we speak about a city or a town; occasion-ally it is spelled Ville, and “City” then does not mean anything like civitas, but simply refers to a specific city, e.g. Lisbon. These differences should always be clear enough from the context.

état, “state,” refers to (1) any more or less stable, lasting condition, as in “the state of her health” or in “state of affairs” and, of course, in “state of nature” or “civil state”; this is the meaning of “state” that informs Hume’s criticism of Hobbes’s state of nature: “Whether such a condition of human nature could ever exist, or if it did, could continue so long as to merit the appellation of a state, may justly be doubted” (Concerning the Principles of Morals 1, 3).

(2) It refers to “estate” (German: Stand) as in “the third estate,” as well as to “rank” or “station” as in “my station and its duties.” However, (3) état in this sense must sometimes be translated by “position,” as in “being in a position to . . .” Finally, (4) Rousseau writes état in referring to any particular given political state, e.g. “the French state,” whereas in reference to the political state in general he writes “State” (Etat): The “. . . public person . . . formed by the union of all the others, formerly assumed the name City, and now assumes that of Republic or of body politic, which is called by its members State when it is passive, Sovereign when active . . .” (SC 1 7[10]).

Gouvernement, “Government,” is the institution charged with the legitimate exercise of the executive power (SC III 1).

législateur is “legislator”; but Législateur is “Lawgiver.”

The modern reader cannot help being struck by the fact that Rousseau does not capitalize certain words which contemporary writers would regard it as irreverent or inconsiderate not to capitalize.

Punctuation is almost as much a problem in rendering a text from one language into another as is vocabulary. Decisions about punctuation are decisions about respecting the meaning, but also the rhythm and flow of the text, and hence of the thought. Rarely is anything gained by breaking up a competent writer’s sentences, and almost always something is lost in the process.
A Note on the Editorial Notes and the Index

The Editorial Notes have been relegated to the end in order to keep them from intruding between text and reader. They identify persons, events, texts, or passages, and sometimes doctrines which Rousseau mentions or alludes to. Very occasionally they call attention to parallels with what he says in other writings. They remain at or near the surface of the texts. They do not analyze or interpret.

The Index is designed to be of help even to close readers of these texts.