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ROUSSEAU

The Discourses
and other early
political writings

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY
VICTOR GOUREVITCH

Wesleyan University

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Preface

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, 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, Karl Heinz Stierle, William Trousdale, 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 passage or in tracking down an obscure quotation in the corresponding Editorial Note.

ridiculous, and if they had begun by making fun of my System, this procedure, made respectable by so many instances of it, would have spared them the troublesome effort of examining my proofs.

[9] I therefore had to take some precautions at first, and I did not want to say everything in order to make sure that everything got a hearing. I developed my ideas only successively and always to but a small number of Readers. I spared not myself, but the truth, in order to have it get through more readily and to make it more useful. Often I went to great trouble to try and condense into a single Sentence, a single line, a single word tossed off as if by chance, the result of a long chain of reflections. The majority of my Readers must often have found my discourses poorly structured and almost entirely disjointed, for want of perceiving the trunk of which I showed them only the branches. But that was enough for those capable of understanding, and I never wanted to speak to the others.

[10] This method put me in a position of frequently having to reply to my adversaries, either in order to meet objections, or to expand and elucidate ideas that required it, or to develop fully all the parts of my System in proportion as the approbation of the Wise secured me the attention of the public. I did, it is true, believe I had attended to all these matters adequately with my earlier replies, at least in so far as the Readers I had in mind were concerned: But as I see from the Lyon Academician's second Discourse that he has still not understood me, I prefer to accuse myself of ineptness [102] than him of a lack of goodwill. I will therefore try to state my position better, and since the time has come to speak openly, I will overcome my distaste and for once write for the People.

[11] The work I propose to examine is full of pleasant sophisms that are even more sparkling than subtle, and which, because they seduce with a certain vividness of style and the cunning of a crafty logic, are doubly dangerous to the multitude. I will follow the very opposite procedure in this analysis, and, by following the Author's arguments step by step as accurately as I can, I will, in this discussion, rely exclusively on the directness and the zeal of a friend of the truth and of humanity, who seeks glory solely in honoring the one, and happiness solely in being useful to the other.

A Jean Jacques Rousseau
DISCOURS
Donné par J. J. Rousseau lui-même
SUR L'ORIGINE ET LES FONDEMENTS
DE L'INEGALITE PARMI LES HOMMES.
A. Rich Davenport 1766.
Par JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

CITOTEN DE GENÈVE.

Non in depravatis, sed in his quæ bene secundum naturam se habent, considerandum est quid sit naturale. ARISTOT. Politic. L. 2.



A AMSTERDAM,
Chez MARC MICHEL REY.
M D C C L V.



Il retourne chés ses Egaux.
Voyez la Note 13. p. 255

He returns to his equals; see note p. 220.

DISCOURSE
ON
THE ORIGIN
AND THE
FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUALITY
AMONG MEN

By
Jean Jacques Rousseau
Citizen of Geneva

*What is natural has to be investigated not
in beings that are depraved, but in
those that are good according to nature.
Aristot[le]. Politic[s] Bk. 2*

AMSTERDAM
Marc Michel Rey

MDCCLV

[OC III, 111]

TO
THE REPUBLIC
OF GENEVA

MAGNIFICENT, MOST HONORED,
AND SOVEREIGN LORDS,

[1] Convinced that only the virtuous Citizen may fittingly present to his Fatherland honors it may acknowledge, I have for thirty years been working to deserve to offer you some public homage; and this happy occasion partly making up for what my efforts have not been able to do, I believed that I might here be permitted to heed the zeal which animates me more than right which should authorize me. Having had the good fortune to be born among you, how could I meditate about the equality nature established among men and the inequality they have instituted, without thinking about the profound wisdom with which both, happily combined in this State, contribute in the manner most closely approximating natural law and most favorable to society, to the preservation of public order and to the happiness of individuals? In looking for the best maxims which good sense might dictate regarding the constitution of a government, I was so struck to see them all implemented in yours that, even if I had not been born within your walls, I would have believed myself unable to refrain from offering this picture of human society to the one People which seems to me to possess its greatest advantages and to have best forestalled its abuses.

[2] If I had had to choose my place of birth, I should have chosen a society of a size confined to the range of human faculties, that is to say to the possibility [112] of being well governed, and where, everyone being equal to his task, no one would have been compelled to commit to others the functions with which he was himself entrusted: a State where, since all individuals know one another, neither the shady stratagems of vice nor the modesty of virtue could have escaped the Public's gaze and judgment, and where this gentle habit of seeing and knowing one another would have made the love of one's Fatherland a love of the Citizens rather than of the soil.

[3] I should have wished to be born in a country where the Sovereign and the people could have had only one and the same interest,

so that all the motions of the machine might always tend only to the common happiness; since this is impossible unless the People and the Sovereign are the same person, it follows that I should have wished to be born under a democratic government wisely tempered.

[4] I should have wished to live and die free, that is to say so far subject to the laws that neither I nor anyone else could shake off their honorable yoke; the salutary and gentle yoke which the proudest heads bear with all the more docility as they are made to bear none other.

[5] I should have wished, then, that no one inside the State could have declared himself to be above the law, and No one outside it could have imposed any [law] which the State was obliged to recognize. For, regardless of how a government is constituted, if there is a single person in it who is not subject to the law, all the others are necessarily at his discretion (1);¹ and if there is one national Chief, and another foreign Chief, then regardless of the division of authority they may establish, it is impossible that both be obeyed well and the State well governed.

[6] I should not have wished to live in a newly established Republic, regardless of how good its laws might be, for fear that, if the government were perhaps constituted differently than it should have been under the circumstances, either by being ill-suited to the new Citizens or by the Citizens' being ill-suited to the new government, the State might be liable to be upset and destroyed almost from birth. For freedom is like the solid and hearty foods or the full-bodied wines fit to feed and fortify robust temperaments used to them, but [113] which overwhelm, ruin and intoxicate weak and delicate ones that are not up to them. Once Peoples are accustomed to Masters, they can no longer do without them. If they attempt to shake off the yoke, they move all the farther away from freedom because, as they mistake unbridled license for freedom, which is its very opposite, their revolutions almost always deliver them up to seducers who only increase their chains. Even the Roman People, that model of all free Peoples, could not govern itself on emerging from the Tarquins' oppression. Degraded by the slavery and the ignominious labors the Tarquins had imposed on it, it was at first

¹ [Rousseau's end-notes, numbered 1 through XIX, begin on p. 189; an editorial note about their numbering will be found on p. 370.]

but a stupid Populace that had to be handled with care and governed with the utmost wisdom; so that these souls, enervated, or rather numbed under the tyranny, as they little by little grew accustomed to breathe the salutary air of freedom, might gradually acquire that severity of morals and that proud courage which eventually made of them the most respectable of all Peoples. I should, then, have sought out as my Fatherland a happy and quiet Republic of an antiquity that lost itself, as it were, in the night of the ages; which had been subject only to such attacks as are apt to stimulate and to strengthen its inhabitants' courage and love of Fatherland, and whose Citizens, accustomed by long experience to a wise independence, not only were free, but were worthy of being so.

[7] I should have wished to choose a Fatherland diverted from the ferocious love of Conquest by a fortunate powerlessness, and protected against the fear of itself becoming the Conquest of some other State by an even more fortunate location: A free City, situated amidst a number of Peoples none of which had any interest in invading it, but each of which had an interest in preventing the others from invading it: In a word, a Republic which did not tempt the ambition of its neighbors, and might reasonably count on their help in case of need. It follows that, being so fortunately located, it would have had nothing to fear but from itself alone; and that if its Citizens had military training, it would have been more in order to keep alive in them that martial spirit and proud courage which so becomes freedom and maintains the taste for it, than from the necessity to provide for their own defense.

[8] I should have sought out a Country where the right of legislation [114] was common to all Citizens; for who could know better than they the conditions under which it suits them to live together in one society? But I should not have approved of Plebiscites like those of the Romans, where the Chiefs of the State and those most interested in its preservation were excluded from the deliberations on which its security often depended, and where, by an absurd inconsistency, the Magistrates were deprived of rights enjoyed by ordinary Citizens.

[9] On the contrary, in order to forestall the self-seeking and ill-conceived projects and the dangerous innovations which finally ruined the Athenians, I should have wished that not everyone have the power to propose new Laws according to his fancy; that this

right belong to the Magistrates alone; even that they exercise it so circumspectly that the People, for its part, be so guarded in granting its consent to these Laws, and that their promulgation require so much solemnity that, before the constitution became unstable, there had been time to realize that it is above all the great antiquity of the Laws that renders them sacred and venerable, that the People soon scorn those they see change every day, and that, by getting used to neglecting ancient ways on the pretext of doing better, great evils are often introduced to correct lesser ones.

[10] I should above all have fled as necessarily ill-governed a Republic where the People, believing it could do without its Magistrates or leave them no more than a precarious authority, had imprudently retained in its own hands the administration of Civil affairs and the execution of its own Laws; such must have been the rude constitution of the first governments arising immediately from the state of Nature, and it still was one of the Vices that ruined the Republic of Athens.

[11] Rather, I should have chosen one where private persons, content to ratify the Laws and decide the most important public business in a Body and on the recommendation of the Chiefs, established respected tribunals, carefully distinguished their various functions, yearly elected the most capable and the most upright among their Fellow-Citizens to administer Justice and govern the State; and where the Virtue of the Magistrates thus bearing witness to the wisdom of the People, [115] each would do the other honor. So that if ever fatal misunderstandings arose to disturb the public harmony, even those times of blindness and errors might be marked by evidence of moderation, mutual esteem, and a shared respect for the Laws; harbingers and guarantees of a sincere and everlasting reconciliation.

[12] Such, MAGNIFICENT, MOST HONORED AND SOVEREIGN LORDS, are the advantages I should have sought in the Fatherland I would have chosen. If, to these, providence had added a lovely location, a temperate Climate, a fertile soil, and the most delightful vistas under Heaven, I should only have wished, in order to complete my happiness, to enjoy all of these goods in the bosom of this happy Fatherland, living peacefully in the sweet society of my Fellow-Citizens, practicing toward them, and at their example, humanity, friendship, and all the virtues, and leaving behind the

honorable memory of a good man and an honest and virtuous Patriot.

[13] If, less happy or too late grown wise, I saw myself reduced to ending a lame and languishing career in other Climes, in vain regretting the quiet and the Peace of which a youthful want of prudence would have deprived me; I would at least have fostered in my soul these same sentiments which I could not put to use in my country, and, imbued with tender and selfless affection for my distant Fellow-Citizens, I would from the bottom of my heart have addressed to them approximately the following discourse.

[14] My dear Fellow-Citizens or rather my brothers, since ties of blood as well as the Laws unite almost all of us, it pleases me that I cannot think of you without at the same time thinking of all the goods you enjoy and of which perhaps none of you feels the value better than I who have lost them. The more I reflect on your Political and Civil situation, the less can I imagine that the nature of human things could admit of a better. In all other Governments, when it is a question of providing for the greatest good of the State, everything is always restricted to ideas for projects, and at most to mere possibilities. For you, your happiness is complete, you have only to enjoy it; and all you need in order to become perfectly happy is [116] to know how to be content with being so. Your Sovereignty, acquired or recovered at sword's point, and maintained for two centuries by dint of valor and wisdom, is at last fully and universally recognized. Honorable Treaties fix your boundaries, insure your rights, and confirm your security. Your constitution is excellent, dictated by the most sublime reason and guaranteed by friendly and respectable Powers; your State enjoys tranquility, you have neither wars nor conquerors to fear; you have no other masters than wise laws, made by yourselves, administered by upright Magistrates of your own choosing; you are neither so rich as to become enervated by softness and lose the taste for true happiness and solid virtues in vain delights, nor so poor as to need more foreign assistance than your industry provides; and it costs you almost nothing to preserve the precious freedom which great Nations can maintain only by means of exorbitant Taxes.

[15] May a Republic so wisely and so happily constituted last forever, both for its Citizens' happiness, and as an example to all Peoples! This is the only wish it remains for you to make, and the only care it remains for you to take. Henceforth it is up to your-

selves alone not, indeed, to provide for your happiness, your Ancestors have spared you that trouble, but to make it long-lasting by the wisdom of using it well. Your preservation depends on your everlasting union, your obedience to the laws, your respect for their Ministers. If there remains among you the least germ of bitterness or mistrust, hasten to destroy it as a fatal leaven which would sooner or later bring about your miseries and the State's ruin: I implore all of you to return to the depths of your Heart and consult the secret voice of your conscience: Does anyone of you know anywhere in the universe a more upright, more enlightened, or more respectable Body than your Magistrature? Do not all of its members offer you an example of moderation, of simplicity of morals, of respect for the laws, and of the most sincere reconciliation? then grant without reservations to these wise Chiefs the salutary trust which reason owes to virtue; remember that you have chosen them, that they justify your choice, and that the honors owed to those whom you have [117] made dignitaries necessarily redound upon yourselves. None of you is so unenlightened as not to know that where the laws lose their vigor and its defenders their authority there can be neither security nor freedom for anyone. What else, then, is at issue between you, than that you do wholeheartedly and with justified confidence what you would in any event have to do out of true interest, duty, and reason? May a guilty and fatal indifference to the preservation of the constitution never cause you to neglect in times of need the wise opinions of the most enlightened and zealous among you: Rather, may equity, moderation, and the most respectful firmness continue to regulate all your undertakings and through you exhibit to the entire universe the example of a proud and modest People as jealous of its glory as of its freedom. Above all, and this will be my last Advice, beware of ever heeding sinister interpretations and venomous discourses, the secret motives of which are often more dangerous than are the actions they are about. An entire household is awake and on the lookout at the first calls of a good and loyal Guardian who barks only when Thieves draw near; but people hate the importuning of the noisy animals that continually disturb the public repose, and their constant and misplaced warnings are not heeded even in time of need.

[16] And you, MAGNIFICENT AND MOST HONORED LORDS, you worthy and respectable Magistrates of a free People; allow me to offer my homage and respects to you in particular. If there is in

the world a rank suited to confer distinction on those who occupy it, it is without a doubt the rank bestowed by talents and virtue, the rank of which you have proved yourselves worthy, and to which your Fellow-Citizens have raised you. Their own merit adds further luster to yours, and I find that for having been chosen to govern them by men capable of governing others, you are as much superior to all other Magistrates as a free People, and particularly the free people you have the honor of leading, is, by its enlightenment and reason, superior to the populace of other States.

[17] Allow me to cite an example of which there should be better records, and which will always be present to my Heart. I never recall without the [118] sweetest emotion the memory of the virtuous Citizen to whom I owe my life, and who often throughout my childhood impressed on me the respect due you. I see him still, living off the work of his hands, and nourishing his soul with the most sublime Truths. I see Tacitus, Plutarch, and Grotius before him amidst the tools of his trade. I see at his side a beloved son receiving with too little profit the tender teachings of the best of Fathers. But if the excesses of a foolish youth caused me to forget such wise lessons for a time, I have the happiness of at last experiencing that, whatever may be one's inclination to vice, an education in which the heart has a share is unlikely to be lost forever.

[18] Such are, MAGNIFICENT AND MOST HONORED LORDS, the Citizens and even the mere residents born in the State you govern; such are the educated and sensible men about whom they have such low and false ideas in other Nations, where they are called Workers and the People. My Father, I gladly admit it, was not outstanding among his fellow-citizens; he was but what they all are, and, such as he was, there is no Country where his society would not have been sought after, cultivated, and even profitably so, by the most honest people. It is not for me, and thank Heaven it is not necessary, to tell you how much regard men of such mettle can expect from you, your equals by education as well as by the rights of nature and of birth; your inferiors by their own will, by the preference which they owe to your merit, which they have granted to it, and for which you, in turn, owe them a kind of gratitude. I learn with lively satisfaction how much you, in your dealings with them, temper the gravity beehoving the ministers of the Laws with gentleness and condescension; how much you reciprocate in esteem and

attentions what they owe you by way of obedience and respect; conduct full of justice and of wisdom that is appropriate for putting increasingly far behind the memory of the unhappy events which must be forgotten if they are never to recur: conduct all the more judicious as this equitable and generous People makes its duty a pleasure, as it naturally loves to honor you, and as those who are most intent on upholding their rights are the ones who are most inclined to respect yours. [119]

[19] It should not be surprising that the Chiefs of a Civil Society love its glory and happiness, but it is altogether too surprising for men's peace of mind that those who look upon themselves as the Magistrates, or rather as the masters of a Fatherland more holy and more sublime, should exhibit any love for the earthly Fatherland that sustains them. How pleased I am to be able to make such a rare exception in our favor, and to rank among our best citizens those zealous trustees of the sacred dogmas authorized by the laws, those venerable Pastors of souls whose lively and sweet eloquence all the better conveys the maxims of the Gospel into men's Hearts because they are themselves always the first to practice them! Everybody knows how successfully the great art of the Pulpit is cultivated in Geneva; But since they are all too accustomed to see things said one way and done another, few People know the extent to which the spirit of Christianity, holiness of morals, severity toward oneself and gentleness toward others prevail in the Body of our Ministers. Perhaps only the City of Geneva can offer the edifying example of such a perfect union between a Society of Theologians and of Men of Letters. It is in large measure on their acknowledged wisdom and moderation, it is on their zeal for the State's prosperity that I base the hope for its eternal tranquility; and I note with a mixture of pleasure, surprise, and respect how much they abhor the frightful maxims of those holy and barbarous men of whom History provides more than one example and who, in order to uphold the supposed rights of God, that is to say their own interest, were all the less sparing of human blood as they flattered themselves that their own would always be respected.

[20] Could I forget that precious half of the Republic which causes the other's happiness, and whose gentleness and wisdom preserve its peace and good morals? Amiable and virtuous Citizen-women, it will always be the lot of your sex to govern ours. How

fortunate when your chaste power, exercised in conjugal union alone, makes itself felt solely for the State's glory and the public happiness: This is how women commanded in Sparta, and this is how you deserve to command in Geneva. What man would be so barbarous [120] as to resist the voice of honor and reason from the mouth of a tender wife; and who would not despise vain luxury upon seeing your simple and modest attire which, by the radiance it owes to you, seems to complement beauty most? It is up to you, by your amiable and innocent dominion and your ingratiating wit, always to preserve the love of the laws in the State and Concord among the Citizens; by happy marriages to reunite divided families; and above all, by the persuasive gentleness of your lessons and the modest graciousness of your conversation, to correct the misconceptions our young Men acquire in other countries from which, instead of the many useful things that could profit them, they only bring back, together with a childish tone and ridiculous airs adopted among lost women, an admiration for I know not what supposed grandeurs, the frivolous compensations for servitude, that will never be worth as much as august freedom. Therefore always be what you are, the chaste guardians of morals and the gentle bonds of peace, and continue at every opportunity to assert the rights of the Heart and of Nature on behalf of duty and of virtue.

[21] I flatter myself that the event will not prove me wrong, when I base the hope for the Citizens' common happiness and the Republic's glory on such guarantors. I admit that, for all of these advantages, it will not shine with the brilliance that dazzles most eyes, and a childish and fatal taste for which is the deadliest enemy of happiness and of freedom. Let dissolute youths go elsewhere in search of easy pleasures and lasting remorse: Let supposed men of taste admire elsewhere the grandeur of Palaces, the beauty of carriages, the sumptuous furnishings, the pomp of spectacles, and all the refinements of softness and luxury. In Geneva will be found only men, yet such a spectacle has its own value, and those who will seek it out will certainly be worth as much as those who admire the rest.

[22] Deign, MAGNIFICENT, MOST HONORED AND SOVEREIGN LORDS, to accept, all of you with equal goodness, the respectful testimonies of the interest I take in your common prosperity. If I had the misfortune of being guilty of some indiscreet transport in this lively

outpouring of my Heart, I beseech you to pardon it as due to the tender affection of a [121] true Patriot, and the ardent and legitimate zeal of a man who envisions no greater happiness for himself than that of seeing all of you happy.

I am with the deepest respect

MAGNIFICENT, MOST HONORED
AND SOVEREIGN LORDS,

*Your most humble and most obedient
servant and Fellow-Citizen*

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU

At Chambéry, 12 June 1754

PREFACE

[122]

[1] The most useful and the least advanced of all human knowledge seems to me to be that of man (11), and I dare say that the inscription on the Temple at Delphi alone contained a more important and more difficult Precept than all the big Books of the Moralists. I therefore consider the subject of this Discourse to be one of the most interesting questions Philosophy might raise, and unfortunately for us one of the thorniest Philosophers might have to resolve: For how can the source of inequality among men be known unless one begins by knowing men themselves? and how will man ever succeed in seeing himself as Nature formed him, through all the changes which the succession of times and of things must have wrought in his original constitution, and to disentangle what he owes to his own stock from what circumstances and his progress have added to or changed in his primitive state? like the statue of Glaucus which time, sea, and storms had so disfigured that it less resembled a God than a ferocious Beast, the human soul altered in the lap of society by a thousand forever recurring causes, by the acquisition of a mass of knowledge and errors, by the changes that have taken place in the constitution of Bodies, and by the continual impact of the passions, has, so to speak, changed in appearance to the point of being almost unrecognizable; and instead of a being always acting on certain and unvarying Principles, instead of the Celestial and majestic simplicity its Author had imprinted on it, all one still finds is the deformed contrast of passion that believes it reasons and the understanding that hallucinates.

[2] What is more cruel still, is that, since every progress of the human Species removes it ever farther from [123] its primitive state, the more new knowledge we accumulate, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all, and that in a sense it is by dint of studying man that we have made it impossible for us to know him.

[3] It is easy to see that it is in these successive changes of man's constitution that one must seek the first origin of the differences that distinguish men who, by common consent, are naturally as equal among themselves as were the animals of every species, before various Physical causes introduced in some species the varieties which we

observe among them. Indeed, it is not conceivable that these first changes, however they may have come about, altered all the Individuals of the species at once and in the same way; rather, while some were perfected or deteriorated and acquired various good or bad qualities that were not inherent in their Nature, the others remained in their original state for a longer time; and such was, among men, the first source of inequality, which it is easier to establish thus in general, than it is to assign its genuine causes with precision.

[4] Let my Readers therefore not imagine that I dare flatter myself with having seen what seems to me so difficult to see. I have initiated some arguments; I have hazarded some conjectures, less in the hope of resolving the question than with the intention of elucidating it and reducing it to its genuine state. Others will easily be able to go farther along the same road, though it will not be easy for anyone to reach the end. For it is no light undertaking to disentangle what is original from what is artificial in man's present Nature, and to know accurately a state which no longer exists, which perhaps never did exist, which probably never will exist, and about which it is nevertheless necessary to have exact Notions in order accurately to judge of our present state. Whoever might undertake to ascertain exactly the precautions required to make solid observations on this subject would need even more Philosophy than one might suspect; and a good solution of the following Problem does not seem to me unworthy of the Aristotles and the Plinys of our century: *What experiments would be needed in order to come [124] to know natural man; and by what means can these experiments be performed within society?* Far from undertaking to solve this Problem, I believe that I have meditated upon the Subject sufficiently to dare answer in advance that the greatest Philosophers will not be too good to direct these experiments, nor the most powerful sovereigns to perform them; a collaboration which it is scarcely reasonable to expect, especially in conjunction with the sustained or rather the successive enlightenment and goodwill needed by both parties in order to succeed.

[5] Yet these investigations so difficult to carry out, and to which so little thought has so far been devoted, are the only means we have left to resolve a host of difficulties that deprive us of the knowledge of the real foundations of human society. It is this ignorance of the nature of man that casts such uncertainty and obscurity on the genuine definition of natural right: for the idea of right, says

M. Burlamaqui, and still more that of natural right, are manifestly ideas relative to the Nature of man. Hence, he goes on, it is from this very Nature of man, from his constitution and his state, that the principles of this science have to be deduced.

[6] It is not without surprise and scandal that one notes how little agreement prevails about this important matter among the various Authors who have dealt with it. Among the most serious Writers, scarcely two can be found who are of the same opinion on this point. To say nothing of the Ancient Philosophers who seem deliberately to have set out to contradict one another on the most fundamental principles, the Roman Jurists indiscriminately subject man and all other animals to the same natural Law, because they consider under this name the Law which Nature imposes upon itself, rather than that which it prescribes; or rather, because of the particular sense in which these Jurists understand the word Law, which they seem on this occasion to have taken only for the expression of the general relations established by nature among all animate beings, for their common preservation. The Moderns, since they allow the name of Law only for a rule prescribed to a moral being, that is to say to a being that is intelligent, free, and considered in its relations with other beings, restrict the province of natural Law to the only animal endowed with reason, that is to say to man; [125] but while each one of them defines this Law in his own fashion, all of them base it on such metaphysical principles that even among us there are very few people capable of understanding these principles, let alone of discovering them on their own. So that all the definitions by these learned men, which in every other respect are in constant contradiction with one another, agree only in this, that it is impossible to understand the Law of Nature and hence to obey it without being a very great reasoner and a profound Metaphysician. Which precisely means that in order to establish society men must have employed an enlightenment which develops only with much difficulty and among very few people within society itself.

[7] Knowing Nature so little, and agreeing so poorly about the meaning of the word *Law*, it would be most difficult to agree on a good definition of natural Law. Indeed, all those that are found in Books, besides not being uniform, suffer from the further defect of being derived from a range of Knowledge which men do not naturally have, and from advantages the idea of which they can con-

ceive of only once they have left the state of Nature. One begins by looking for the rules about which it would be appropriate for men to agree among themselves for the sake of the common utility; and then gives the name natural Law to the collection of these rules, with no further proof than the good which, in one's view, would result from universal compliance with them. That is certainly a very convenient way of framing definitions, and of explaining the nature of things by almost arbitrary conformities.

[8] But so long as we do not know natural man, we shall in vain try to ascertain either the Law which he has received or that which best suits his constitution. All we can very clearly see about this Law is not only that for it to be law the will of him whom it obligates must be able to submit to it knowingly; But also that for it to be natural it must speak immediately with the voice of Nature.

[9] Hence disregarding all the scientific books that only teach us to see men as they have made themselves, and meditating on the first and simplest operations of the human Soul, I believe I perceive in it two [126] principles prior to reason, of which one interests us intensely in our well-being and our self-preservation, and the other inspires in us a natural repugnance to seeing any sentient Being, and especially any being like ourselves, perish or suffer. It is from the cooperation and from the combination our mind is capable of making between these two Principles, without it being necessary to introduce into it that of sociability, that all the rules of natural right seem to me to flow; rules which reason is subsequently forced to reestablish on other foundations, when by its successive developments it has succeeded in stifling Nature.

[10] This way one is not obliged to make a Philosopher of man before making a man of him; his duties toward others are not dictated to him exclusively by the belated lessons of Wisdom; and as long as he does not resist the internal impulsion of commiseration, he will never harm another man or even any sentient being, except in the legitimate case when, his preservation being involved, he is obliged to give himself preference. By this means the ancient disputes about whether animals participate in the natural Law are also brought to an end: For it is clear that, since they are deprived of enlightenment and of freedom, they cannot recognize that Law; but since they in some measure partake in our nature through the sentience with which they are endowed, it will be concluded that

they must also participate in natural right, and that man is subject to some kind of duties toward them. Indeed, it would seem that if I am obliged not to harm another being like myself, this is so less because it is a rational being than because it is a sentient being; a quality which, since it is common to beast and man, must at least give the beast the right not to be needlessly maltreated by man.

[11] This same study of original man, of his true needs, and of the fundamental principles of his duties is also the only effective means available to dispel the host of difficulties that arise regarding the origin of moral inequality, the true foundations of the Body politic, the reciprocal rights of its members, and a thousand similar questions, as important as they are badly elucidated.

[12] Human society viewed with a calm [127] and disinterested gaze seems at first to exhibit only the violence of powerful men and the oppression of the weak; the mind rebels at the harshness of the first; one is inclined to deplore the blindness of the others; and since nothing is less stable among men than those external relationships that are more often the product of chance than of wisdom, and that are called weakness or power, wealth or poverty, human establishments seem at first glance to be founded on piles of Quicksand; it is only by examining them closely, only after setting aside the dust and sand that surround the Edifice, that one perceives the unshakable base on which it is raised, and learns to respect its foundations. Now, without the serious study of man, of his natural faculties, and of their successive developments, one will never succeed in drawing these distinctions and in separating what, in the present constitution of things, divine will has done from what human art has pretended to do. The Political and moral investigations occasioned by the important question I am examining are therefore in every way useful, and the hypothetical history of governments is in all respects an instructive lesson for man. By considering what we would have become, abandoned to ourselves, we must learn to bless him whose beneficent hand, correcting our institutions and grounding them unshakably, forestalled the disorders that would have resulted from them, and caused our happiness to be born from the very means that seemed bound to complete our misery.

*Learn what the god ordered you to be,
And what your place is in the human world.*

NOTICE ABOUT THE NOTES

[128]

I have added some notes to this work after my lazy practice of working in fits and starts. These notes sometimes stray so wide of the subject that they are not good to read together with the text. I therefore cast them to the end of the Discourse, in which I tried my best to follow the straightest road. Those who will have the courage to start over again can amuse themselves the second time with beating the bushes, and trying to peruse the notes; there will be little harm in the others' not reading them at all.

QUESTION

Proposed by the Academy of Dijon

What is the origin of inequality among men, and whether it is authorized by the natural Law.

DISCOURSE
ON THE ORIGIN
AND THE
FOUNDATIONS OF INEQUALITY
AMONG MEN

[1] It is of man that I am to speak, and the question I examine tells me that I shall be speaking to men, for one does not propose such questions if one is afraid of honoring the truth. I shall therefore confidently uphold the cause of humanity before the wise men who invite me to do so, and I shall not be dissatisfied with myself if I prove worthy of my subject and my judges.

[2] I conceive of two sorts of inequality in the human Species; one which I call natural or Physical, because it is established by Nature, and which consists in the differences in age, health, strengths of Body, and qualities of Mind, or of Soul; The other, which may be called moral, or political inequality, because it depends on a sort of convention, and is established, or at least authorized by Men's consent. It consists in the different Privileges which some enjoy to the prejudice of the others, such as to be more wealthy, more honored, more Powerful than they, or even to get themselves obeyed by them.

[3] It makes no sense to ask what the source of Natural inequality is, because the answer would be given by the simple definition of the word: Still less does it make sense to inquire whether there might not be some essential connection between the two inequalities; for that would be to ask in different terms whether those who command are necessarily better than those who obey, and whether strength of Body or of Mind, wisdom or virtue, [132] are always found in the same individuals, in proportion to their Power, or their Wealth: A question which it may perhaps be good for Slaves to debate within hearing of their Masters, but not befitting rational and free Men who seek the truth.

[4] What, then, precisely is at issue in this Discourse? To mark, in the progress of things, the moment when, Right replacing Violence, Nature was subjected to Law; to explain by what chain of wonders the strong could resolve to serve the weak, and the People to purchase an idea of repose at the price of real felicity.

[5] The Philosophers who have examined the foundations of society have all felt the necessity of going back as far as the state of Nature, but none of them has reached it. Some have not hesitated to ascribe to Man in that state the notion of the Just and the Unjust, without bothering to show that he had to have this notion, or even that it would have been useful to him; Others have spoken of everyone's Natural Right to keep what belongs to him, without explaining what they understood by belong; Others still, after first granting to the stronger authority over the weaker, had Government arise straightway, without giving thought to the time that must have elapsed before the language of authority and of government could have meaning among Men: Finally, all of them, continually speaking of need, greed, oppression, desires, and pride transferred to the state of Nature ideas they had taken from society; They spoke of Savage Man and depicted Civil man. It did not even enter the mind of most of our philosophers to doubt that the state of Nature had existed whereas it is evident, from reading the Holy Scriptures, that the first Man having received some lights and Precepts immediately from God was not himself in that state, and that, if the Writings of Moses are granted the credence owed them by every Christian Philosopher, it has to be denied that, even before the Flood, Men were ever in the pure state of Nature, unless they relapsed into it by some extraordinary Occurrence: a Paradox most embarrassing to defend, and altogether impossible to prove.

[6] Let us therefore begin by setting aside all the facts, for they do not affect the question. [133] The Inquiries that may be pursued regarding this Subject ought not be taken for historical truths, but only for hypothetical and conditional reasonings; better suited to elucidate the Nature of things than to show their genuine origin, and comparable to those our Physicists daily make regarding the formation of the World. Religion commands us to believe that since God himself drew Men out of the state of Nature immediately after the creation, they are unequal because he wanted them to be so; but it does not forbid us to form conjectures based solely on the nature of man and of the Beings that surround him, about what Mankind might have become if it had remained abandoned to itself. This is what I am asked, and what I propose to examine in this Discourse. Since my subject concerns man in general, I shall try to speak in a language suited to all Nations, or rather, forgetting

times and Places, in order to think only about the Men to whom I am speaking, I shall suppose myself in the Lyceum of Athens, repeating the Lessons of my Masters, with the likes of Plato and of Xenocrates as my Judges, and Mankind as my Audience.

[7] O Man, whatever Land you may be from, whatever may be your opinions, listen; Here is your history such as I believed I read it, not in the Books by your kind, who are liars, but in Nature, which never lies. Everything that will have come from it, will be true: Nothing will be false but what I will unintentionally have introduced of my own. The times of which I will speak are very remote: How much you have changed from what you were! It is, so to speak, the life of your species that I will describe to you in terms of the qualities you received, which your education and your habits could deprave, but which they could not destroy. There is, I sense, an age at which the individual human being would want to stop; You will look for the age at which you would wish your Species had stopped. Discontented with your present state, for reasons that herald even greater discontents for your unhappy Posterity, you might perhaps wish to be able to go backward; And this sentiment must serve as the Praise of your earliest forbears, the criticism of your contemporaries, and the dread of those who will have the misfortune to live after you.